



EXPANDED
PORTFOLIO
OF WRITING
SAMPLES

BY ABDALLAH AL ALFY

Portfolio of Writing Samples

Assorted Works, Copy and Content By

Abdallah Al Alfy

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Index

-Screenshot (web & SEO) & Form Samples -----	Page 3
-General Copy & Content Samples -----	Page 9
-Video Ad/Script Sample -----	Page 25
-Medical Copy Sample -----	Page 28
-Prose Sample -----	Page 37
-Philosophy Article Sample -----	Page 43
-Serial/Short Story Samples (Fiction) -----	Page 50
-Poetry Sample -----	Page 79
-Published Guidebook Sample -----	Page 81

Screenshot/Form Samples

(Web Content, SEO Writing & Forms)

Business: Business Name Scrubbed

About: High-End Subscription video conferencing service with enhanced security standards, enhanced features, enhanced bug and lag maintenance and multiple conferencing solutions/platforms. Displayed are multiple smaller web content samples for their page with some SEO research and a larger, more SEO focused sample page from their web page. Displayed are also a sample subscription agreement and a credit card form.

Web Content Samples

Examples of web content contributed to multiple pages of the same web site.
Smaller divided content is also SEO researched.

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Featured News

's services and platforms for premium video chat and video call, video meeting and video conference, have been featured on numerous news platforms and publications. Market Insider, Yahoo Finance, News Break, Radio 980 CFPL, Niche, and Inside Halton, to name just a few! Scroll down below for a more detailed list and browse through the articles, talks and interviews, to learn a bit more about what has to offer you! The material below offers insights on protecting your data privacy in the digital age, current legislation related to both digital communication and healthcare, and the future of modern telecommunications. At we're proud to be on the cutting edge of all these changes, and we would like to invite you to join us there.

NEWS BREAK CHCH yahoo/finance

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Text boxed in red signifies complete authorship.

Text boxed in red signifies complete authorship.

Why ?

One-click virtual meetings

Say goodbye to generating complex meeting identifications. No more complicated pins and passwords with long-winded requirements. Hosting a meeting? Just click. Boom. You're meeting. Joining a video call? Just put in your name. Boom. You're on the call.

Premium video conferencing

Minimal lags and minimal bugs. Features like advanced video presentation, split-screen, picture-in-picture display, and more! Our developers and our technical support team work very closely together to ensure an optimum video call experience for you.

Customized unique URL

Want someone to find you? Want to find someone? Easy. No downloads. No temporary meeting platforms. Just use a custom URL to put into any browser. If you're hosting, you let them in. If they're hosting, they let you in. No hassle.

Search Engine Optimization

Want to be more accessible to people, professionally? Or even socially? Allow search engines to display your space, and people can find you for video meetings just by searching your name along with or even just your name! Our SEO content allows you to be found whenever you wish to be.

Data Security

Generally, people worry about digital privacy when communicating online. And they should, in this day and age. But not with. Featuring direct server-to-server connections, advanced encrypting, and compliance with a host of security standards, is the safest platform online.

FURTHER MEDICAL SECURITY STANDARDS AT

Along with being PHIPA compliant and OHIP compliant per Canadian digital security standards in health care, is also HIPAA compliant per the United States digital security standards in health care.



ABOUT HIPAA

If your health care focus isn't the United States you might be asking "What is HIPAA compliance?" HIPAA is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, enacted in the United States in 1996. This act provides for the protection of information under a clause known as the HIPAA Privacy Rule. Per the HIPAA Privacy Rule, HIPAA compliance in our case means complying with the HIPAA network requirements for digital security. On top of PHIPA and OHIP security compliance, provides HIPAA compliant video conferencing as well.

Text boxed in red signifies complete authorship.

SEO Writing

the world together through

Get your whole team in a single video call online!

is the solution for connecting large teams and companies using video chat. If you want to video call with large numbers on a regular basis, this is definitely the video conferencing software for you. As far as video conferencing platforms go, our team will develop a completely custom interface that will allow you to seamlessly connect with your colleagues. Whether you need a simple video chat solution for your team of over 30 people or you're looking for video conferencing solutions to connect teams across separate locations, is the custom webRTC solution for your business.

enables real-time, feature-rich video conferencing, which includes:

Allows teams of over 30 to easily video chat and collaborate

Do you manage a team of over 25 people? 30? 100? More? Do you manage multiple teams who all need to video call you and each other on a regular basis? None of that is a problem. can cover that for you and more. Share your screen with as many people as you have on the video call, for essential reading and explanation. Give detailed presentations with video slides to your whole team. Watch videos together, use picture-in-picture and split screen features to magnify and highlight important information, and more is so much more than a secure video platform for larger teams. is the ultimate video conferencing solution for your business.

Record any video session

Just like in-person, proximal meetings, some things get lost in remote video chat. however, has just the right video conferencing tools to eliminate this possibility within your organization. To ensure an optimal experience and review both the content of your team's conversations within the meeting, as well as any information displayed visually through manual or digital means. offers you an additional video call feature. All meetings or conferences, no matter the number of attendees and participants, may be recorded in full, if your organization needs to do so. The chance to review a meeting in full is realistic enough in this day and age. Why rely on minutes alone, when you can replay parts (or all) of the original meeting and correct any potential oversight in the minutes? offers you, along with a number of other video call tools, this particular ability.

Scheduler

comes with its own scheduler! Need to remember a meeting online? Not a problem! With a few intuitive clicks, a notification with reminders can be set up for an online video chat in less than two minutes! Send out invitations to whomever you're speaking with! Never miss a meeting again!

Google Calendar integration

If you already use Google Calendar for scheduling, don't worry! You don't have to change to's scheduling feature. Keep using Google Calendar to setup your meetings as seamlessly as you've always done. is fully integrated with Google Calendar.

Example of SEO researched content for a single page. Red frames signify complete authorship. The gold frame signifies heavy editing and contribution.

A completely custom interface developed for your business

Every business's video call needs are unique. At we recognise that. This is why we help you customise the interface to your virtual offices and meeting rooms at to your exact requirements. Unlike other video call solutions and video conferencing applications, at our developers and customer service experts come together to design an online digital presence specifically designed for your particular set of business needs.

Custom webRTC solutions

relies on Web Real-Time Communication technology. WebRTC for short. WebRTC technology is about operating direct, peer-to-peer communication, with no additional plugins or external application downloads for your device. That means that webRTC in general is based upon the similarities between platforms. Normally, this doesn't leave much room for customization. However, our team at has developed unique webRTC solutions for. Solutions which allow for the most versatile video call customization imaginable, without the need for downloading any dedicated video chat software or video conferencing apps. With, you get web RTC technology that works for you.

Branded corporate pages

Use your organisation's logo, graphics and colour scheme on all your pages: your virtual offices, your meeting rooms, and more. Give your clients that familiar feeling your offices are known for.

Visibility

With you get a dedicated web address. More than one! Want someone to find you for a video call? Want to find another user? Easy. No downloads. No temporary meeting platforms. Just use your very own customised URL to put into any browser. Each account gets one. Even your organisation's general meeting room. If you're hosting, you let them in. If they're hosting, they let you in. No hassle. Say goodbye to generating complex meeting identifications. No more complicated pins and passwords with long-winded requirements. No more jumping through hoops just to have a video chat. Hosting a meeting? Just click. Boom. You're meeting. Joining a video call? Just put in your name. Boom. You're on the call. They can even find your meeting room by looking you up online, if you allow your meeting room to be found by search engines!

Role-based permissions

At, we understand how sensitive information can be sometimes. In light of that understanding, we've built a number of solutions to support private video chat functions and private video conferencing. For Banty Enterprise in particular, we give you the option of role-based permissions, also known as role-based access control (RBAC). This ensures the security of your team's information at every layer of your organization, so that everything can be accounted for. If security is a top priority in your organization, Banty Enterprise is a great option.

Advanced security and end-to-end encryption

Further security features include our standard server-to-server, end-to-end encryption. While role-based access control protects your organization from the inside, our advanced server-to-server encryption security protects you from any potential outside attack, securing any information belonging to your organization or your team externally. Banty Enterprise, along with all of Banty's platforms, has state-of-the-art security.

----- PLAN

----- *the world together through better* -----

Date: ***** **, 2021

1111 Somewhere Somewhere-Unit 102,
Mississauga, ON, L5X XXX
1(885) 000-0000
www.-----.com

Prepared for:
Name of Organization:
Name of Person:
Address:
Phone #:
Email:

Welcome to your ----- Plan - Secure video conference calling made better.

----- PLAN TYPE	HST	AMOUNT	TOTAL
----- ----- Plan	\$64.87	\$499.00	\$563.87

-25 user licenses included

*Pricing: Per month. Additional users may be added any time for \$19.95 monthly per user.

Plan Details:

This is a recurring month-to-month agreement starting ***** **, 2021. Additional users can be added at any time at \$19.95/user, monthly plus applicable taxes. To cancel this monthly recurring agreement, the client must give two weeks' written notice in advance of the next monthly billing cycle.

By signing below, the client agrees to -----'s terms and conditions listed here: <https://------.org/terms/> and to the plan described above.

Signature

Date

Print Full Name

Congratulations! Welcome to -----'s next-generation secure video conferencing platform!

Credit Card Authorisation Form

Please fill in all the following fields. This is an authorisation for a monthly charge of your credit card per your subscription with -----. To cancel this authorisation, please contact ----@----.com two weeks before the start of the next billing cycle. This authorisation will remain in effect until cancellation.

Credit Card Details
Card Type: <input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard <input type="checkbox"/> Discover <input type="checkbox"/> AMEX <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
Cardholder Name (as shown on Card): _____
Card Number: _____
Expiration Date (mm/yy): _____
Card Billing Address: _____
Card Billing Address: _____ (Line 2-Optional)
City (Billing Address): _____
Postal Code/Zip Code (Billing Address): _____
Country (Billing Address): _____

I _____, hereby authorise ---- to charge my credit card per the information above, for agreed upon fees, services, subscriptions and purchases. I understand that my information will be kept on file by ---- for future use in transactions until cancellation.

Customer Signature: _____

Date: _____

General Copy & Content Samples

Business: Business Name Scrubbed

About: Sample Blog post for a HVAC business blog.

5 Mistakes You Can Make When Buying a New Air Conditioner

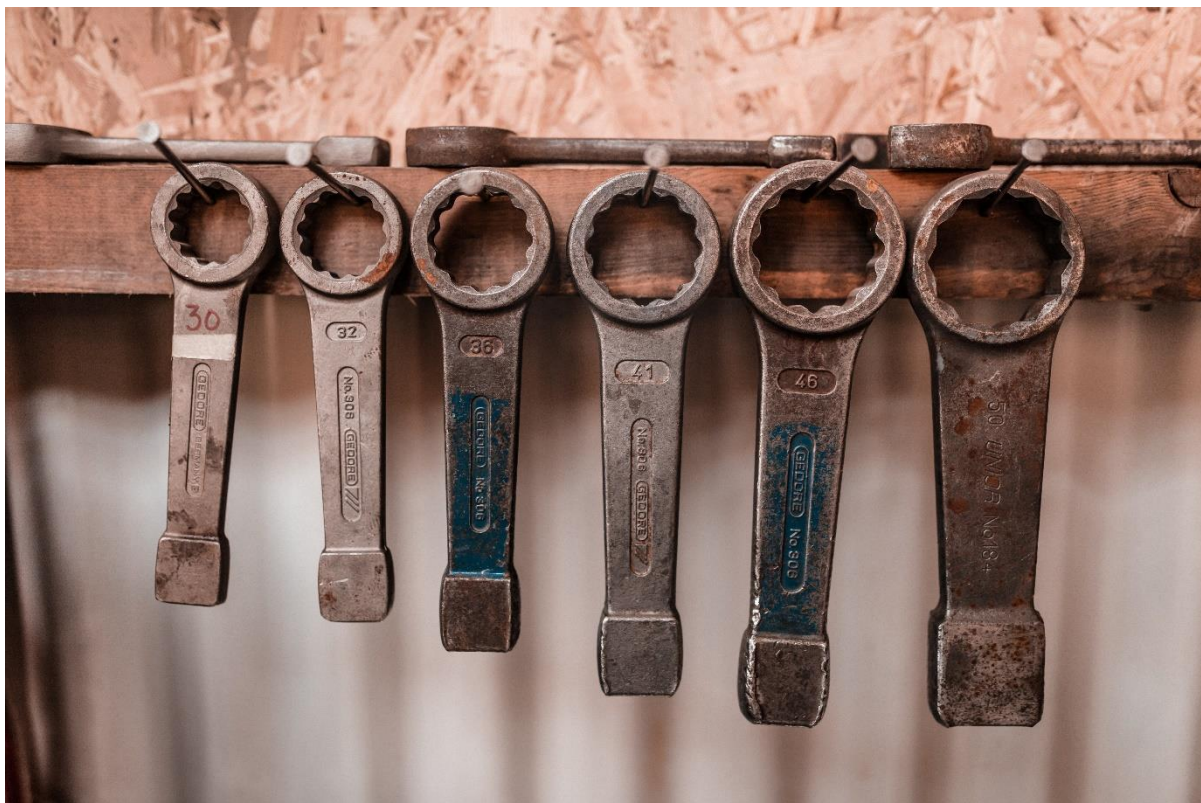


It's finally time. You're pulling the trigger on a new AC. Congratulations! Whether you're making a long-awaited upgrade or doing this as you move into a new place, buying a new air conditioner is generally the right decision. New air conditioners require less maintenance for a longer initial period from purchase. When the time does come for repairs, it helps if you live near certain locations. For example, there are very attractive, hassle-free options for [air conditioner repair in Mississauga](#).

That said, there are a few ways a generally right decision could go wrong. For air conditioners in particular, this could mean a number of things. Buying an AC, or several, is a significant expenditure. To stay on the right track and experience no buyer's remorse, it is well worth your time to consider researching your options in detail and speaking with experienced professionals before finalising your decision, financially speaking.

For the future benefit of your home, finances, and life in general, we'll be taking a closer look at some of the important variables that could go off-kilter and make the generally right decision to buy a new AC, go wrong.

Selecting an Inappropriate Size



For air conditioners available for purchase on the market, size is paramount. Not in the way many people think, however. There is a widespread belief that the larger the air conditioner is the more superior its performance. This belief is manifestly false.

Your air conditioner's size should be determined by the space you want to use it in. It should be neither too small, nor too large. Are you installing it in a small bedroom? A large living room? A kitchen? If your AC is too big for its section, you could end up suffering more with regards to the quality of air, utility expenses, mould, or even malfunctioning electronic components.

Conversely, the AC you buy shouldn't be too small for its chosen room. More likely than not, this will increase your long-term expenditure. This is not just a question of power efficiency or hydro bills. The additional output required of an AC smaller than its target area will more likely exhaust its components in a shorter time period than originally anticipated. You might end up paying for repairs or replacements more frequently than you need to.

Consider inviting a professional to give you an idea of the best air conditioning options for your home. This is likely to not only save you some expenses, but also a lot of trouble.

Making False Economies



You get what you pay for. Often enough, that old saying is bang on the money. While there are absolutely terrific deals to be made out there sometimes, there are far more air conditioners being sold for less because they offer less. In the near but not immediate future, it may very well cost you much more to buy an unsuitable AC just because it seemingly costs less in the immediate future.

If you can afford to buy a more suitable AC for a little more, but it feels unnecessary, rethink that position. Remember that you're not just paying the retail price. There are also expenses related to power, system and home repairs, as well as unforeseen costs. You buy an AC in one day, but you consider its expenses for years to come.

Getting a Singular Estimate



Sometimes there are multiple air conditioners to suit your needs. Similarly, there are multiple ways to install them. While costs for appropriate AC units may vary, so too, can costs of suitable installations. For this reason, it is better to ask for a quote or an estimate from more than one contractor. Ideally three or more.

This allows you a better range of selections for your potential AC solutions. It's also helpful to research some of your options beforehand. If contractors are aware you've studied the details closely, they may be more informative themselves.

When getting price quotes or specific estimates from contractors, do so in written form. The written material should include details for warranties, guarantees, timelines as well as the finer individual details for what amounts to the overall amount to be paid.

Disregarding the SEER



Not your local psychic. SEER stands for Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio. It can tell you which air conditioners can do **more** whilst consuming *less* energy. While this is a great consideration for hydro bills and the environment, there's more to it. An AC with a good SEER can help with issues like home aesthetic, space, and initial finances. A slightly smaller AC with a high SEER can sometimes be a more valid option than an AC on the bigger side with a significantly lower SEER.

If, after professional advice, that option seems feasible for your home, you would save money on three fronts. Initial purchase price, regular utility payments, as well as the frequency of repairs and replacements. If the option is not feasible and you end up needing the bigger unit, you're still saving money on two fronts. Try to go for a SEER of 16 and up. The higher the number is, the more energy efficient the unit is. A more energy efficient AC unit may also qualify you for significant environmental rebates in some countries and jurisdictions, saving you money on **four** fronts!

Not Vetting the Contractor



It seems tempting to hire a contractor charging much less, doesn't it? While not always a bad thing, again, you get what you pay for. Look at past reviews. Examine any available certification. Ask yourself if the price your contractor is offering is low enough to compete for business or low enough to tempt you to ignore a lack of qualifications? If it's the latter, then definitely hire someone else.

Now you know about some very important factors to consider before buying an air conditioner. We hope arming you with this knowledge will help your purchase go a little smoother. Good luck!

Business: Foley's Fry House

About: Restaurant/Eatery specialising in both usual and unusual fried foods. Displayed is the adjusted slogan, name and menu items, which were all crafted for the original business by myself, along with further branding before the launch.

Foley's Fry House

Slogan

The Food. The Savings. The Service.

Sample Menu Items (Starter, Main Dish, Dessert)

The Sealord's Morsel

Experience the rich flavour of our premium *****ian shrimp, hand-battered and tossed in a proprietary herbal blend and deep fried in clarified butter. This perfect starter is served with our award-winning sesame butter sauce, the best in *****!

Foley's Meatballs

A seamless blend of top crop white rice, prime ground beef and seasoning blend, these meatballs are deep fried in our kitchen-made ghee and served with marinara sauce from completely organic sources. Served with a choice of rice, pasta, or potatoes.

The Judge's Morsel

Scrumptious, sugar-blended, light and fluffy, dough balls, deep fried in clarified butter and completely *soaked* in your choice of honey, sugar-cane molasses, or syrup. Crispy on the outside, smooth and tender on the inside, you may never think of dessert the same way again!

Business: ZapTech

About: A business specialising in outsourced technology services. Provides a wide variety of software and hardware solutions, with both remote and physical administration. Also have a coding division. Displayed is the Adjusted slogan and marketing email, the original ones being crafted for the business by myself. Also displayed is an adjusted form of their business name, the original of which I did not craft or help launch.

ZapTech

Slogan

IT from A to Z.

Email Format:

Long story short,

You need IT services. But not enough to hire in-house, with all the associated expenses; salaries, benefits, office space and more. Great news. You just found the solution. Zap Tech's IT Solutions!

We already have an in-house IT team. Cream of the crop. All the above expenses are taken care of. Subscribe to Zap Tech's **IT Solutions Retainer Program**. A small monthly fee will get your business discounts on every conceivable IT service.

What You Get

Software Solutions, System Updates and New Installations

20% discount from unsubscribed client prices.

System Management

15% discount from unsubscribed client prices.

Maintenance, Repairs and Troubleshooting

FREE for systems ZapTech installed and manages! 15% discount from unsubscribed client prices.

Hardware Solutions, System Updates and New Installations

A WHOPPING 25% discount from unsubscribed client prices!

Reliable, high quality IT services, at a fraction of the cost to hire in-house. Some clients expanding business to the point of traditional hiring rather opted to keep our services. Subscribe now for a surprise discount on the first 3 months of our retainer fee! Call X-XXX-XXX XXXX to schedule evaluation for a free quote!

Save Big Soon!

The ZapTech Team

Business: Medical Spa

About: A Medical Spa offering beauty products and services. First part of name scrubbed. Displayed is the adjusted website content for their general information and samples from the services and products they offer, the original of which were crafted by myself

About Us

***** Medical Spa began as a revolutionary idea to provide a wider range of cosmetic health services and products in one location, in a market place where a limited range of services is the norm. It is our unwavering priority to find a suitable solution for every client's needs, and in pursuit of that goal we have expanded the scope of the skin care, cosmetic health and rejuvenation services and products that we offer, pushing the limits of all that can be offered in one place. Along with this wide range of aesthetic medical services, we do not compromise on specialty. Every service we offer and every product we sell is backed by the extensive expertise of our team, with at least one specialist or expert on our staff for every service or product we offer. Our equipment is state-of-the-art and the techniques employed by our personnel are always the latest and most cutting edge in our field. Your needs for skin, cosmetic, aesthetic, and rejuvenation are of paramount importance to us.

Treatments

Skin Peel Treatments

A peel is a treatment which enhances the softness of the skin and makes its texture smoother, eliminating wrinkles, reducing pore spots and more. There is a variety of peel treatments available to our clients, and since each client's needs are unique and different, our specialized staff will be happy to assist you understand the advantages of each type so that you can select the peel treatment you feel suits you the most.

Microneedling

Microneedling is a treatment which rejuvenates the skin by utilizing professional equipment which depends on needles that are extremely fine and slender. These needles make minimal incursions into the skin's surface and due to their slender nature and their controlled and limited progression past the skin's surface, those microneedles stimulate the body to generate collagen elastin to fill those extremely minor punctures, rather than haematological clotting factors. This new collagen enhances the cohesion and smoother texture of the skin, reducing marks such as stretch marks, enlarged pores, or even scars.

Facial Treatments

There are many factors that harm your skin in small ways every day. Over many days, this damage accumulates. Some factors include ultraviolet light from sun exposure, exposure to airborne substances harmful to the skin such as heavy metals, and even biological remnants you are exposed to every day in your environment and surroundings. The effect of all these factors compounds the natural regression of your skin's health over time. Our variety of facial treatments, also selected based on your specific personal needs will protect your skin from the various external factors which affect its health and in some cases with the use of your choice of natural or synthetic substances, it may also reduce the rate of your skin's natural regression, improving skin appearance, elasticity, smoothness, clarity and more.

Skin Imperfection Treatments

A number of treatments are also available to treat various other imperfections of the skin such as Freckles, Acne, Spider Veins and more. These treatments, like all our other treatments are specially tailored to your needs and are selected in accordance

with your aim. Our relevant professional staff will be delighted to guide you through the benefits of each treatment and assist you until you choose the treatment you find more suitable for you.

About our products

Aside from our wide variety of services tailored to fit your needs, our products are sourced from the most highly regarded manufacturers combining the use of the most cutting edge materials available with the materials' authentic high quality. We source the best products in each class to better serve you and your every need.

Video/Ad Script Sample

Business: Green Scape

About: A regular landscaping business. Displayed is the adjusted script for a video shot for the business website and the adjusted business name, the original of which were both crafted by myself.

Green Scape

Video Script

Woman walks through door of a space laid out like a regular urban/suburban house ground floor. Man standing at table sorting mail.

Woman: Oh my gosh Honey, I am SO psyched! I don't have to work this Saturday!

Man: Babe, that's wonderful! Don't they need you at work though?

Woman: No, I got out of it! You know what this means right? We can go to the lake!

Man: Honey I'd love to. But I need to do yard work this Saturday. We've already put it off too long.

Woman: Let's bring in pros. It'll only take them a couple of hours.

Man: If only. But one pro is already pushing it. More than one would break the bank.

Woman: What? No! We're not paying a dime! Remember dad gave us that Green Scape gift card?

Man: Honey, that was two years ago. Pretty sure it expired.

Woman: Nu'uh. Green Scape gift cards never expire.

Man: Say what now?

Woman: That's right! Lifetime Service!

Cut to Logo of Green Scape while Narrator Speaks

Narrator's Voice: Our Lifetime Service Guarantee honours pre-paid contracts and gift cards for as long as we're in business. Give the gift of Green Scape. A gift that lasts.

Medical Copy Samples

Product: Runcourse

About: Pharmaceutical product prescribed to treat certain male performance issues. ***** is active ingredient, locally licensed to a pharmaceutical plant belonging to a local corporation in target country. Significantly cheaper than imported pills, or local pills made by foreign pharmaceutical giants. First Ad is adjusted for client legality requirements in client's target country, ran on brochure cover. Original pitch closer to:

“She’s on Board. He’s on Board. Ready to Run.”

Second Ad was briefly featured on two billboards before being restricted to online ads to avoid potential legal challenges.

Runcourse ad 1

Your wife is on board. Your doctor's on board. Nothing else matters.

Ready to Run.

Runcourse ad 2

Same bang. Less Buck.

Distinctive Photo of Pill showing in Ad

Product: HiBlend

About: Herbal medicine/supplement, marketed to pre-hypertensive customers in more than one target country. Content written for client website and some printed marketing literature.

HiBlend

The good news is you're not hypertensive. Your doctor said so! Congratulations! Still... You're worried you might get there. Life can be stressful and pre-hypertension is not a joke. But what to do? Pharmaceutical grade medications aren't a great fit for you. Too strong for what you have, and you could definitely live without the potential side-effects. On the other hand, left uncontrolled, your pre-hypertension could lose a prefix and you might end up needing those meds! There might be an answer. HiBlend Hibiscus Extract Capsules.

Go Herbal with HiBlend

Hibiscus is a herb some cultures use in food or to make tea. Results of multiple studies indicate that dietary consumption of Hibiscus can reduce blood pressure. But dietary consumption isn't for everyone. Taste, availability, storage and preparation are all factors in regular diet staples. Consuming something as a supplementary herbal extract allows direct and controlled dosing. Which is exactly what HiBlend is!

What to Do?

Talk to your doctor about HiBlend. Follow up if you're cleared to take it. Hibiscus extract doses are safe, but they're still potent!

Product: EZ Breathe CPAP

About: New CPAP machine in client target country. Marketed both to those directly or indirectly affected by Obstructive Sleep Apnoea, and to both insured and uninsured potential buyers. Content for client's marketing literature.

EZ Breathe CPAP

CPAP machines are uncomfortable to wear. They clutter. They're loud, and they're expensive to buy, and they cost a lot in power bills. You buy them to sleep better, so why shell-out big bucks and still lose out on sleep? On the other hand, you need them. What to do? ***** Medical heard you. That's why we've introduced EZ Breathe CPAP. The quietest, most comfortable, size efficient, and affordable CPAP machine to date, designed with state-of-the-art technology. The difference: Fusion. Zero industry stagnation. To accomplish that, ***** Medical hired the industry's most talented Medical Device Specialists, and then went a step further; combining their expertise with input from the world's foremost Mechatronics Engineers and Material Scientists. The result is EZ Breathe CPAP. Take a closer look!

Size

Our largest EZ Breathe weighs a staggering 30% less than the lightest CPAP machine previously on the market!

Comfort

The entire EZ Breathe product line is outfitted with masks made entirely from Watercloud, a patented, yielding, sealant, material which mimics the temperatures and textures of your individual skin. No more morning imprints on your face from the plastic mask. No more elastic mask band chafing your skin.

Noise

By re-designing the arrangement for most CPAP machine components to reduce direct contact with the frame and lining the insides with proprietary, patent-pending technology, the loudest EZ Breathe machine punches at 21% less volume than the quietest CPAP machine previously sold worldwide!

Economy

At 10% less than the least costly CPAP previously approved for sale in ***** , the most expensive EZ Breathe product is well within most insurance budgets and considerably easier in co-payments.

Power Consumption

Gives your bills a break with EZ Breathe. The highest power consumption in a CPAP from our new product line falls at 28% less than every other CPAP currently available in ***** .

Sleep sound with EZ Breathe. Breathe Easy.

Service: WilliaMed

About: A family of physicians with active licenses all over the world and a distinctive sounding name, wanted to form a corporation combining all of their expertise to offer online medical services through a website, social media, and an app. The family name is changed to “Williams” for the sake of this ad, but the real name sounds even more distinctive. Idea for name branding and corporation name was mine. The sample is all they cleared me to demonstrate from their web literature.

WilliaMed

Why go to the doctor when you don't have to? It's 2016. Science has caught up. 60%-75% of medical consultations can be done online. You don't have to wait 3 hours in a doctor's lounge every time you wake up feeling so so. You don't even have to wait half an hour.

Members of the Williams family are licensed to practice medicine on four different continents. WilliaMed was founded to put that experience right at your finger tips!

What You Need

- A great webcam.
- A reliable internet connection.

What You'll Get

- World Class medical attention in your living room.

Prose Sample

A Perfect Man

I look outside the window. The snow is picturesque. In Canada, the cold has a tendency to get into your bones, but inside, in a warm and well-heated building, the white blanket covering the world is deceptively beautiful. Canada in general is a beautiful country. In the summer, it feels as gorgeous as it looks outside. But I am far from a perfect man. I do not refer to my faults, though they be many. I refer to the homesickness from which I suffer. I close my eyes, and I'm in Egypt, driving on the Sixth of October Bridge. It's Friday before prayer, so the drive is oddly serene. It's hot, but I'm well hydrated. There's a breeze blowing in my hair as I drive over the River Nile with my air conditioning off and my windows down. The sun kisses my face. At this point an idiot would normally break into my lane without signalling and maybe throw off my zen but I'm too homesick to imagine that right now. Maybe later.

I open my eyes. I love what I see. But I am far from a perfect man. I close my eyes. I'm back in Egypt. In Dahab this time. South Sinai. I'm lying on my favourite beach there, with mountains to my back and to the right, and the inviting calm sea to my front. An impossible array of blue. Five different shades. I *know* them, those shades! They're not an illusion or a trick of the light. Each and every one is a real shade that remains that colour when you swim into its expanse. I go in for a dip. By which I mean two hours. I swim the length of the beach. Go in deep. Look into the beautiful blue drop below. Lie on my back in the water and stare at the mountains hugging the sea in my upside-down state. Stare at the palm trees on the other end of the beach. I get salt water up my nose and I come upright. But once I shake it off, I lie on my back in the water again. I open my eyes. I love where I live. I do. But I am far from a perfect man.

I close my eyes. I'm in Zamalek, at a table in Sufi with my friends. The conversation is flowing. The vibe is perfect. Everybody's laughing. For a bookstore café, we're a little loud, but nobody cares. The tables next to us are all the same. I look at the books around me, I look at my friends faces, and I don't think about when we won't all be here, at this table. I don't know it at the time, but the spirit of these moments is something I take with me forever. Were things perfect at the time? I don't know. Something might have been up. Then again, it might not have. I'm too homesick to remember. The antique shop across the hallway was rather unique. Set in an apartment, furnished in an odd combination of flat and antique store. But that wasn't what set it apart. Those are a dime a dozen in Cairo. This one had its own cat. The door was open, and yet there was only one cat. Sitting on a sofa as though it owned the furniture. I remember trying to pet the thing before it scratched me. If I believed in reincarnation I would have thought that cat owned the place in a previous life. Coming back to haunt it.

I open my eyes. I consider everything around me. Here in Canada there's ALOT to be thankful for. But here in Canada, things are different. For better or for worse, things are different. And yes, in many respects, for better. And I am grateful. I am thankful for it. But I am far from a perfect man.

I close my eyes. I am in Old Cairo. The tourist section. I walk by the ancient mosques. I wonder what those building it must have thought. I wonder what their first preachers were thinking. I look at the architecture. I wonder if there were some sort of true spiritual experiences that inspired it or if the architecture was in and of itself what inspired spiritual thoughts. Is it merely the cultural affiliation or do those edges and arches really seem to promise the alluring gift of spiritual truth? I go into an alleyway. No ancient architecture here. Some alleyways have them. Some alleyways don't. This one doesn't. Everything is modern. Well. Maybe modern's too strong a word for this neighbourhood. Contemporary.

The buildings, the workshops, the local brandless coffee shop that sells almost as much tobacco as it does beverages. All of them contemporary. And yet the feel of old Cairo doesn't disappear. Something of the past has stayed here. Even when everything it ever looked like went away. I make my way to other tourist sections. Moez Street. Shops, shrines, architecture. The shouting, the suffocatingly huge crowds walking, the salesmen brazenly asking what they can do to get your money. I drink it all in like a stranger. Every wooden door at a mosque has a story to tell here. If the stones in that street could talk, the world would be much richer in memories. I wander again through old Cairo. I make my way to Khan El Khalili. More of the same. But there are places here very few people really know anything about. Places that sell products most mainstream tourists never thought to buy. Not on the main streets. Deeper inside. So deep inside you get lost. Those always sell the most interesting wares. I take a look at some of them. A white cloth banner hanging with intricate black calligraphy making a shape. An antique dagger. Nothing like the mass produced brass stuff being sold on the outer streets. I'd love to buy it but it's too rich for my blood. I guess I'll never know who owned it. Maybe a foreign merchant from centuries past. Maybe a Mameluke prince. The shop keeper isn't talking much. Unlike most of the other shopkeepers there. I open my eyes. No one is shouting here. The place is calm, quiet and ordered. My soul should be as well. And often it is. But I am far from a perfect man.

I close my eyes. I wake up in my home in the Sheraton District. A relatively quiet corner of Cairo. Relatively being the operative word here. The area was named in relation to its proximity to the old five star Sheraton hotel a little ways from the airport. A few years ago, the Fairmont chain had taken the giant building over but the name stuck. No one calls it The Fairmont District. I wake up to the sound of some guy shouting unintelligibly in the street. I'm unsure at first if he's buying junk or selling gas tanks until he starts banging on one of the

gas tanks with a wrench. I briefly consider murdering him. The love we bear our fellow countrymen.

I'm back on the streets of Zamalek but only for a moment. I enjoy the look of the faded glory of its buildings in the daylight. I enjoyed that look more downtown but I heard they renewed it recently. No more faded glory. Well, maybe a little. They didn't get all of them. I remember standing in Talaat Harb square by myself once. 3 or 4 am. Must have been past 3 because I was literally alone there. Or was there a lone cop on duty that night? Poor guy. I parked my car to the side of the square and just stood there, in front of Madbouly's bookstore and said goodbye. Just me and Cairo. I was leaving for Canada soon and I stood in the very beating heart of Cairo when there was no one there but me, and I said goodbye.

I'm in Boulak. They say it was originally named in French. Beau Lac du Caire. Now known as Boulak El Dakrour. The streets are shattered asphalt, the cars almost exclusively drive by end to end at about 8 cm/hr and there's not a place to put your foot on the ground. Guys in motorbikes and Toktoks are somehow trying to wind their way through threads of people, people are cussing each other out, and throughout the noise, and shouting and suffocating heat, somehow, with the exception of a few guys settling their differences with chairs to the head next to an oddly parked car to the side of the road, none of us are trying to kill each other. Some guy leans out of his car window to yell at the car in front of him. Ok it was me. I was yelling at the car in front of me.

The memory takes me back to my last night in Egypt. I was driving through Haram street, going to see my aunt before I leave and for some reason everyone seemed to think it was international drive like a jackass day. Unconsciously I found myself channelling the spirit of Mortada Mansour. I hurled abuse at no less than 30 drivers that day. Cairo's way of saying goodbye. I open my eyes. I don't just like Canada. I love Canada. This is a place to build a

life. A good life. For some maybe, a perfect life. But perfection is only as perfect as those who perceive it. And I am far from a perfect man.

I close my eyes.

Philosophy Article Sample

Reflecting the Weaknesses of Evil and Omnipotence by J. L. Mackie

Abdallah Al Alfy

There are a number of criticisms one might level at the points made by J. L. Mackie in “Evil and Omnipotence.” We are going to address the most significant of said points. But before we begin this argument we must first identify his primary position, which is that God cannot be both omnipotent and wholly good while evil exists, arguing that two must necessarily negate the third. (Mackie, 1955, p. 200)

Since we cannot address all the weaknesses in his argument in three pages, we will address the most significant of them. The first being his restriction of the definition of good. (Mackie, 1955, p. 201) The second being his musing on what most theologians and theists think. (Mackie, 1955, pp. 200, 208) The third being his dismissive attitude to an argument common enough in the theological circles of his day. (Mackie, 1955, p. 200)

Let us begin with the first of these weaknesses. His restriction of the definition of good. In order to make his point, Mackie openly admits to needing to restrict the definition of good to the understanding that “a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can”. (Mackie, 1955, p. 201) He even labels his restriction “quasi-logical” with no apparent prompting from anybody. (Mackie, 1955, p. 201) He then goes on to criticize the notion of good being a counterpart to bad if it is within the scope of an omnipotent being to make things good in and of themselves. (Mackie, 1955, p. 203) The first step that defies logic was to restrict the definition of good in the first place. How can you make a valid argument if you alone are deciding the scope of the rules? The supreme error in logic however comes later, when he criticizes the concept of good and evil being counterparts, oblivious to the fact that he built his entire argument by restricting the definition of good to this premise in the first place. “If a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can” by the definition of the author, how can the author then argue even in passing the possibility of good as an independent concept?

Another problem with his restriction is that, having crossed the line into restricting his definitions to serve his opinions, he did so half-heartedly. He did not restrict the definition enough. He did not say that “a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can as soon as it can”. By his restriction, can it not be argued that a wholly good and omnipotent being will indeed eventually eliminate all evil in time? Is this not an argument theologians and theists can and actively have made? Which brings us to the next significant weakness in his argument.

His completely unsupported musing on what theologians and theists think. At one point he presumes to speak for most theological positions, in another he presumes to speak for most theists. All whilst maintaining the position of their opponent. This is only acceptable if one provides acceptable sources or statistics for one’s argument, which he most certainly did not. Indeed if he had made the attempt, it is likely that I would have thought even less of his arguments since the number of theologies in the world alone is quite numerous. You may then imagine the number of theologians for these theologies. You may then imagine the number of theists compared to those theologians. I contend that some of these numbers may very well be too extensive to accurately represent statistically. At least with the resources available to the institutions concerned with such statistics. An attempt to support his argument with statistics might then have proved to be equally, if not more lacking, than asserting it unsupported. This presumption on the part of all theologians and theists is reflected in the final major weakness of his argument. His dismissive attitude to an argument common enough in the theological circles of his day.

He dismisses the answer “this is a mystery which may be revealed to us later” as mere

parrying and fluttering attempts to ignore his supposedly very valid points, all at once failing to grasp and brushing over the much deeper arguments that many theologians have made in that vein. If his experience of theologians is merely of the ones who used this argument as a statement of deflection it is because he has not read the works of enough theologians in depth, nor has he spoken in depth to enough of them. The argument of the human mind being unable to grasp certain concepts, whether from a shortage in scope or from a lack of information is central to many theological precepts. (The Holy See, n.d.) A concept partnered quite often with vices like arrogance and pride. The idea that man in his arrogance believes he can perceive the whole truth with the faculties available to him and that such belief is erroneous has been around for a very long time indeed. (Az-Zumar, p. 466)

An example of that would be the origin of the universe. A common theological argument can easily go something like this; In the Big Bang Theory, the universe supposedly sprang from a virtual particle. Where did this virtual particle, this transient state of matter come from? Energy of some form. Where did this form come from? An earlier form of energy. Where did energy in general come from? It must have always been there. But how can something “always” be there? Eternity, defined as something without a beginning or an end to its state, is not a concept mortal human logic has ever grasped. The theory is understood but in practice, when thinking about when something first became, you always find yourself trying to measure it against time. Our minds in their present state cannot comprehend something that never even began. If God is eternal and we cannot fully comprehend God’s beginning, how then could we presume to address God’s reasons?

For many theologians not knowing the answer to paradoxes is a very valid position. The theological argument being that having grasped that all things have an origin and that this

origin is eternal and at once intelligent and omnipotent is all that you need in order to build and address theological precepts. Everything else, including paradoxes built on quasi-logic is not ignored because it challenges their beliefs, but because it does not concern them. Having accepted that there is a God they cannot fully comprehend, all other incomprehensible answers are easily put aside. Theologically, it is acceptable to perceive God through the universe and not perceive all His reasons. This concludes the discussion on the three major weaknesses in “Evil and Omnipotence” by J. L. Mackie.

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Serial/Short Story

Samples

The Circassian Travels: Chapter 1-The Prince Down the Mountain.

Intro

This chapter is the first in what I hope will be many. It takes the form of a short story as a serial link to eventually present a larger story. A serial chapter. It presents the fictional tale of a protagonist from an ancient ethnic group in a historical context. Some of you may have heard of this group. The Circassians, or as they call themselves, The Adyghe. There's a number of reasons motivating this project. I love history and I've always wanted to write historical fiction of major proportions. I also enjoy working in blocks so I don't get bored. But the last and most important reason is, this story promotes awareness of a people battling cultural extinction. They are not the only people facing cultural extinction of course. But it just so happens that I am part Circassian myself. I have other ethnicities too. And I've honoured them all in many ways. But I haven't done anything to honour my Circassian ethnicity yet. And as I read more and more about the Adyghe culture, its collective contributions to humanity, and the challenges and pressures it faces, I became convinced that I should. About 25%-38% of my ethnic heritage comes from the Adyghe people. So this is my tribute to them. I hope those reading this will be inspired to do all they can to help keep that rich and complex cultural heritage alive.

From a far enough distance, the view of a path seemingly snaking from in between two mountains, descending out of the entire Zagros range was one of lonely solitude. The solitude however, was ever so slightly disturbed by the tiniest of cavalcades. On the path coming down from the mountains were two figures mounted on horseback, and two pack mules, ambling along at an easy pace. One of the riders was in the lead, the other riding behind him, a pack mule on either side. A closer look would reveal that the rider in the lead was very young. So young, that the wealth of experience and hardship apparent on his face could not

conceal very much of his youth. That meant he was not fully grown, despite being the height of many a fully grown man, and even exceeding such height slightly. He was well built too, showing some signs of obvious muscular development, though such development was more lean than burly. He was quite fair skinned and his eyes were a slightly lighter shade of blue. He wore a steel helmet capped with black fur surrounding head and helm. Brown felt covered the back of his neck, topped by a sheet of chainmail. The capped helm effectively concealed most of his hair, but what little showed of it, and the colour of his sparse distribution of facial hair, made it obvious he was also fair haired.

His companion as well, was very young. At least three or four years younger than his senior. He sported only a thick leather cap upon his head and had a somewhat darker complexion, though he could not exactly be described as “dark”. His hair was various shades of brown and he had hardly any facial hair. His eyes were rather unusual though, in that his irides were almost indistinguishable from his pupils, each black as coal. He was not quite at most adults’ heights, though he was tall for his age. He was built on broader lines though, and the width of his forearms indicated a manual strength unusual to the rest of his size. They were both in arms, with the elder of the two having a quiver full of arrows, a bow, a round steel shield and three short javelins about his saddlebags as well as two weapons on his waist; a one handed sword slightly curved along its entire length and a large dagger without a handguard, and a deeper curve towards the upper third of its blade. He also had a lance slung across his back. The younger rider also carried a similar dagger on his waist, but his sword, which was straight in the first half of the blade, and was more deeply curved in the second, and broader, was fastened just behind him on his saddle, across the horse’s back. His saddle bags also bore shield, quiver and bow, but he carried no javelins and no lance.

“Do we make straight for Tabriz, *effendem?*” The younger of the two riders asked.

“Not in one journey, no.” Replied the elder, “If our directions at the last village were accurate we should be reaching a caravanserai a little before dusk.”

“And if they weren’t?”

“Then we find a place to camp.”

“What about the wolves, prince? The villagers DID say this was wolf country.”

“Only the most desperate wolves stalk man-prey, Barlas. We’re not in hard-winter yet and this land is good. The only wolf desperate enough to try to intercept us will be a wolf too weak to catch anything at all in a land teeming with game. He’ll be a wolf without a pack, more likely than not. If the horses can’t outrun him, we could probably take care of him. Mountain lions would be a bigger concern. We’re still not clear of the Zagros.”

“You know best, my lord. I’m only thinking of how we’ll fare come camping time. This is not just wolf-country. Fire scares wolves from camp sites but may invite bandits. Without fire, the wolves may be tempted to come for the horses. Or at least the mules.”

“It IS possible. But is this what I taught you? We’ve been riding together well-nigh on three years now. You’ve lived with me for five. Bandits are less likely to ride at night this far from the cities, unless they’re stalking a caravan during the day time to attack as they rest. Bandits here, in the middle of nowhere, subsist on raiding nearby farms, small settlements, and a few of the smaller caravans that pass through. Any occasional lone travellers like us they attack mostly during the day. There’s not enough of us in these parts to justify riding out at night and risk men or horses tripping on something in the dark. Whereas closer to the cities...”

“The travellers are far more frequent and thus have greater cause to worry of night raids. Yes, master.”

“Good. I was beginning to think you have a watermelon on your shoulders instead of a head. As it happens, we’re far more likely to be attacked by bandits right about now.”

Young Barlas looked alarmed

“Now, master??!”

“Don’t panic, young one. Probably no more than ten. But yes, I’ve spotted what seemed like a smoke signal a little ways back when we left the mountains.”

“What are we going to do??!”

“What we always do, young one. You will ride ahead, and I will fall a little ways behind to face them. You will use your bow on any of them that you can before they get too close to me. You will also use it if any of them circle far enough to get past me and come at you, or the baggage. If they get me, forget the baggage and run. You’re light and your horse is fast. You’ll probably beat them. If you make it to Tabriz, you can go back to my family with any of the Circassian merchants’ caravans. They’ll look after you, my family. Go with any merchants who aren’t slavers. Stay away from the slavers. Or if you’re of a mind, you can try finding your clan in Azerbaijan. Stick to travelling with caravans.”

“Master... Why not stay with me and run? Surely it is better than risking your life?”

“It’s a calculated risk. A smoke signal means someone calling for help. Which means there’s no more than two of them calling for reinforcements. More likely just one, because a small raiding party can ill spare its members for makeshift outposts. And if he’s calling for help with smoke, it’s not very close. If they were more than a dozen riders, coming from that far off to attack a party as small as ours would be inconvenient. Their time would be better spent preparing a night time raid on a farm or so. A professional thief knows that. The risk is that their scout might be inexperienced. That’s unlikely though. Newly minted brigands usually

stay with the herd. Don't worry. With any luck, we'll get them all. When have you seen more than a handful of raiders on a road like this?"

"Never, my lord. But then again, we haven't travelled this long on roads like this one since Georgia... When do you think they will close in?"

"On the uphill stretch within two hours. That way we're slower going up when they're covering flattened ground. That's also why you'll push ahead. It will give you some vantage."

"Prince, if I may...Are you sure this signal is about us?"

"No. But it's a reasonable assumption my friend. This isn't a very well travelled road, and we haven't come across any other travellers in the past four days."

"Why not let me know when you first spotted it?"

"I didn't want you worrying before you needed to, young one. After all, if things don't go well...I wanted us to make the most of what time we had. Push ahead now. Keep your bow ready."

"What about THEIR bows?"

"If we're not running, they won't shoot when we're so outnumbered. The horses are too valuable. Only worth risking them if we're getting away anyhow. By the time they realise they should have, it will be too late for them."

The prince slackened his horse's pace and within five minutes the distance between him and his squire, his squire's mount and the pack mules had widened considerably. Within fifteen minutes there was a significant stretch between them. He called out to him that this was far enough and told him to remain within sight. Looking back periodically, another hour of riding had barely brought their pursuers into sight, though a little earlier than he had

predicted. Possibly due to the slackened pace they had not accounted for. Looking ahead, his squire was well on his way to the top of the uphill stretch. The prince kept pace for ten more minutes then turned his trusty black Kabardian mount around. Time to pay the piper. Not too long later, the party riding after them came into sight. The prince nocked arrow to bow and waited.

When they were close enough to make out each other's colours, his horse charged at a full gallop. As the wind blew back the felt and chainmail dangling from his capped helmet, he realized the raiding party had mirrored his pace from the other direction, closing the distance between them at double the speed. "Good" he thought. He had counted on that. Using legs to rule mount and hands to hold bow, the prince used his eyes to count as soon as they were close enough. *Fifteen*. One and a half times more than he'd bargained for. The prince would not spare time for the curse that flashed across his mind. Time enough to lament his stupidity if he and his squire survived. Five of them were ahead of the rest and three of them had a commanding lead. Individual horsemen of some skill but no cavalry discipline. They were close enough now that he could hear their high pitched yelling in mimicry of Mongol and Turkmen battle cries. Out of the leading three, one was overtaking the entire party, coming at him alone. The prince released his arrow, knowing exactly where it would find purchase. The brigand's head was split in two followed by his corpse tumbling off his charging steed. For a practiced horse archer, it was an easy shot. Direct, in a straight line.

Still at a full gallop the prince drew another arrow, preparing to hit the second of the two but before could nock it to his bow, his target was taken by another's arrow to the chest. "*Barlas*" The prince noted mentally. By the time he'd nocked the arrow to turn his attention to the last of the three who had rode quickest, his squire's other arrow had landed, this time hitting his enemy's horse squarely where it's right front shoulder joins it's chest and neck. The animal let out a pitiful whinnying and fell to its right, throwing its rider to the ground. The prince

couldn't stop to finish him now. If the bandit survived, Barlas would have to finish him. Thinking ahead, he shot his arrow beyond the two riders coming at him, to the right flank of the rest of the cavalcade charging behind them. He hit none of them, but he loosed two more arrows. Both those shots hit no one as well. It was intentional. Now they clustered closer together. They weren't yelling anymore.

Quickly returning bow to saddle his left took up the round shield and his right threw two short javelins in rapid succession, almost directly from their saddle quiver. Both took his two closest enemies squarely in the middle of their chests with an impact that took them cleanly off their horses almost immediately. This probably meant it pierced anything they wore and shattered their sternums. The prince thought it safe to assume they're dead. Now riding past them he was left with his original estimation. Ten enemies. They were riding at one pace now, and thanks to his feinting with the arrows, they were riding closer together. They would have still been too far for a certain, unavoidable javelin throw, had they been riding in a looser formation, but because they were so packed, the prince felt confident. He picked up his third and final javelin, launched it very high up and it landed in the middle of their party, taking a brigand off his horse with it. The prince had no way of knowing where it landed but it had hit the brigand in the side of his abdomen and ruptured his kidney. The riders now drew their own short ranged bows. Four of them.

"Damnation." Thought the prince. Clearly they were done underestimating him. He took three arrows from them on his shield as the fourth one missed him. They were careful not to hit his horse but he couldn't trust that to last. The bulk of the raiding party was only thirty five yards away from him now. Keeping hold of his shield, the prince put away his bow and took his lance from its saddle hold in his right hand, took his feet from the stirrups, and shifted his seat to the rump of his horse. The move he was attempting boded ill for most any

rider, but he was the pride of Circassian horsemanship in his homeland, and if any man existed who could successfully carry it out, it was he. *“sixteen yards away. Now or never.”*

A tiny nudge from his foot at the exact right spot of his Kabardian mount and in a flash his stallion's rump violently bucked him at maximum force. In that same split second, the prince's feet clapped onto the rump and down his legs pushed with the full power of every muscle. He was flying in the air at break neck speed. Lance in right, shield on left, sword and giant dagger on waist. His enemies pulled their horses to a stop and looked upwards in confusion as he soared above their heads. While they were temporarily stunned into Chaos with the prince flying at them however, he was focusing. He had picked a target, aimed his lance and pierced the last man in their cavalcade straight through the heart. As the bandit met the momentum of the lance and the flying prince holding it, he was dragged clean out of his saddle. The prince left the shield hanging on his arm while he used both arms to grip the lance. The force of the man's friction on his back against the ground with the momentum of the collision in the opposite direction allowed the prince to give in to a propulsion which flipped his back upwards as the dead man landed, and as he relinquished his grip on the lance he fell straight to his feet, not one yard from the fallen brigand's head, bending his knees to absorb the fall.

Not waiting to catch his breath, his left gripped his shield again as his right drew his sword and he turned around all at once. His enemies, now numbered eight, were still struggling to turn their horses themselves. Leaving his lance in the fallen man's chest, he ran at the brigand who was just managing to turn around and with sickening accuracy, reached up his sword to cut his throat. Not waiting for him to die he heaved him off his horse and mounted it himself, just as the seven remaining had fully turned around to see him riding where another of their fallen comrades had just been. Snarling like a wolf now he stabbed at one of them who took the blow on his shield but the prince merely used his own shield to stun him with a blow

across the face before cutting him where the neck joins the shoulder in one brutal stroke. Two of them had thick, short sabres drawn and they flailed them at the prince who dodged one and took the other on his shield, before cutting the arm of the first one clean from the shoulder and slashing viciously at the second, who barely parried. The rest closed in now, blades drawn. But they were fearful. They had been reduced to a third of their force, and this helmed devil alone had taken eight of them, not accounting for his squire's assistance. Their hesitation would cost them dearly. Seeing their fear, the prince, screamed as one possessed as he hacked viciously with his sword. His flurry of slashes hit three of their shields as their horses-not quite war mounts-mirrored their five masters' fears and stumbled backwards a few steps, giving the prince the time and space he needed to sheathe his sword and draw the shorter curved blade. Essentially a giant knife, it was barely shorter than their small sabers, broader and far better balanced. Much better for fighting in tighter distances compared to his longer blade.

By the time they closed hesitantly in again, he was ready for them. Feinting for the right-most bandit's left shoulder, he tempted the second right-most rider to the inside of his shield to try for a direct stab, then brought his sabre-knife down, parrying his enemy's blade followed up by counter-stabbing in one fluid motion, whilst bringing up the shield in his left hand to protect against a slash from the rider at the centre of the five. His stab landed squarely in the middle of his enemy's torso just below the bandit's rib cage, and the brigand's arms fell limply to his sides in shock. Without wasting time, the prince drew his giant dagger out of the brigand and struck against the right side of the man's neck in another fluid motion, severing the brigand's head clean off, and with it, the last remaining string of the other bandits' courage. Wheeling their horses around in different directions, they took flight. The prince gave chase to the right-most brigand, whilst whistling for his own mount-which caught up to him in less than a few seconds-jumped back onto his own horse without touching the ground,

nocked an arrow from his saddle-quiver into his bow and let it loose into his quarry's back. Not waiting for him to fall, he wheeled his steed to the left and after a short gallop was close enough to shoot again. Twice he loosed arrows, first splitting a head from behind, then impaling a throat. All three were fatally injured. Only one raider remained. Wheeling his steed further left, prince and mount both galloped at a frenzy. The prince knocked an arrow again but before he could fire, his prey's mount stumbled and the last remaining brigand flew some distance before hitting the ground at a perilous angle. All fifteen raiders were downed.

"MASTER!" Barlas called, galloping towards his lord from a distance, the mules slowly walking behind him. "Master" He said again, breathlessly this time as he arrived at the prince's side.

"I am well child. I am well."

"That was well fought, my lord!"

"It was lucky. They were bunglers. However mighty you become, Barlas, never attempt a full frontal attack like this one alone if you think you might be fighting real cavalry men. It was risky enough when they weren't."

"Yes, prince!"

"The brigand who fell after you shot his horse...Did he survive?"

"I don't know master. He did not move as you fought the others. If he did survive, it's safe to say he can do no harm. Would you like me to confirm, my lord?"

"No. First we look at his poor horse. Then we'll see about him."

Warrior and squire both rode at a brisk canter to where the second raider and his horse had fallen and came upon the horse. The prince dismounted immediately to inspect the animal. It was still alive but had bled quite profusely. It was bleeding still, its breathing shallow and

laboured. It was lying on the side of its injury but the damage was apparent. The arrow had severed a major blood vessel. There was nothing to be done but put the poor being out of its misery. The prince patted the animal's neck reassuringly, whispered soothing noises in its ear, and then carefully positioned himself, drew his sword and swiftly severed its head in one move. It sickened him to do so and he felt the blood rushing upwards and to his extremities in anger at having had to. He wiped his sword and sheathed it. He then walked over to the creature's fallen rider. He was unconscious but breathing. Occasionally groaning. His right leg was broken at the shinbone. It had broken the skin. The prince kicked the downed brigand unceremoniously. The man awoke with a gasp. He saw the prince looking down at him and recoiled, then winced as he felt the pain in his leg. He cried out something in Farsi. The prince didn't understand Farsi but it meant very little to him. He drew his giant, curved sabre-dagger.

"Mercy!" The man cried out again, this time in broken Turkic. "Mercy, Bey!" The prince's gaze was pitiless as he stared down at the fallen brigand, his clear, light blue eyes, showing neither joy nor any of the anger he was feeling. The calm untroubled waters of a shallow Red Sea bay on a day without wind.

"You just made me kill a horse." The prince answered in his own, somewhat stiff Turkic. "I am very fond of horses. I cannot forgive that. But I can still give you some mercy. If you do not move, I promise to take your head quickly."

"Bey! Lord! Why wake me up if you will kill me! I would not have moved if you left me unconscious!"

"It is bad form to kill an unconscious man if you can wake him. And I do not wish to give you THAT much mercy." The prince pointed at the man with his giant dagger. "I will strike you on the count of three. What you do is up to you."

“My lord, I beg y-”

“One.”

“Plea-”

“Two.”

Sensing no hope, the man closed his eyes. The prince brought his huge dagger quickly down with one hand and it was done. He wiped the blade and sheathed it and looked up at Barlas.

“Gather their surviving horses with our mules. Inspect each body. Finish any survivors. Make it quick if they let you. Strip them of any arms, armour, coins, or anything of value. Load them up onto the horses. Spoils of war.”

“Yes my lord.”

“Approach their bodies with care. Survivors may still have some fight in them.”

“Understood, master.”

The prince nodded his dismissal and his squire cantered away. He mounted his own Kabardian horse again and surveyed the field a while. He looked in the direction the bandits attacked from and thought he saw movement on the horizon. Within a few minutes he was certain of it and within the third of an hour he could make out horses and a banner. Likely not brigands, but some warlord’s troop. There was no Anatolian-Persian fighting at this particular area, so he did not expect hostility but any group of men in arms was reason enough to be on guard.

“BARLAS!” He called, “gather the mules and horses and come to my side!”

As his squire did his bidding, the troop came further into view. They were marching in orderly fashion, double file about twenty horsemen in all, and fifty men on foot behind them.

As they came closer he could see their arms and armour were of the best make, clean, well-maintained, and of one form. They might have been a small royal force. Likely no less than a minor prince's personal retinue. Warrior and squire, both on horseback, waited. When the troop was twenty yards away, they came to a halt as one. From the two file column head, the horseman to the prince and Barlas's left advanced apace then halted. He was a grizzled man of middle age, with sparse, roughly trimmed white facial hair, a scarred, wrinkled, sunburnt face, and a chipped front tooth. A veteran of many seasons. He called out in Farsi.

The prince replied in stiff Turkic. "Apologies. I am a traveller and do not speak your tongue."

The veteran spoke again in almost fluent Turkic. "State your names and purpose on the road!"

"I am Prince Inal son of Prince Hetal, from the Circassian lands. He is Barlas son of Aslan of the Turkic nomads. My man and I were on our way to Tabriz when bandits attacked. Any bodies you observe on the road belong to them, killed lawfully."

The veteran took in Inal's appearance carefully, considering his blood soaked clothes and face, and lack armour apart from his helm. "You do not *look* like a prince." He said suspiciously.

"Speak better to my lord, old man!" Barlas snarled.

"Or what, little Turk?" replied the veteran

"Or I will take your head, Mongol!" Barlas shouted furiously

The veteran laughed. "Mongol, is it? I've been called worse. I've even been called a Turk."

The other rider heading the column raised his right hand advancing forward. "Peace!" He called out. He was much younger than the veteran, and dressed better. His length-curved sabre's hand guard and was jewelled with red rubies at the hilt. He was not as fair as Inal but

still on the lighter side. Under his helm, were dark golden eye brows, darker olive green eyes, and a carefully groomed goatee matching his eye brows' colour. "You will forgive my man here Prince Inal. He is a great warrior but he hasn't a great head for thinking. It is not immediately apparent to him that even princes' clothes stain with blood after a fight. Though he has seen such on my own clothes many times. Nor does he know of Circassian customs of wearing rough clothes to a fight and fine ones in the village, though his father, like mine, were both born Circassian. Tell me though. Do you not refer to yourself as Adyghe?"

Inal looked measuringly at the new speaker before replying. "We do. But my travels have taught me that the word 'Adyghe' and the regions of Adygea are not commonly known."

The new man laughed. "Do I appear a commoner then? I should have brought a larger retinue."

Inal laughed as well. "Forgive me sir. But you now know our names and purposes. Would you tell us yours?"

"I am Mirza Shahin, son of Mir Idar. We were tracking these men, though I can see now that we need not have."

"No sir. As I told your man, they were lawfully killed. Forgive me, but I am not familiar with titles in this land. I can see you are a man of rank, but I am not familiar with the titles you just spoke."

Shahin's ready laugh rang out before he spoke. "Not at all, Prince Inal, though I did not think I would be discussing the linguistics of regional titles when I rode out this morning. The titles 'mirza' and 'mir' are Farsi derivatives based on the Arabic word 'amir' which refers to a prince or a commander, depending on the context. Mirza is a contraction of Amirzada. The word Zada denotes descent, and usually refers to a prince who is also a prince's son. Sometimes a king's son, in the sense that principality is a natural constituent of kingship."

“The trappings of your troop denote such rank and more, my lord.”

“I thank you most humbly, Mirza Inal. You on the other hand, exude such rank on your bearing alone, without the need for any trappings. Kind words aside, though, I should like to know more about how these brigands met their fate. I do not doubt they were lawfully killed. But perhaps my lord prince, hailing from my father’s ancestral homeland, would care to enlighten me as to *how* they were lawfully killed? By what means?”

“By means of the arms myself and my squire bear, Lord Prince.”

Shahin raised one eyebrow someone sceptically. “My good lord, from the tracks we followed and what I see around me I estimate the death of a full fifteen mounted warriors. You and your squire are but two men. Well-mounted, aye, and brave I have no doubt but... Though I am young myself you both seem much younger still.”

It was Inal’s turn to laugh. “You state the facts but arrange them in such a way that they would state for you what you are too courteous to voice. Aye, we are both quite young. I have but lived in this world seventeen years, and my squire fourteen. But life on the Adyghe steppes is even harder than the Turkic steppes, and I killed my first man as a boy six years ago. These three years past I have journeyed from my homeland and for much of this time I have led a band of veteran Adyghe warriors to fight in the ranks of the second Sultan Murad of the Osmanli Anatolians. I do not say this to boast. Had those brigands indeed been warriors, I would no doubt be lying dead right now, but they were little more than poorly equipped bunglers, with some skills in horsemanship but no real war horses, riding baggage horses into raids. Some skill and exceptional luck on my part make this outcome very plausible.”

Shahin was looking very thoughtfully at Inal now, an inscrutable expression on his face.

“How many did you down?”

“Twelve. My squire downed two by means of bow. One fell from his horse trying to escape me.”

“Were you caught unawares?”

“No. We had time to prepare.”

“You have baggage and have been fighting, nay, leading for years. I see no armour but that helm. Why not stop and don the armour from your baggage?”

“It is not in our baggage, noble lord. A merchant from my homeland has carried it on to Tabriz for me in a well-protected Caravan. It was in bad need of repair and we could not remain in the Osmanli realm.”

“You are not fleeing Osmanli justice then?”

“No, Mirza, no. I have urgent business in Tabriz.”

“You look to be an honest man, Prince Inal. You carry a sword with the handle of an Osmanli Kilij, but the slight, consistent curve of your sheath makes it seem more like an Adyghe Shaska.”

“I have learned the value of many things in my travels, Mirza Shahin. I still prefer our Adyghe blades, but I prefer them much better with a hand guard now.”

“This is consistent with a young warrior who left the Adyghe homeland to fight in other lands. You are taking what is new and what is old and making what is your own. As spectacular as your tale sounds, I find myself, against all my experience, very much believing of your skill and courage.”

“Of my luck, lord. God’s fortune is most credited.”

“It is auspicious that I should run into a warrior of your calibre and noble station. It so happens that my father’s forces are in need of a warrior. A leader of men. We have only just met, but a man knows a man, a lord knows a lord, and a prince knows a prince, and by God you are all three or I am none of those things! Finish your business in Tabriz and come fight for me!”

“You honour me, Prince. But I cannot make such a promise.”

“Let me tempt you further first. My father rules a fertile region some distance to the South-West of Tehran. Just outside the Black Sheep dominion. One of his vassals died without an heir. I would install you in his estate. You would have a great house. Almost a palace. Vassals of your own. Forty men who use the income from their portions of your land to provide their own horses, arms, and armour, as well as those of ten foot soldiers each. All to serve you. Your own income would be four times what these cavaliers receive combined! With such money, you could train a household guard twice that size if you were minded to be extravagant... You would not just be a prince in Adygea. You would also be a prince of Persia.”

“Mirza Shahin, as gracious as you are, you have not known me very long.”

“I know loyalty, courage and honour when I see it. I am not the politician my father is yet, but I know characters well. All men have their gifts, and reading selves is one of mine.”

“I am very tempted by your generosity my lord. And I do not refuse. But I cannot assent until I have ascertained my business in Tabriz.”

“I grow curious. What is this business in Tabriz that would drive you from an honourable post in the Osmanli forces in a rush, and make you unable to commit to accepting a lordship many men have killed for? It is rude to ask, but if you can enlighten me, I would be most grateful.”

“It is not rude at all. You have shown me courtesy and it would be discourteous of *me* to abstain from answering your generosity without explanation, since you desire it. It is merely that I did not wish to burden you. My father has many children. 5 sons and a daughter, who is my twin sister. I am the second youngest of his sons. Three years ago, slavers abducted my youngest brother. Illegally by the laws of most every country they sell in. In Egypt, in Turkmen lands, in Syria, in Persia, a slave cannot legally be Muslim at the time they are taken. My great-grandfather converted to Islam a long time ago. The majority of the villages my family rules over have been Muslim since my grandfather’s time. So I resolved to bring and kill the slavers. Or, failing the former, if my brother is dead, at least do the latter. I followed their trail through Georgia and into Anatolia and the bulk of the Osmanli realm. When I lose track of them I take what work a man with a lance and a horse can take, and when I receive word of them I continue my search. For much of these years they were in and around Anatolia, so commanding irregular Adyghe troops for the Osmanli’s was good work for me. But I have received word they are gone to Tabriz. I may miss them again. But I have to try.”

“It is a noble cause you pursue, and a strange tale you tell. Myself, I am also very attached to my sister. I understand your reasons. But why do none of your elders seek your youngest brother out?”

“My father and older brothers are needed to rule and command the warband. Our warband sometimes serves the Osmanlis in their European battles. I was too young to owe service to the warband, too junior to govern the villages or sit as judge in disputes, and too strong to prevent from leaving. Even on the Adyghe steps, killing your first man at eleven is most unusual. By the time I was twelve it was understood that I would be free to seek my fortune if my service is not owed to the warband.”

“You know, my father was taken as a child by slavers as well, albeit legally by this realm’s laws. Now he is a great prince. Perhaps your brother will fare as well.”

“Perhaps he will fare better still when I free him.”

“I have seen lone Adyghe mercenaries pass through this land. Or very small groups. Do they not owe service to a warband as well?”

“Service to a prince’s warband is only owed when the need for fighting arises. If an Adyghe leaves his home when no fighting is required, he owes nothing unless he returns. So in times of peace, an Adyghe may seek to sell his service in other lands. Typically men who have nothing but their horses and arms do that if times are hard. Of course, the men you saw may also be exiles.”

“So be it. You have rid the area of bandits that frequently incur into my father’s domain. I will do what I can in repayment of your good deed. Go to Tabriz. Take 10 of my mounted household guard. Including my man who got off on the wrong foot with your squire. He’s an old goat but I trust him with my life. His name is Temraz. That way if you find your slavers, you are not alone. If there’s no trail to follow, come back to my father’s estate. I can’t promise he will not take service from another lord while you are gone, but I will do what I can to convince him to wait. If the position is filled upon your return, we will at least regale you with our hospitality.”

“I do not deserve such generosity my lord.”

“Nonsense. Men know men, lords know lords, and princes know princes. Did I not say that? I will also pay you for all the spoils of war from your kill. What you’ve gathered and what still lies on the field. That way you can gain some time and not worry about selling the goods there.”

“I can only hope, Mirza Shahin, that I am one day in a position to repay your kindness.”

“Perhaps you will be. There is another Prince Inal I have heard of. A great prince of Egypt, with estates in Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Palestine. There are rumours he will be sultan one day. Perhaps your name will afford you some of his great fortune.”

“One can only pray.”

Shahin nodded. “Temraz!” He called out. “You and 9 of our troop now ride with Mirza Inal! You live by his word and die by it! Obey him in all things as you would me!” Shahin looked straight into Inal’s eyes. “Go with God now. And may you return with your younger brother in hand!”

Thank you for reading. Till we meet again in the serial Chapter 2. The Prince in Tabriz.

The Red Ribbon

Chapter 1

Sitting in complete stillness, the man known only as The Cairene waits with the utmost patience behind a sniper rifle made out of a customized alloy and a proprietary carbon fibre blend. You might think that isn't some great accomplishment, since the ability to sit still is quite common to most any assassin who's good at his job, let alone one of the most feared men in the business, but the remarkable thing about The Cairene is not his ability to sit still, but rather, his ability to do so in excessively uncomfortable circumstances. You see, The Cairene and his big boy sniper rifle are in Moscow. In Mid-January. At a height of more than 1000 feet, with a dreadful wind-chill flying at far more knots-per-time-unit than any wind-chill should.

So far so good. People who go to Moscow in the winter have heavy coats right? Not in this case though. You see, The Cairene has to make some very delicate shots with his expensive rifle. And as I'm sure most of you know from watching all those movies, a lot of factors can hamper the accuracy and precision of a delicate shot. What they don't tell you however is this. One of these factors is heavy layering. When shooting normal targets it's acceptable to take precautions so as to avoid freezing your trigger finger off. But when making a delicate shot, too many layers can ruin it for you.

So here he was, The Cairene, sitting perfectly still with his custom new rifle, 1000 feet in the air during Mid-January in Moscow, wearing nothing but a grey turtle-neck jumper. Do you perhaps see anything remarkable about this situation now? Yes? I Thought as much. What's

that? No? Not to worry. You needn't repeat geography. An internet search of Moscow weather in mid-January will suffice. To resume. Our enterprising assassin had quite a bit of time on his hands and being the professional that he is he started multi-tasking. He had the ability to reminisce without losing focus. So while waiting for his target, which is obviously what he's been doing, he began to dwell on how he got here in the first place.

A few years ago he'd been working for an organization calling itself "The Red Ribbon." In principle their ideals were the same as any other mercenary group, illegal or otherwise. Kill people. Get paid. The difference is that "The Red Ribbon" were better at it than anyone else. Better at secrecy. Better at special services. Better at targeted assassinations. Better at managing their small army of professional killers. Better at everything. They were so good that only a small number of employees outside of their "shot callers" even knew they called themselves The Red Ribbon. They offered their services to different allied and opposed institutions at the same time, both governmental and private and none of these institutions knew for sure when someone else had used the same service they used. To them, they were just a nameless service. An email they sent when they needed something sorted out. A number they called when they couldn't afford to be public. The Cairene had been relatively content to work for them for two years. He killed quickly and efficiently, without compunction and without joy either. He embodied everything the organization offered. Neutral, business-like, kill-for-cash services. And for that reason he rose through their ranks fairly quickly. Two years might not seem like much, but the life expectancy on spec ops guys working without legal cover or governmental support isn't very high. Two years practically amounts to a career. Plus. His credits transferred. It was all going smoothly for him. Until the Arab Spring.

No one knows why The Cairene reacted badly to the Arab Spring. Nobody knew his motivations because nobody had much about his background. Even the name they knew him by wasn't certain. Half rumours and the other half speculation. Besides. He'd killed Arabs before. What's more, he'd done it in Cairo! So when the Powers-That-Be; The Secretive Billionaire's Club as he liked to call them, decided that the governments in the volatile region known as the Middle East were no longer pliable enough, and that it was worth the investment to shake things up a little, The Red Ribbon didn't expect him to turn down his part in this huge assignment. But he did. The section that usually assigned him his missions, was a little concerned. The Cairene's mission refusal rate was much lower than most of their operatives, which is one of the factors that contributed to his rise to serve so close to "The Throne" as they called their board of directors. But they weren't concerned enough to think it would cause problems further down the line. After all, one of their most successful management principles was that all their operatives were free to turn down assignments. Not every assassin was as perfect as The Cairene. Some had political concerns. Some had safety concerns. Some even had nationalist concerns. To avoid conflicts of interest, about practicality, loyalty or otherwise, "The Red Ribbon" allowed all their operatives to refuse assignments. As long as they didn't interfere. Which The Cairene most certainly did.

Despite being a very small piece of the clockwork, he was unable to completely halt the progress of such a massively funded project. It was a juggernaut, in essence. But, given his unique talents he was able to disrupt it. Which he did. To devastating effect. Having refused the assignment at first, he cited reasons of personal business on the other side of the globe

which had fallen through. He then proclaimed his willingness to engage in the Cairo branch of the mission if that was still being offered. Finding nothing amiss with their reliable and most trusted operative being ready to get back to work, "The Throne" assigned him to the team in Egypt. They were to receive intel on key figures in various sections of Egyptian society from the agents of the people that were paying them, a mixture of foreign government employees, members of private syndicates and local talents with a vested interest. They were to kill those key figures so that when the old man stepped down, everything would be ready to fall into place. The people they were meant to kill themselves came from all walks of Egyptian society. Some were tribal leaders, some were politicians, some were union leaders. Some worked for the government. All this never came to be however.

The Cairo team slept in the apartment assigned as their base of operations but they never woke up. Even the one on watch succumbed to the eternal sleep. The Cairene used poison incense to make sure of that. While they were inhaling their own death in their sleep, he made his move on the apartment across the street, where the "Torch" had set up headquarters. The representative of "The Throne" on the ground. He was basically the "non-field" field commander. He stayed out of most tactical decisions but gave the Yea or Nay on operations. He also had the information about all the agents they were meant to get in contact with for instructions on who needed taking care of. The "Torch" had two highly trained security guards. Former Spetsnaz. Russian special forces. They were also the only two legally hired muscle in this whole operation. Hired through a dummy registered private contractor firm. This didn't mean much to The Cairene. Legal or illegal a directive was a directive. He took care of those two security guards by talking to them, walking past them,

sneaking up on them and slitting their throats. Simultaneously. They knew him. So they let him get behind them. They thought he was going through the door, to talk to the “Torch”. It wasn’t difficult. No sense in fighting trained killers if you can avoid it. It is especially stupid to engage in a knife fight with a former Spetsnaz member if you can avoid it.

With security taken care of The Torch was an easy target. The Cairene didn’t take long to torture him for all the information he needed to know. The decryption keys to the digital lists. The code words to all agents which he kept only in his memory. The meeting points, the expected contact methods, everything. After he verified the information he killed the “Torch” too. The way he looked at it, it was a mercy. After what The Cairene had done to him, he was begging to die.

Armed with the list of agents and how to get in contact, The Cairene proceeded to wreak havoc on the Egyptian plan. Not only did he go on a spree of torturing and killing agents from a number of foreign governments and private institutions, but, having learned the information they had, he proceeded to wipe out a number of other teams from other, better publicised mercenary groups who were paid for other assignments. He didn’t get them all. Not all the agents, not all the teams. After all, creative as he was, the man was not a teleporter. One place at a time. But as word spread that the Egypt plan was going to shit, people started to panic. Information leaked through to some of the targets. The region’s most powerful intelligence chief’s motorcade was targeted. Only he wasn’t in it. It was a trap. The guys hired to carry out the hit were erased by a coalition of Egyptian Special Forces teams. It’s not that they didn’t want to capture any for questioning. They just weren’t equipped to. It wasn’t in their training. These were death squads and all they understood

was all out, or all in. The only way they capture anyone is if they surrender. Otherwise it's a bullet to the head.

With chaos overtaking the Egyptian branch of the plan, the whole Cairo operation was pulled. The Cairene had pissed off a lot of powerful people. People who now devoted a whole lot of resources to finding out who this operative who had gone on a rampage originally worked for. This was problematic for "The Red Ribbon". An organization that values its secrecy. So "The Red Ribbon" put a price out on The Cairene's head. All their operatives were offered 20 times their going rate upon a kill confirmation of The Cairene. This was why he was sitting here, perfectly still, freezing his ass off. It had been four years. He was tired of running. He knew the only way he'd walk free was by going for "The Throne." He was here for their top guy.

And he was about to get him. Finally, the man he was here for had shown up on his rifle's scope. The crosshairs were one of those modern graded things which obscured the fine details of his target's features a bit but it was definitely him. The grey hair, the prematurely lined face, the signature briefcase. All the same. The Cairene dialled his old handler's number from the headset.

"Ja?" came the answer in German.

"It's me." The Cairene said coldly, in his signature tone, devoid of all emotion. "I just wanted you to know that I have your top guy in my sights. I want "The Throne" to know that I'm killing him now and there's nothing they can do about it."

“Jesus.” His former handler replied, in a thick German accent. “Der P-Princeps?” he said, struggling to pronounce the Latin word.

“Nein.” The Cairene replied in execrable German. “Der Secundarius. What I’ve found out in four years of research on the run is something they don’t tell you. Your so called Princeps is just a façade. All the decisions come from the Secundarius. Tell “The Throne” that I have a list. Every day there’s a price on my head I check a name off that list. And I go after that name no matter what. Even if they pull the bounty on me the next day. Tell them I’m starting by taking their top shot caller. Then, if they keep at me long enough, I’ll be coming for all of them.”

Before the other man could reply The Cairene had hung up. He then fired three successive shots. None of these shots killed anybody, but they weren’t meant to. They were meant to convey enemy fire from his direction. Three, highly precise shots to indicate that three of the ways away from the building were exposed to enemy fire. One shot to the car’s bullet proof window. One shot right next to the guard holding the door on the other side open, less than an inch from his shoe. And one shot to rest in the door of the building right next to his target’s head just as soon as it was two steps behind him. Bang Bang Bang. Top dog’s security would have no choice but to take him through the alternate escape route. Then they’d get a phone call from “The Throne” telling them who it was. Because he’d just told them. These were quite literally the best security available for money. The best in the world. They’d realize he might have done that specifically to drive them to the second escape route. They’d have no choice but to re-route him to the third escape route. Which put him right where he wanted him. Not the third route. The re-route. The transition from route 2 to

route 3. 30 seconds. That was all it took to serve the Secundarius right up to his enemies on a silver platter.

The Cairene smiled. The freezing icicles on his face muscles shattered rather painfully. But no matter. He would be enjoying much warmer weather soon enough. It was time to stop running. It was time...to go home.

Elsewhere a phone rang. Somewhere on the other side of the world, in the middle of the night. "What?" A groggy voice answered in irritation.

"It's The Cairene." Answered a female voice in a worried tone and refined accents.

"What about him?" replied the irritated man.

"He's going for 'The Throne'."

"Shit." He hung up. Then dialled another number. "We have a problem. The Cairene. He's going for 'The Throne'."

To be continued.

Poetry Sample

Almost

Almost, light enough a word
One that we use every day
Almost seems a bit absurd
Such a word could bar our way

Almost lost that job we had
Left that city, took that trip
Almost let her drive you mad
Nearly let him from you slip

Almost one day sold our souls
For the wrongs that felt so right
Almost compromised our goals
When light faded from our sight

Almost grasped meanings so vast
That the wisest men could not
Almost defeated our past
But I guess we missed our shot

Almost heeding the wrong calls
When the pain becomes too much
Almost fold when darkness falls
Well-nigh fell into its clutch

Almost had our hearts' desire
All we ever could have dreamed
Almost gained the world entire
Could have all our faults redeemed

Almost got what matters most
Overcame every relapse
Almost overcame the ghost
Thrashed delusions till collapse

Almost drowned thinking we'd swim
Thinking water was our friend
Almost died upon a whim
Not concerned with how things end

Almost, more than just a word
But we beat it every day
Almost is truly absurd
It cannot stand in our way.

Guidebook Sample

Available on Amazon at: https://www.amazon.com/Islam-Versus-Muslims-guidebook-differences-ebook/dp/B0893CT8KN/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Islam+Versus+Muslims&qid=1591395979&

[sr=8-1](#)

Islam Versus Muslims



A brief guidebook
on the differences between both

By A. A. Alfy

***For my Lord, God, the One, the Enduring, the Eternal, the Everpresent.
Intended only in the hopes of pleasing him and receiving more of his already
bountiful blessings in this life and the hereafter. May the sincerity of this, my
intention, never waver.***

1. Introduction-----	Page 03
2. To Be Muslim-----	Page 05
3. The Source of The Message-----	Page 08
4. The Pillars-----	Page 12
5. Background History-----	Page 15
6. Interpretations-----	Page 21
7. Traditions-----	Page 22
8. The Role of Religious Clerics and Scholars-----	Page 25
9. Sects-----	Page 28
10. Dispelling Other Myths-----	Page 41
11. About The Author-----	Page 45

Introduction

Islam is a growing religion, professed, practiced, or both, by a significant portion of the world's population. Over 1.8 Billion people, at least. With such growth, there comes a natural curiosity and more than a few misunderstandings. Some of these misunderstandings are more troubling than others and may cause animosity. Yet these misunderstandings are not exclusively present in non-Muslims. Many of us Muslims carry some misunderstandings of our own faith. However, the most common of these misunderstandings, or rather, the underlying reason for most of these misunderstandings is the same in both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It is a failure to consistently discern the dividing line between the basics of the faith; beliefs which, without believing all without exception, one cannot be a Muslim, and the traditions and interpretations and conventional applications most Muslims accept as part and parcel.

This guidebook aims to, in the simplest of terms, dispel this failure to discern the difference. This guidebook aims to draw, within the mind of the modern human of our era, a clear dividing line between faith, and culture. Muslims and non-Muslims alike can benefit from this guidebook. If you're a Muslim who grew up his whole life with faith misconceptions, and no clear separation of faith and culture, this could be enlightening. If you're a non-Muslim who wants to know the bare basics rather than listen to confusing rhetoric, reading on might help you. If you're thinking of converting to Islam and you want to know how to distinguish your true obligations, prohibitions, and optional good deeds, from the opinions and instructions of others, this may be a good first step.

I write this guidebook seeking only the pleasure of God and His blessings in this life and the hereafter. Because of that, this paperback version of the guidebook shall be priced as cheaply as Amazon will let me price it. If you haven't already bought this book or know someone else

who wants it, I will also offer a free PDF version to anyone who messages me at <https://www.facebook.com/AlAlfyOfficial/> while I can keep up. If I'm so fortunate that your demand exceeds my ability to keep up, I'll put the PDF version up on a file sharing web site. It is my hope to maintain this pure intention forever.

Disclaimer: Beyond professing myself a Muslim, humbly struggling and often failing to perfect the practice of my faith, I make no claim to any religious certifications or credentials relating to any institution of specialised or exclusive religious study. I am neither certified as a cleric, or a theologian, or a historian. All my information comes from many years of practicing my faith, questioning other adherents and non-adherents, and extensive private reading all my life (some of said reading having no obvious bearing on history or religion).

To Be Muslim

This is the first chapter because a lot of people are just looking for this information. What it is to be a Muslim. How to separate a Muslim from a non-Muslim. Being a Muslim, just a Muslim, regardless of how good or bad a Muslim you are, is not a matter of practice, nor a matter of ritual. It is a matter of core belief. To be a Muslim is to Sallim (Pronounced: Sallim) yourself to God, which is to say, to submit yourself, to surrender to Him. To surrender yourself to God you must believe in Him, alone, as the sole deity to ever exist, infinitely and forever, you must believe in His prophets, you must believe in His angels, and you must believe in His scriptures. You must also believe in the inevitability of Judgement Day and God's ability to hold all souls and selves accountable, and in the afterlife. A Muslim, holding to those core beliefs, may take actions which are against the teachings of Islam, and yet remain a Muslim. It is a matter of professing and holding to personal beliefs and whatever a Muslim's sins, a Muslim's crimes, and a Muslim's well-deserved legal punishment, no one has the power to excommunicate or declare an infidel a Muslim holding and professing the above mentioned beliefs.

Some may, and have argued that by this definition, Muslims can come from other monotheistic faiths that believe in one God, and believe He has angels and prophets and scriptures (even if they don't agree on all their names). The argument has merit, considering that a verse in the Holy Qur'an refers to the disciples of our lord The Christ, upon him prayer and peace, coming to him as "Muslims". As in, having submitted themselves. Indeed, even the opposite has also been argued, albeit, in a less conciliatory fashion. In an age of surprising religious tolerance and free religious debate, a Christian priest known as "John of Damascus", who served as a high ranking court official in the Umayyad Caliphate's court, once openly expressed the opinion that Islam, the religion his overlords followed, is a

heretical sect of Christianity. However, for the purposes of this guidebook, we shall mostly be referring to “Muslims” as those who profess to submitting themselves to God upon the path of our lord Muhammad son of Abd Allah, God’s Prophet and Messenger, as revealed to us by what we can grasp from God’s revelation to him. The Holy Qur’an.

To be a Muslim on the path of Prophet Muhammad, upon him prayer and peace, as revealed to us by the Holy Qur’an, is outwardly a simple matter. One must, knowingly and understandingly, with the intention of becoming a Muslim, utter “the testimony”. The Muslim “profession of faith”. What we call, the “Shahadah” in Arabic. “Ash-hadu an la ilaha il-la Allah, w an-na Muhammadan Rasoolo Allah” which is to say “I bear witness/testify that there is no god/deity but God/Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of God/Allah”.

The testimony is also sometimes said with a slightly different ending. “Ash-hadu an la ilaha il-la Allah, w ana Muhammadan abduhu wa rasooloh”, which is to say “I bear witness/testify that there is no god/deity but God/Allah and that Muhammad is His servant/slave and messenger.” Both forms are valid as far as I was told. The testimony is valid in any language and does not require a cleric or a mosque to be professed, however, many people choose to undertake it with assistance from a cleric, or another Muslim in a mosque. Usually in such cases, the assisting Muslim will slowly pronounce each word in Arabic for the new Muslim to repeat, and will then assist him to pronounce it in the new Muslim’s first language.

In this context, Allah is the Arabic name for God, not exclusively the Muslim name for Him. Arab Christians and Jews, as well as Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews have used the word “Allah” before Prophet Mohamed was ever born. In many contexts, the two words are used interchangeably. Often, it is possible to refer to the One Sole Deity in English as God, without needing to use His Arabic name; “Allah”, but some Muslim religious English text writers choose to do so in honour of God’s choice to reveal the message to Prophet Muhammad in Arabic.

Before undertaking the Shahadah however, it is recommended that you research a few basics, such as Islam's divine concept (God's Oneness, omniscience, omnipotence, absolute sovereignty and more), the finality of Muhammad's role as the "Seal of the Prophets", the concepts of fate, the pillars of Islam, and a general basic grasp of the faith. I am not brave enough to suggest this guidebook would be enough, but I daresay it would be an excellent first step.

The Source of The Message

The only source for the core message of Islam is one I have mentioned before. The Holy Qur'an. This is the holy scripture for Muslims on the path of our lord Muhammad, upon him prayer and peace, the prophet of God and His messenger. The word Qur'an is literally the noun form for "recitation", in that it refers to a specific recitation, not the act of recitation in general (which would refer to a verb). The Qur'an is a series of verbal divine revelations, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, by God through an angel, over a period of approximately 20 years. The literal word of God, revealed in the Arabic tongue. The angel who brought the revelations is traditionally narrated outside the Qur'an to be Gabriel. The Qur'an itself does not specify which angel revealed it to Prophet Muhammad, however, Gabriel is one of the angels named in the Qur'an, and was named at least twice.

This series of revelations was transcribed, written down and copied during the life of Prophet Muhammad, and compiled into a standardised book with chapter (Sura) names and numbers along with verse (Aya) numbers, not very long after his death. Chapters and verses existed before compilation, but compiling them made the relevant verses numerically easier to navigate and access for much more people, including many who did not memorise the Qur'an by heart. The one who commanded this standardised compilation is Uthman son of Affan, the third "Khalifah" (meaning successor) to Prophet Muhammad in governing the affairs of the Muslims and leading them.

The most common compilation of the Qur'an is thus known today to most Muslims as "The Codex of Uthman." The compilation process was attended by many of Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries, companions, friends, and even relatives. This includes the Prophet's paternal first cousin and son-in-law, Ali son of Abu Talib, Who would later be hailed the fourth

successor to Prophet Muhammad, and the final successor from the “four rightly guided successors”.

The most orthodox way of reciting the Qur’an today is commonly believed to be the most correct way, but there are other recitations with differences in intonation and pronunciation of largely the same words, and some minor differences in letters which sometimes amount to minor word alterations. These other recitations are also transcribed and memorised by those who make it their work to memorise the Qur’an. These apparently small differences may sometimes amount to no obvious change in meaning at all, or they may amount to a change in the meaning of a verse. This is because the complexities of Arabic language are such that words of the same letters may mean different things. For example, in some contexts, the command to “fight” and the noun for “murderer” can be pronounced in the exact same way with virtually no difference.

There are 14 recitations which scholars accept can be reasonably claimed to be correctly itinerant from Prophet Muhammad. That is, recitation forms of the same verses which have been at least once recited or taught by Prophet Muhammad, or at least accepted by him when someone else recited them in his presence. Seven of those 14 recitations were originally regarded as having more than a reasonable claim to be correctly itinerant. They were regarded as at the very least, “likely” to be correctly itinerant. Three more recitations were added to the aforementioned seven by the majority of scholars at some point in history, giving us what we now know as “The Ten Recitations”. These three added recitations, despite some being less commonly used than others, are regarded as orthodox.

The four remaining recitations, having in scholarly regard a “reasonable” claim to correct iteration, but not a likely one, are named “The Four Deviant Recitations”. This is not a pejorative term, but refers to their literal deviation from the orthodox recitations, since some

of their verses, while in agreement with the divine concepts on which Islam is based, deviate, with their minor pronunciation differences, from the overall meanings of the same numbered verses in the orthodox recitations. The deviations in verse meanings are typically regarded as not contradicting each other. For example, a verse relates that God visits His suffering upon whomsoever He wills, and the same verse in a different recitation relates that God visits His suffering upon whomsoever ill (does ill), because of a miniscule difference in pronunciation. Those two recitations do not contradict the core tenets of Islam or each other. It is Islamically sound that God's absolute sovereignty entitles him to visit suffering upon whomsoever He wills. It is Islamically sound that God visits suffering upon whomsoever ill, should they not be forgiven. It is Islamically sound that whomsoever God wills suffering upon (specifically as a punishment, not say, a test) should also be one who has done ill. Thus, the meanings change but the verses don't contradict each other, or the core principles of Islam.

Based on this view of non-conflict between deviations, the fourteen above mentioned recitations are considered by most specialised scholars as genuine, divinely permitted aspects of the same book, as opposed to being merely a highly detailed documentation of how people recite the Qur'an.

Any recitations outside of the 14 recitations are considered to have a significantly weaker claim to being correctly itinerant. Some of those recitations outside the 14 raise issues of theological contention, with regards to the unalterable principles on which Islam is based. They are not typically learned or recited by mainstream Muslims who are not specialised in religious study. The Qur'an is, by definition, a book of many aspects. Even reading the most commonly recited recitation, a true master of the Arabic language might find numerous interpretations. Some say endless, interpretations, in just the one recitation. So interpretation is an important issue even Muslim laymen and women rightly discuss when making religious decisions.

These are the broad stroke basics regarding the Holy Qur'an, the only holy book mainstream Muslims have, and, as stated at the start of this chapter, the only source for the core message of Islam.

However, the core message of Islam leaves us with a need for some guidance with regards to religious application. The main sources of guidance for applying the message of the Qur'an, and for the religious application of certain customs for Muslims, are the traditions handed down to Muslims by Prophet Muhammad. The traditions of his well-regarded companions are also significant sources of guidance. These traditions shall be discussed in more detail in their own chapter.

The Pillars

The Pillars of Islam, so named because they are perceived as the basis on which the correct practice of the faith stands, vary between religious sects. The Sunni sect, which your humble author belongs to, upholds 5 Pillars of Islam.

1. Al Shahada. The “testimony/profession of faith, mentioned above.” The wording in both Arabic and English is explained in the first chapter. A Muslim must testify that “there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”
2. Al Salah. The obligatory, relatively short ritual prayer. Most commonly done five times a day within specific times, for the dawn/morning period, the noon period, the afternoon period, the sundown period and the night time period. Each ritual prayer averages about 7 to 10 minutes, but can take up to 15 depending on how one prays alone or how the imam (any Muslim leading the prayer, almost always a male in mosques) prays.
3. Al Zakah. Alms. The amount of money that a Muslim is obligated before God to pay for the poor and the unable. This religious tithe and its importance are stressed upon in the Qur’an, but from what I can discover, the amount is not specified there. What I remember from what my Religious Studies teachers told me, is that this religious tithe primarily amounts to 2.5% of any money which remained in your possession for a full lunar year. The amount and the method of calculation is found in the aforementioned traditions, and its unbroken continuity makes a very reasonable case for its consistently correct itinerancy.

Due to the modern banking lifestyle where some of us hardly ever keep more than a week’s worth of spending currency static for more than a few months, many Muslims choose to go the extra mile and pay 2.5% of some or all their bank accounts’ values,

so as to avoid the suspicion of not giving their due. Some Muslims will go further and pay 2.5% on the value of certain assets (such as gold accessories), considering it to be currency. There are other religiously obligatory payments. For example, it is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an that one who owns the right to the crops of a certain land must yield a portion of what is harvested on the very same day, the common interpretation being that said harvest portion should be yielded to the needy locals (or if there are none, to any other religiously deserving who will accept). Not owning the rights to any crop harvests myself, I am unsure of the percentage.

4. Al Sawm/Seyam. The Fasting. Those physically able are meant to observe the fast of the lunar month of Ramadan, abstaining, from dawn till sun down, from any food or drink, as well most forms of sexual activity. There are exceptions to the requirement, for example, due to health or travel reasons. During Ramadan, after sun down, eating, drinking, and sexual activity with a spouse are permitted. Being physically able to fast here is at one with being mentally able to fast. Those with debilitating mental challenges are not required to fast. Those who are normally in possession of their faculties but become significantly mentally debilitated during fasting (not minorly inconvenienced) may often fall under the category of being physically unable to fast. Those permanently unable to fast, if they are wealthy enough, must feed a certain number of poor people for all the days they miss fasting. Those temporarily unable to fast due to illness or travel may make up the days they missed by fasting outside of Ramadan. Most of the above is detailed in The Holy Qur'an.

There is a rule often applied to all religious requirements, not just fasting, almsgiving or feeding the poor. The rule is that "ability is the origin of requirement". Meaning that if a task falls outside one's ability, one cannot be religiously required to carry it out. This rule has a basis in a verse from the Holy Qur'an stating, along with other

things that “God does not require [from] a self, save what it is able”. It is also a rule to beware since self-deceiving oneself that one is not able may count against one in God’s accounting of one’s deeds.

5. Al Hajj. The Major Pilgrimage. Due to a direct statement in the Holy Qur’an stating that people owe to God “Pilgrimage of The House” if they are able to, this is also considered a religious requirement. The House here is interpreted as the Kaaba in Mecca.

Other sects agree that the above mentioned practices named by Sunnis “The Five Pillars of Islam”, are core practices in Islam in general for every sect, but they do not necessarily have the same name for them, nor are they always limited to those five. Given that much of this guidebook is based on what I learned during my own years as a practicing Muslim, lucky enough to be born to generations of practicing Muslims, I will refrain from adding information that I am unfamiliar with to this chapter. In a later chapter, I will name and compare, the sects of Islam and with that information, it will be relatively easy for you, dear reader, to research how the practices in “The Five Pillars” relate to the other sects, if you have further interest in discovering such.

Background History

The Holy Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, upon him prayer and peace, approximately fourteen centuries ago in the Hijaz region of the Arabian Peninsula. This revelation caused great religious, and consequently social, legal, and political upheaval, that would eventually go on to change the world far beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Before that time however, and for centuries past, the Arabian Peninsula, was dominated by Arab clans and tribes with primarily four broad types of political allegiance.

At the edge of the peninsula, towards Mesopotamia, (modern day Iraq and Iran) there were Arab tribes and clans who were vassals of the Persian Empire. At another edge, towards Egypt and Syria, there were Arab tribes who served as vassals to the Byzantines, The Eastern Roman Empire. The south of the peninsula was divided between sovereign Arab clans, and clans who at various points in time owed some form of fluctuating allegiance between Abyssinia/Ethiopia, and the Persians.

The Persians and the Romans were both content to support their Arab vassals to conduct proxy wars against each other as a buffer between their borders at Mesopotamia and Syria, while they pursued their conflict elsewhere in earnest. On the scale of the Persian and Roman armies, these proxy wars rarely amounted to more than armed squabbles, unless the overlords became directly involved. Between these edges of the Arabian Peninsula, was a vast, mostly arid region which largely held no interest for the Persian and Roman empires to the Northeast and Northwest of the Peninsula, or the Abyssinians across the strait of Bab El-Mandab (The Gate of Tears) at the South of the Peninsula. This vast region was inhabited by tribes who were largely independent and nomadic, with few scattered fully sedentary settlements. Few of these tribes formed any successful polities during the period in question (Since the presence of the Christian Eastern Romans in Syria). Their neighbours to the North, despite support

from their Roman and Persian overlords, were barely petty kingdoms. Statelets. To the south, Central Power in the modern day regions of Yemen and Oman had significantly weakened long ago. The nomadic tribes of the Arabian heartland largely warred, truced, and grazed their herds with how their fortunes shaped from year to year. Of the few sedentary settlements they relied on, two relatively large ones were in the Hijaz. Mecca, and Yathreb, the city now known as Al-Madinah. These settlements were large by that area's standards, but considerably small as far as cities went, even then. These two cities were loosely governed by confederations composed of the strongest of the clans settled within them, and the customs they somewhat selectively enforced. Occasionally, they would agree on a central leader, but not necessarily on his succession. For example, Prophet Muhammad's grandfather, known as "Abd Al-Muttalib" son of Hashem, named "Shaybah" at birth, was acknowledged as the "Lord of Mecca" but his children were not acknowledged as such, nor were we ever taught that they pressed such a claim (or even had such a claim to press). Which is to say that while it was politically significant that the one ruler Mecca could agree on came from the House of Hashem, and while the Hashemites were certainly noble before, and after Abd Al-Muttalib ruled, their house was never formally and fully considered the "ruling house". And before Islam took root in Yathreb, the city was reportedly in the process of selecting a prince. Occasionally, to the North, the vassal tribes and client statelets rebelled against their overlords.

This is the historical climate Prophet Muhammad, was born during, in the City of Mecca. The climate he grew up during, and began preaching his message during. Reportedly, he received his first revelation in a cave just outside Mecca, and Mecca was where he first preached his message. It is a climate worthy of note because it offers an oft-ignored perspective with regards to the later wars of the Muslims after The Prophet's passing.

By the time Prophet Muhammad, had passed away, the vast majority of Muslims lived in a unique polity he had personally been leading. A state which was not a traditional hereditary kingdom, but larger and more powerful than any hereditary “statelets” the Arabs had known in the region. And yet it was still not as powerful as its neighbours, the two empires to the North. Nor as established. A fledgling state, which still conducted more affairs through individual assigned responsibility than through institutions. Some institutions did exist however, and were rapidly developing.

After The Prophet’s passing, the leadership of this state passed to a “Successor”. The literal translation for the word “Khalifah”. This would become the title accorded to every leader to govern this state, and its successor states for centuries to come. The state and its successor states would become known as “Al Khilafah”. What people call in English “The Caliphate”. This particular Caliphate would be distinguished from later Caliphates by the name “Al Khilafah Al Rashidah.” “The Wise Caliphate” or “The Rightly Guided Caliphate”. So named for the four companions of the prophet to immediately succeed him as leaders of the state. “The Rightly Guided” Caliphs. Four close companions of the prophet, none having openly defied the rule of the successor before him.

“The first of the “Rightly Guided” Successors was Abu Bakr Al Siddiq. It was during his “succession” that Muslims first went into open war with the Persian Empire. The traditional historical narrative is not expansive upon the origins of this conflict. It says only that after a period known as “The Apostasy Wars” and pacifying the state once again after the prophet’s passing, a Tribal Chieftain, and general of the Caliphal Army during The Apostasy Wars, took the initiative to raid into Persian-controlled Mesopotamia. Modern day Iraq. Abu Bakr supposedly praised the action when he got word of it, and reassembled more forces in preparation of a campaign against the Persian Empire.

It has always seemed obvious to me that much is missed from this story. To begin with, the Arabic sources mention that the chieftain in question is “Al Muthana Ibn Al Harith”, and name him as a previous vassal of the Persians, who was initially reluctant to embrace Islam so as to not offend the Persian Emperor (or Shahanshah). The leader of a fledgling state exhausted by a recent inner conflict, is unlikely to permit, let alone praise an unprovoked attack on a much larger and stronger and more established empire without a very strong reason. Even if the empire in question was going through its own share of internal turmoil at the time. The most obvious explanation for that is that the raid was more than just a raid, but a counter-raid, a necessary one. Despite the internal strife of the Persian Empire at the time, it would have offended the strongest amongst the Persian Satraps in Mesopotamia that a former Persian vassal who had rejected Islam for fear of Persia would overcome his reluctance and embrace it willingly. In the simplest of terms, it is likely that the Persians “drew first blood”.

The conflict with the Romans however, began during Prophet Muhammad’s lifetime, with the Romans definitely drawing first blood, and further proving themselves a serious threat to the fledgling Muslim state after initiating armed conflict. The first incident reported is of an Arab vassal of the Eastern Roman empire who had an emissary from Prophet Muhammad murdered. Taking it for the act of war it was, the Muslims prepared an army, and the Eastern Roman Empire sent its vassals Roman soldiers to aid in defending against the Muslim Arabs. There was a battle and a series of skirmishes. The second incident reported is of Romans amassing soldiers with their Arab vassals to begin an invasion of the heartland of the Arabian Peninsula. The Muslim Arabs, led by Prophet Muhammad, amassed their own forces quickly and marched to confront the threat, but for unknown reasons, the Romans and their Arab vassals had disbanded their forces by the time the Muslim Arabs arrived, so no further blood was shed during the prophet’s lifetime.

If you consider every conquest the “Rightly Guided Caliphate” ever made, you would see that every new land the state took control of in that time period, (The Levant, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greater Persia, Transoxiana, etc) was either a former Persian province or a former Roman province. Which means, framing the conquests of that particular era, and a few later others, as unprovoked attacks by Arabs against the local, indigenous populations of these lands, lacks the aforementioned perspective mentioned earlier. These were not independent lands the “Rightly Guided Caliphate” was enslaving. These were lands controlled by the empires of its enemies.

Lands, resources and people the caliphate’s enemies dedicated to oppress the caliphate. These enemies had begun the aggression against the Arab Muslims long before the Arab Muslims fought back. The Arab Muslim state in question was taking from two of its bigger, economically and numerically stronger enemies; lands, financial resources, food, wealth and population, which the other two empires were actively using to attack it. There were often cases when the indigenous population, brutally treated under Roman or Persian rule, where the locals would cooperate with the Arab Muslim forces to unseat the imperial Roman and Persian forces.

All things considered, during the life of Prophet Muhammad, Islam essentially brought law to the majority of the tribes and clans of the Arabian Peninsula, both sedentary and nomadic. A law which would enforce justice and accommodate custom. A common denominator to resolve the clash of different customs from different clans. From this law, a true Arabian state emerged. A state which was larger, stronger and more independent than the vassal petty kingdoms and statelets Arabs on the fringe of the peninsula had formed at the time.

In time, this state would come to be more multicultural than Arabian, its only claim to being called Arabian being the primary language of its sovereigns. The state would also become

Persian, North African, West & Central Asian, Turkic, Caucasian and more. And from this gigantic state, which would eventually decentralise to the point of division into other states, the core substance of much of pre-medieval Middle Eastern and North African civilisation would later come to emerge. Islam is now a common cultural denominator across all those cultures, rather being a common cultural denominator only to rival Arab clans. It is because of Islam that in days of stricter local customs, from before the middle ages up to the mid-20th century, an Arab who speaks no Turkish, may live amongst the Turks for an extended period without inadvertently causing great offence. Or a Turk amongst the Persians. Or a Kurd amongst the Arabs.

A similar effect may be attributed to the spread of Catholicism in Western Europe, in that religion is a great connector of cultures. But in truth, it is rarely that one hears of an English medieval merchant who speaks no Spanish, deciding to leave England and move to Aragon solely in the interest of better trade. Particularly if his trade was still surviving. In the lands mostly populated by Muslims however, a merchant moving from one Muslim country that spoke his language to another which did not, was not so uncommon. In many ways, till this day, Islam connects many of the aforementioned Eastern cultures to each other. This is a basic historical background for the initial revelation of Islam, the circumstances in which Islam was revealed, and of the armed conflicts involving Muslims outside of the Arabian Peninsula which followed.

Interpretations

Interpretation is a key determinant in how a Muslim practices Islam. This is especially true for The Holy Qur'an, both in cases where verses bear several meanings, and in verses that seem to bear only one meaning. For example, there are verses that describe the religious requirements for a marriage to be Islamically correct in no uncertain terms. But if one of those requirements are not met, does that make the marriage invalid, and thus, its consummation, fornication? Does the answer to that apply to all requirements equally? The rules for inheritance are very specifically identified as executable "after" a legal will, but does that make those rules "secondary" to a legal will? Can a legal will divide the entire estate and leave nothing for the rules specified in the Qur'an to apply to an estate "after" a will? These are just examples of the many issues to which different interpretations of the Qur'an have applied over the centuries.

Interpretation differs with several aspects. A grasp of the formal Arabic language, the original roots and literal meanings of the words along with an understanding of the historical and contemporary applications of these words. The methodology of confirming or denying answers to theological questions, as determined by religious schools of thought, and ultimately, by the religious sects those schools of thought come from. The traditions ascribed to the Prophet, upon him prayer and peace, and his close companions, and the veracity of said ascription to the satisfaction of various scholars from various religious schools of thoughts and sects, and so on, and so forth.

Traditions

The traditions aforementioned in the second chapter, the prophet's specifically, are referred to collectively as "The Sunnah". Significant, though admittedly smaller parts of "The Sunnah" are correctly itinerant with very minor differences between religious schools. Notably, action-based traditions such as the motions of prayer or the rituals of major pilgrimage (Hajj) or the minor pilgrimage (Umrah). Most Muslims will generally accept the core prayer motions and pilgrimage rituals of Muslims from other schools as permissible, or only minorly incorrect, as opposed to outright disqualifying them. These particular examples were witnessed by thousands of people many times over, some on a near daily basis for years.

Other parts of these traditions are thought by some schools to be "most likely" to be true of The Prophet's actions and sayings, but are not universally thought of as such by all religious schools. And this is where the dividing line between "faith" and "culture" begins. The dividing line I mentioned in my introduction. The main reason I wrote this guidebook. I refer to "religious schools" in a general sense because even the same sects have different ways of thinking with regards to the religious traditions and the guidance they seek from it, let alone different sects.

Each religious scholar/cleric, or aspiring scholar/cleric, influenced largely by the school of religious thought he belongs to, looks to the traditions to at least help guide in the details of religious life, as well as help them interpret the Holy Qur'an. Some scholars/clerics, look to the traditions to enforce the details of religious life. Over the course of history, from a purely secular perspective (finance, health, statehood etc), some of these enforcements, based on religious tradition, have been beneficial. Some of them, have been catastrophic. But in either case (and most clerics reading this might protest) they were based on invalid grounds. The far bigger portion of the compiled traditions, most of the text from which scholars derive "the

sunnah”, is ranked in orders denoting the least likely to be true up to the most likely to be true. These orders, up to the “most likely” generally lack full certainty. And one cannot declare a spiritual decree “obligatory” based on a lack of certainty alone. One cannot use a tradition regarded as “most likely” yet uncertain to interpret a complicated verse in the Qur’an as a certainty simply because it seems very fitting. And yet many clerics have done those two things and continue to do so. This is the source of many problems for us Muslims today.

That is not to say that many of these traditions, from most likely to least likely, are not sometimes an excellent source of wisdom and spirituality. Considered rationally, and optionally, many of those traditions carry tremendous benefit. But problems tend to arise when the traditions cease to be applied with optional rationality in favour of unthinking imposition.

The most famous of these traditions are compiled in a volume set named “Sahih Al Bukhari”. Al Bukhari was a religious scholar who attempted to compile the verbal and physical traditions of Prophet Mohammad, his sayings and doings. Al Bukhari was born after the prophet’s death by almost 178 years, so he began his journey compiling the prophet’s sayings “Hadeeth (singular)/Ahadeeth (plural)” and doings, roughly two centuries after the prophet’s death. Al Bukhari instituted a complex system for validating the likelihood of a tradition truly coming from the prophet. He established a line of transmission from the prophet to whomsoever told him the tradition, he then investigated all available information regarding everyone this line of transmission, such as the historic likelihood of one person in the line of transmission meeting the other and passing the tradition on, whether anyone in the line of transmission was known to be a liar, whether the tradition, or a similar one, coincides from another (or even several) line(s) of transmission, whether anyone in these lines of

transmission was known to be a liar, and many other criteria. Al Bukhari then used these criteria to grade these traditions' likelihoods, naming some more likely than others.

The proponents of using Al Bukhari's and other similar volumes as measures for "definite" religious guidance, argue that a high standard of criteria and verification methodology is sufficient to take the information provided by compilers as measures to make absolute, irrevocable religious decisions. The opponents argue that Al Bukhari's and others' volumes have inevitable gaps in their verification process, and that compiling previously unwritten traditions two centuries after the man they are accredited to has passed away will inevitably yield vast falsity in some of even the most well-verified traditions, because 200 years is too long a time. As you have guessed, there are other compilations of Hadith well regarded by some. But Al Bukhari is the most famous and most celebrated of those compilations.

However, it is important to note that this fame and celebrity is based on Al Bukhari's status amongst the Sunni sect's scholars, and this is the Muslim sect with the largest numbers. Other sects typically rely on Al Bukhari's volumes less than Sunni scholars, and may hold other traditional compilation volumes above it.

The Role of Religious Clerics and Scholars

Religious clerics and scholars amongst Muslims have many different specialties. Some are dedicated to the art of interpretation, some are dedicated to the art of memorising and reciting the Qur'an correctly out loud (no easy task, especially if you memorise the 14 recitations), while others still are dedicated to studying the "Hadeeth" part of the Sunnah, and many other specialties.

Religious clerics' spiritual significance to Muslims on an individual level varies from Muslim to Muslim, school of thought to school of thought, and sect to sect.

That being said, in the core message of the majority of the world's Sunni Muslims, religious clerics are not particularly considered "holy" in the traditional sense. A religious cleric's opinion that you are religiously permitted to do something will not ensure you are spared from God's judgement if the cleric was wrong. The cleric cannot bear your blame and leave you blameless. A cleric cannot forgive you on behalf of God. A cleric does not know how you will be held to account for your sins, what you will be forgiven, who will go to hell and who will go to heaven. A cleric is not even necessary for a marriage to be Islamically correct.

There have of course, over the centuries, been attempts by members of the clerical class to elevate the perception of their spiritual importance. This is universal across all Muslim sects and schools of thought. This is however, a cultural perception which alternately strengthens and weakens under certain socioeconomic circumstances. Historically, the secular roles of Muslim clerics and religious scholars have played a more consistently important part than their occasional perception as a class of spiritually superior beings.

Judges in predominantly Muslim societies were almost always drawn from the ranks of those who received an advanced degree of religious education. While the laws judges governed by

were typically a combination of religious laws and local laws, customs and codes, it was always necessary for a judge to ensure that enforcing a sentence does not blatantly violate the socially accepted level of commitment to religious rules. This meant that a pre-requisite to learning the law, was learning the faith upon which the law stands. For example, while eunuchs had very prominent roles in predominantly Muslim societies, it was religiously unacceptable to compel a slave who was recognised as legally Muslim, to undergo a process of castration. Using a local law or custom to violate this prohibition could result in a judge's removal from his post.

Thus, a secular judge, for much of Muslim history, needs must also have been a Muslim cleric. This role is less widespread today but still extant. In my home country of Egypt, while judges lean far more heavily on secular codes nowadays, and need not be trained as clerics, there are still certain courts which are administered by clerical judges, remnants of over 14 centuries of legal customs. Sentences involving the administration of capital punishment by a secular judge still require the final approval of a high ranking religious cleric. There are also countries, such as Saudi Arabia, and Iran, where justice is mainly dispensed by a judiciary appointed from the clerical class.

In certain rural, nomadic and semi-nomadic, predominantly Muslim communities across the Middle East and North Africa, locals defer their conflicts to the arbitration of traditional judges rather than the state-run courts of law. These traditional judges' stations in life may vary, from a magnate being appointed recently by local notables, to being the descendants of ancient aristocratic families who held secular power in the region. One of these variations comes in the form of the traditional judge being a fully-trained cleric from a notable family of clerics. In certain cases, such a cleric may serve as an official judge in a particular state-run court, and serve as the traditional judge of his ancestral village.

Muslim clerics were also an important source of literacy and education. Up until the mid 20th century, the overwhelming majority of literates first learnt to read and write in a preliminary religious school for children, taught by their local mosque cleric who also led the regular prayers. These schools still exist today, but they are becoming increasingly rare.

Another role particular clerics traditionally fulfil, is the role of spiritual guides within religious orders. Sufism, a spiritual approach towards life through Islam, aims to promote a deeper understanding of God and divinity during the mortal phase of life, rather than waiting for the hereafter. In service to that objective, many Sufis adhere to the practices of certain religious orders, known as Sufi Orders. The vast majority of these orders are headed by a fully trained Muslim cleric, who has undergone both the traditional training a cleric from his general sect would normally receive, and additional training in the Sufi practices of his order. Descent from a particular family line, may also play a role in the succession to the head of a Sufi order. For example, the spiritual head of the Teejaneya Sufi order in Nigeria, is also Simultaneously the traditional “Emir (Prince) of Kano”, and the tradition goes back to a time when the title of “Prince of Kano” was an official monarchical title attached to legally secular gubernatorial rights and powers over a state. The familial aspect of “succession”, or lack thereof, however, differs from order to order.

Overall, in the core of the faith, the role of a cleric in Islam, at least pertaining to the Sunni sect, is less integral to salvation than the role of a priest in Christianity, or the role of a Rabbi in Judaism. However, the veneration a Sufi adherent accords to the head of his or her order will typically exceed the veneration an unaffiliated Muslim from any sect, will afford clerics in general. This is ultimately a matter based on cultures defined by religious traditions and interpretations, rather than speaking to the core of the faith.

Sects

The two biggest sects amongst the Muslims are broadly defined as

1. **The Sunni Sect.** This one is the largest of all the sects, with over 80-85% of Muslims purporting to be Sunni.
2. **The Shia Sect,** the second largest of the Muslim sects.

These two sects bear many subgroups within their numbers but there are roughly three much smaller sects which claim or have claimed at one time to lie outside the umbrellas of these two sects and yet within Islam. The three smaller sects are:

3. **The Druze Community**
4. **The Ahmaddiya Muslim Community**
5. **The Qur'aniya (Qur'anists) Group**

This chapter will deal with the defining features of the Sunni and Shia sects and their collective relationship to other Muslims in some detail, and then briefly outline the same for the other three sects. Beginning with the largest of the sects, The Sunnis:

“Sunni” is the endonym for the sect denoting that they follow Islam through the “Sunnah”, the traditions established and accepted by our lord the messenger of God, Muhammad, upon him prayer and peace. This is largely a self-description which does not speak for every other sect’s descriptions of themselves. For example, I’m sure many Shia would consider themselves following the “Sunnah” as they interpret it and believe it. The point being that just because Shiism is the second largest sect of Islam, with significant differences in religious practices, the actual meaning of the word “Sunnah” is not a meaning Shia Muslims reject. It is true, that being the two largest sects of Islam, their names being mentioned together almost always invites comparison, but they are not polar opposites.

The Sunnis generally take primary guidance from the Holy Qur'an, and secondary guidance from the Sunnah, the traditions ascribed to the prophet Muhammad. The degree to which they rely on some traditions more than others, varies across Sunnis, who are a vast sect. Their main source for the traditions ascribed to The Prophet is the compilation of "Al Bukhari" but also other volumes, such as the compilations of "Muslim" (A religious scholar's name), "The Traditions of Abu Dawood", and a few others.

Their interpretation of these traditions, and of the Holy Qur'an, is broadly divided between four schools of Islamic thought, each relying on a fairly structured method of religious jurisprudence. The four schools of thought are the "Maliki", the "Shafei'i", the "Hanafi" and the "Hanbali". Each of these four schools are based on the methodologies established by four celebrated Sunni religious scholars, known as "Malek", "Al Shafei'i", "Abu Hanifa" and "Ibn Hanbal."

These methodologies have been further developed by prominent religious scholars who identify themselves as "followers" of these four schools of thought, or "students" of the four aforementioned scholars. To be acknowledged as a fully trained religious follower of a school, you must establish an educational lineage, a succession of masters from one of the four founders of the religious schools of thought. It is possible for a scholar to establish a lineage from more than one school of thought, for educational purposes. But such a scholar will typically identify as a follower as only one of the schools, despite holding a certificate from more than one.

The four schools agree on many points and do not necessarily invalidate their points of difference. For example, Al Shafei'i was reportedly a direct student of Malek, and, when visiting "Al Madina" in the Hijaz" was asked to issue a "fatwa", a religious opinion on a particular issue. Al Shafei'i reportedly replied with something that translates to the effect of

“One does not issue a fatwa while Malek is in Al Madina”. Which is to say he was inviting those asking the edict of him to go ask his teacher instead.

Sunni relations with other sects vary depending on the sect in question, the regional and international politics, as well as the general demographics of an area, but as a tentative rule, merely belonging to another sect does not, in the eyes of most Sunni interpretation, challenge the core integrity of someone’s faith. For example, in areas with high sectarian sentiment and tensions, it may be rare for a Sunni and Shia to be wed, and religious scholars from both sides might discourage such unions, and even attempt to challenge the validity of the few instances that take place on case-specific technicalities.

However if you were to sit those prejudiced scholars down and ask if there is any invalidity attached to such a marriage specifically because of a difference in sect, they would begrudgingly admit that sectarian difference alone cannot invalidate such a marriage. In other regions it is not unheard of for intersectarian marriages to occur, and in a few of those regions, it is barely even a consideration.

As mentioned above, being the two Muslim sects with the largest number of adherents, Sunni/Shia comparisons always seem to invite each other. With regards to what defines the Shia as a separate sect from others: A common and particular concept of “Imamate”.

Leadership. To be an “Imam” is to be “Amam” the others, that is, to be at the fore. At the front. In common Arabic parlance and usage, it denotes anyone fulfilling, or who regularly fulfils a spiritual leadership role, which may or may not be additional to a secular connotation. For example, one who leads prayer regularly at a mosque is the “imam” of that mosque. One who leads prayer at a regular gathering is the “imam” of that gathering. If a group of praying men rotate who serves as “imam” during regular meetings for ritual prayer,

whomsoever is chosen to serve as “imam” on a given day is the imam of that particular prayer, and so far, and so forth. But it has a deeper meaning than that.

Of all the titles which referred to Prophet Muhammad, the least used title in the modern day is the one which referred to the combination of his spiritual and secular leadership of the Muslims and their fledgling Arabian polity. Nowadays, we refer to him as “Prophet of God”, or “Messenger of God”, because his spiritual role in our lives is continuous. We address him with the title of lordship as a form of reverence, but this does not refer to his historic rulership of the Hijaz and beyond. After all, all prophets, are addressed thus. Even most of Prophet Muhammad’s companions are addressed thus. He was, most specifically, not a king. The Holy Qur’an said as much. So, by what description did Prophet Muhammad, rule and lead the Muslims in their new state? The epithet which generally describes and fits that role is “Imam”. And as I said, that role has both spiritual and secular usages.

When physically able and available, the prophet led at least all the mandatory ritual prayers for all the Muslims who could come pray behind him. He would stand before them, at their “fore”, with his back to them, and initiate the motions of prayer which those standing behind him followed. Sometimes, notably on Friday, he would preach a short sermon while facing the people, still at their fore, before turning his back on them to lead the prayer towards the “Qibla”. The direction towards which all Muslims pray. First, this was towards Jerusalem, until revelation came to change the direction towards Mecca.

But acting at the forefront of the new “state” was more than spiritual. In his capacity as Imam, Prophet Muhammad decreed permanent and temporary measures, enacted laws in general and specific legal actions in particular, advised people on a voluntary basis on primarily secular issues, conducted treaties with other polities, confirmed hereditary leaders who had converted to Islam in their positions, appointed non-hereditary leaders for Muslim

communities and Muslim military expeditions, directed Muslim finances and the treasury, and much more. Of course, there was delegation and assistance on many levels and he regularly received and welcomed counsel on almost every topic but, like many political societies, the final decisions, or the power to veto subordinate leaders' decisions, lay with one person. This person was Prophet Muhammad, upon him prayer and peace, in his capacity and description as "Imam". The one at the "forefront."

In this sense, anybody who is claimed by others or himself, truly or falsely, to be a "successor" of Prophet Muhammad, a "Khalifah/Caliph" is claimed to succeed to his "Imamate". Which is to say, to succeed to the Prophet's capacity as the ultimate and final decision maker for all Muslims in both spiritual and secular matters. It is **not** a claim of succession to Prophet Muhammad's prophethood. In that sense, a rightful "Caliph" is always "**The** Imam" for the nation, even if he is not "an imam" in the sense of having completed a classic religious education.

The Shia concept of Imamate relies on a succession of figures who are, according to the given Shia school of thought's principles, those who are rightfully entitled to such spiritual and secular authority, despite not always being widely acknowledged as such during their times. In this context, if a man considered "The Imam" by a Shia school of thought, did not wield widespread secular authority amongst the Muslims of his time, it is because his rightful power is usurped by someone with no right to it.

The word "Shia" in itself roughly translates to "the widespread/common of supporters", and is an endonym meaning that as a sect, they are defined by their popular support towards whomsoever they consider a rightful leader, even if other Muslims do not. They are properly referred to by themselves as "Shia'tu Ahl'I Al-Bayt", which can translate to "The widespread of supporters of 'The People of The House.'"

“The People of The House” here refers to the members of Prophet Muhammad’s household, and in Shia consideration, the sect is specifically based on supporting Ali the son of Abi Taleb (the prophet’s first cousin, son-in-law and one of his closest supporters, who was arguably partially raised by the prophet, having spent much of his boyhood in the company of his significantly older cousin), Fatimah (The Prophet’s first-born daughter, and Ali the son of Abi Taleb’s wife), along with their descendants.

As mentioned earlier, Ali was fourth of the “Rightly Guided Caliphs”, and as such, was widely acknowledged as “The Imam” of all Muslims. As the fourth sovereign Caliph of the Muslims, most Sunni-Muslims, despite not having a particularly faith based religious order of imam based successions, are happy to acknowledge that Ali, was also the fourth Imam of all Muslims after Prophet Mohammad.

It is not so with Shia however. The essence of Shia practice revolves on what they perceive as the rightful line of succession to the Prophet’s imamate, and almost all Shia consider Ali the first rightful imam and believe he should have wielded sovereign secular authority as the first rightful successor (Khalifah/Caliph) to the Prophet. Some Shia schools of thought speak more kindly of the first three Khalifahs than others, but all consider them to have occupied their positions as “Khalifahs” and received allegiance from other Muslims without just cause, given that Ali should have succeeded first and been pledged allegiance as leader of all the Muslims first. In accordance with that principle, it is never considered sinful in any Shia branch for someone to pledge allegiance to the rightful imam, even if the rightful imam does not wield the power or lay claim to being a “Khalifa”, more importantly, even if someone other than the rightful imam is widely acknowledged as the “Khalifa” and thus, the rightful imam to most (usually Sunni) Muslims.

Even if the Shia's supposed rightful imam does not dispute another's supposedly false claim to the imamate and caliphate (which is usually interpreted in Shia Islam as a common-sense and legitimate political move aimed at preventing unnecessary bloodshed). Conversely, It is often considered sinful to proffer such allegiance to such a candidate for imamate/caliphate amongst Sunni scholars since it may cause a "fitna" (discord/strife) which may lead to all-out war or even civil-war. This point is the source of significant confusion. Since many of those viewed as "rightful" imams by the Shia, specifically in the Abbasid era, themselves expressed similar opinions to most Sunni-Scholars, in the interest of preventing bloodshed, many figures the Shia traditionally consider rightful "imams" are considered by Sunnis to be Sunni religious authorities of very high standing.

To begin to unravel this, you must understand that though the Shias' differences from the Sunnis revolve around differing views on "imamate", these differences are, from a Sunni point of view, often based on the supporters of an unwilling imam, who is highly regarded by the Sunnis. From a Shia point of view, every imam in question was willing, but did not widely express such sentiment to prevent bloodshed. It is also, according to Shia theology, why the imam, who offered religious education to all Muslims, did not widely preach that he or his successor were the rightful leaders of all Muslims, but generally only spoke of such things amongst committed supporters who had voluntarily pledged allegiance. Sunni sources, of course, tend not to believe this. It is worth noting that descent from almost every imam in question from this period is claimed by some families from both sects.

The two main branches of Shia are the Twelver Shia and the Ismaili Shia, including subdivisions for each. Twelver Shia are so named because of their belief in 12 rightful imams from the house of Prophet Muhammad, to succeed to the imamate after him. The 12 imams are generally listed for Twelvers as: 1. Ali the son of Abi Taleb, 2. Al Hassan the son of Ali, 3. Al Hussein the son of Ali, 4. Ali the son of Hussein (Also known as Ali Al-Sajjad, Ali Zain

Al Abedeen, Al-Sajjad meaning the prostrater, as a reference to how often he prayed because ritual prayer involves prostration. Zain Al Abedeen meaning “Splendour of the Worshippers” or “Most Resplendent of the Worshippers”), 5. Muhammad the son of Ali, 6. Ja’far the son of Muhammad (Also known as Ja’far Al Sadek [Ja’far The Honest]), 7. Musa the son of Ja’far, 8. Ali the son of Musa, 9. Muhamad the son of Ali, 10. Ali the son of Muhammad, 11. Hassan the son of Ali, 12. Al- Mahdy (The guided one).

You may have read about any of the imams mentioned in this list under another title, since they were all known by titles additional to their names, and not every title is mentioned above. In mainstream Twelver Shia Islam, the imams in the above list are all considered infallible, this is their supposed correct order of succession, and the final imam, “Al-Mahdy” is considered to be in occultation, having gone into hiding centuries ago. In mainstream Twelver Shia belief, he is blessed with great longevity, and will supposedly emerge from hiding to aid believers in the end-times immediately preceding judgement day. Most differences between mainstream Twelver Shia Islam and other Shia schools of thought, or even other sects entirely, such as Sunni Islam, revolve around differences in belief regarding the above list.

For example, the concept of an imam named Al-Mahdy who is descended from the prophet coming to aid Muslims before judgement day is not exclusive to Shia traditions, but in Sunni traditions he is supposedly yet to be born, and it is not an essential defining feature of Sunni faith. Another example of the differences in belief regarding the above list is that the majority of the imams mentioned in the above list are considered by Sunnis to be Sunni religious scholars of high standing, and of course, noble by virtue of their descent. While Sunni Islam does not mandate governance from Prophet Muhammad’s descendants, both Shia and Sunni Muslims honour descent from Prophet Muhammad.

Which is to say that in mainstream Sunni considerations, the general opinion is that most of the imams in the list above were Sunni and considered themselves Sunni despite any political persecution they may have been facing from the reigning Khalifas and their agents, mainstream Sunni consideration has no record of these worthy religious scholars considering themselves and their particular supporters a separate religious sect. The Shia mainstream tradition does not challenge this lack of records but rather holds that in order to avoid persecution and unnecessary bloodshed between Muslims, many things were arranged more secretly rather than openly. However, it makes dating for both sects rather different.

Shia clergy historians may date the Sunni-Shia split since the death of the Prophet, since Ali did not succeed him, and the more cautious of Shia clergy historians may date the split to the martyrdom of Al Hussein at Karbalaa, since Ali was eventually acknowledged as leader of all Muslims, at least until Muawiya's rebellion (but even still, leader of most Muslims). On the other hand, since most of the imams on the Twelver Shia list are considered by their Sunni contemporaries to also be Sunni religious scholars, most Sunni clergy historians could probably only formally date the Sunni-Shia split into actual religious sects, rather than just political groups, at the death of the Hassan the son of Ali (Also known as Hassan Al Askari), the 11th imam in Shia tradition, if not dating it even later.

Ismaili Shia schools have their own lists of imamate and deputy imamate, some of which continue till this day. For instance, representing Nizari Ismailis, is the Aga Khan IV (The fourth Aga Khan) who serves as the Nizari Ismaili community's 49th Imam. Dawoodi Bohra Ismailis on the other hand are represented by a deputy known as "Al Dai Al Mutlaq" which translates to "Absolute Missionary".

Then of course, there are religious groups which are mistaken for Shia schools but are not. For instance, there is a small minority of Sunni Bohras in India, and the Bektashi Sufis are

often classified with Shia Alevism because they have an imamate concept with striking similarities to the Twelver Shia's, based on holding 12 high ranking imams in very high regard, but Bektahsis often self-identify as Sunni Muslims, they hold the first 3 Khalifas before Ali in a very high regard as well, and frequently refer to the four main schools of Sunni Jurisprudence. Generally speaking, sect relations between mainstream Twelver Shias and mainstream Sunni groups with no major focus on imamate, are more relaxed than intra-sect relations between mainstream Twelver Shias and other Shia schools with radical differences in the imamate concept, from a theological point of view.

For example, mainstream Twelver Shias relationship with Nizari Ismaili Shias is generally more theologically tense than with mainstream Sunni Muslims. This is because the Sunni position on the imamate is explainable (from a Twelver point of view) as a lack of understanding due to the Shia belief that their imams did not always openly preach Shia imamate concepts. On the other hand, Shia groups are considered by their fellow Shia groups to be initiated in the Shia concept of imamate, so to hold a radically different imamate concept from another Shia group is to diverge more widely from what each group considers core Shia tenets.

Of course, while the theology diverges widely, most Shia groups loosely recognise each other as one sect, if not necessarily in total agreement. It is when theology diverges so widely that it splits, that all Shia groups become unwilling to recognise a particular school of thought. This is when a new sect emerges.

For example, this is what happened with the Druze. The first Druze evolved from the Ismaili Shia taking a particular spiritual stance with regards to the political succession of Fatimid Khalifas after a particular Khalifa disappeared or died mysteriously (depending on the historical accounts). The disappeared Khalifa was credited with increased spiritual graces by

some people (ironically, some of those spiritual graces were considered too extreme to be true, even by the Druze) and from those people, the Druze community evolved. However, their theological development and the radically different social restructuring of their communities, fuelled by many factors, eventually led to a mutual rift between them and other Shia groups. No Shia group considers the Druze as Shia, nor do the Druze consider themselves as Shia.

Indeed, there is dispute as to whether the Druze consider themselves Muslims at all. Many prominent Druze community members have publicly identified as Muslims before, while others have not, and there is speculation that those who identify as Muslim do so to avoid persecution. This is a rather simplistic approach that is difficult to prove however, because some Druze community members have insisted that they are Muslim despite the persecution that brought them. For instance, the Druze community living under Zionist rule in the Holy Land, is considered one of the groups which are not exempt from conscription for military service, as opposed to other Arab groups who are generally Christian or Muslim. However, I remember seeing an episode on television many years ago, about the two sons of a prominent Arab Druze writer who both refused to serve in the military, insisting that as Druze, they are Arab Muslims, and they both suffered incarceration for their refusal. This Arab Druze writer himself spoke of the Druze as Muslims during that televised appearance. He does not live under a government which compels Druze to appear Muslim. It is rather the opposite. Not identifying as Muslim under Zionist rule is not unheard of for some Druze, and may even be advantageous. And yet he insists on identifying as Muslim. These are not the actions of one misidentifying their faith to stave off persecution. Of course, there is a growing number of Druze refusing conscription, but those do not necessarily say they refuse because they are Muslim.

Somewhat inversely, the Ahmadis, or Qadianis always consider themselves Muslims, and are always open about that in conversing with other Muslim groups unless they are forbidden by law from doing so. For instance, in Pakistan, Ahmadis are legally prohibited from referring to themselves as Muslims or identifying Ahmadiyya as a Muslim sect. In the rest of the world however, Ahmadis publicly self-identify as Muslims. The rest of the Islamic community is divided as to whether they can be considered as such however, due to some contention regarding the spiritual status of the leader of their community, whom they refer to as a “Khalifa” in short and “Khalifatul Massih” in full. Literally meaning “The Successor of The Christ”. There is also some contention regarding the ascension of Jesus Christ and his life and death, since Ahmadis consider our lord Isa (Jesus), upon him prayer and peace, to have passed away on earth whereas most Muslim scholars interpret the Qur’anic verses about Jesus to mean he ascended in his living mortal form and body to heaven (widely believed to be the only human to do so).

The final sect I mentioned above, the Qur’anists, are the subject of similar debate to the Ahmadis with regards to scholars from larger Muslim sects considering them Muslims or not, but for different reasons. The name Qur’anist gives an immediate impression, for one somewhat versed in Islam and its groups and classifications. It gives the impression that as a sect, due to the difficulty of ascertaining certain veracities in religious tradition, they rely on the Holy Qur’an alone as the source of their religion, and interpret it solely using linguistic and historic knowledge. It gives the notion that they are purists of a sort. The name however, is misleading, since Qur’anists often challenge the traditional content and compilation method of the Qur’an which both Sunni and Shia sects agree upon, and hold their own views as to the elevated spiritual status of certain religious leaders who are also not mentioned in the Holy Qur’an as it is acknowledged and printed by Shia or Sunni groups. Qur’anists can contend that their challenges to “small details” is hardly a challenge to the Qur’an

acknowledged by other sects in general, but because the compilation of the Qur'an is based on certain principles, the religious principles from both major sects agree that there are no "great details" or "small details" in the Qur'anists' challenges, and that their challenges are addressed to the Qur'an Sunnis and Shias rely upon as a whole.

Dispelling Some Other Myths

-Jihad: Jihad doesn't refer exclusively to a holy war or war of any kind. Jihad is a word derived from the root pronounced "Jahd" or "Johd" which literally translates to effort. A Jihad is a continuous application of effort. So, yes to go to war is a "Jihad". But also, to earn a difficult degree or learn a difficult craft, one commits "Jihad". To withstand a temptation one very much desires is an act of Jihad. To attain the finish line of a marathon on time for most people is a stupendous Jihad. Not every Jihad is holy.

A holy Jihad must have an aspect that serves God, or God's will in some way. This becomes "A Jihad on the path of God" or "A Jihad for the sake of God". If you build a hospital seeking to please God, that is a Jihad on the path of God. If you constantly resist the temptation to have illicit sexual relations with someone when you believe you could, that is a Jihad on the path of God. If you make a difficult personal physical effort to bring the needy what food and medicine they need, that is also a Jihad on the path of God. And yes, if you fight in a justified war in which you are not the original transgressor or supporting the original transgressor, then you are committing a Jihad on the path of God.

-Sharia: Originally, sharia is one of the many words in the illustrious Arabic language that also mean "path" or "course". Due to the law giving nature of the original Islamic revelations in Mecca, as issues arose for the nascent Arabian state, the act of "making a path" for everything like commerce, inheritance, marriage, armed conflict, etc became necessary. Making a path in the sense of legislation. So legislating, making a path, came to be known as "tashree'" and the actual law, the actual path to be followed for the legitimate accomplishment of something by due process came to be known as "Sharia".

You have heard of “Sharia Law” in the west but that is a misnomer. There is no real thing called “Sharia Law”, that would be rather redundant unless you’re literally using old and unusually applied Arabic to speak of a law for roads/paths/courses. Sharia in legal usage is usually used to literally signify law. For example, older Arabic texts mentioning Roman Law might literally refer to it as “The Sharia of the Romans”.

What you’re thinking of when you think “Sharia Law” is Islamic law. But Islamic law is not in itself a very solid concept. From the earliest days of Islam, the sources of the law were myriad. Some of the laws were derived from Islam itself, from holy scripture or the rulings of the prophet, but some of the laws were also derived from local customs, laws of necessity, and pre-existing proto-legal principles. For example, if you examine the laws of each era you will find that the “Sharia” of the Rashidun Caliphate is different to the “Sharia” of the Abbasid Caliphate, and that the “Sharia” of Mameluke Egypt would have been different to the “Sharia” of the Sultanate of Delhi, and they would all be different to the 17th century Sharia of the Ottoman Empire. So yes, predominantly Muslim societies have some laws inspired by or directly derived from Islam of course, but that is not the sole source of legislation.

Then again, many legal concepts which came to be known through Muslims, even the earliest Muslims, have found their way into western legal systems. For example, the legal principle that “the burden of proof is on the accuser” is an early requirement of justice in the Muslim world, stated more literally as “the demonstration/revelation is upon the claimant”. While this concept makes no known appearance in Latin or English legal discourse till the 16th century, it is already spoken of in Arabic as an established legal principle by “Al Nawawi” and other Muslim jurists in the 13th century. Scholars originally credit knowledge of the principle amongst Muslims to a saying of Prophet Muhammad, but state its use to be much

older, going back as far as at least King David. So far as I can discover however, the earliest known written sources for this principle are in Arabic, written by Muslims.

-Islam's treatment of women: The misconception between what is required of women by Islam, and what is imposed upon women by the cultural misconceptions some (and by no means all) Muslims suffer from, is one of many reasons I felt the need to write a guide detailing the difference between the core message of Islam and the cultural applications attached to its appearance by various societies. The core message of Islam empowers women financially, empowers their physical sovereignty, encourages chastity outside of wedlock in both genders on the highest physical levels (up to averting the gaze) and codifies women's rights in cases of inheritance, divorce and other issues. Many if not all the things a Muslim society seemingly dominated by men (or even women) imposes on Muslims in general and women in particular are subjects of vast interpretation and misinterpretation.

After all, the leaders of the Judeo-Christian west have in the past used selective interpretation of religion to mistreat women quite regularly, and it is still the case in many Western communities, but there is no widespread impression that this mistreatment is a requirement of faith when an abundance of these cases emerge.

-Converts/Reverts: English speaking religious scholars and the English speaking Muslims for whom they are a religious source, often make a point of saying that someone who embraces Islam is not a convert, but a "*revert*". They base this on a tradition that all selves are supposedly born Muslims, and are then raised in the faiths of their respective communities. Based on this tradition, these scholars theorise that if such people accept Islam again as adults they have "reverted" to their original faith. They go so far as to correct people who talk about converting to Islam, as though they were wrong. The truth about this phenomenon is that the tradition they base this on is not a core concept of the faith. More importantly, even if the

tradition in question were a core concept of the faith, the terminology they build upon it is **incorrect**. In the Arabic language, the literal translation for “revert” is “mortad”, someone who reverted **away** from Islam. The common English language translation to relate to the culturally Judeo-Christian West is “Apostate”, but “Revert” is actually a more literal and fitting term. So yes, the term “convert” is much more correct.

These are just a few of many myths about Islam which are spawned by misunderstanding and misrepresentation, and they serve as prominent examples of what we should discern more choosily when considering the difference between Islam’s core message and the cultures of various Muslim societies around the world.

About The Author

The author of this guidebook, yours truly, is a graduate of pharmacy school, with professional experience as a writer and as a translator. The author of this guidebook has no Muslim theological or clerical certifications and does not claim to be anything other than an imperfectly practicing Muslim, born to long generations of Muslims before him on either side of his family. The author of this guidebook is going to stop calling himself “the author” now.

My name is Abdallah Al Alfy, born in and (primarily) raised in Cairo, Egypt and living for the last few years of my life in Mississauga, Canada. My original intention behind writing this guide was and remains to please God by presenting it to the world and hoping it promotes better understanding for people open to seeking it. In pursuit of that goal, this ebook is listed as cheaply as Amazon permits, and I will send you a free PDF version if you send a message asking me to at <https://www.facebook.com/AlAlfyOfficial/>, until demand exceeds my ability to reply to everyone. Then I’ll list the free PDF version on a file sharing web site or a drop box.

I did wonder if I should put my name on this guide, on the consideration that it should find many readers, wondering if any potential fame might detract from divine reward, but I came to the conclusion that it is better for this text’s integrity for the author to be known. I chose to write this more conversationally than academically to stress the promotion of dialogue, given that I am free of the obligations of religious academics. I wrote to you, my dearest readers, as a Muslim from my national and cultural background would speak.

You may read less wholesome content from me should you choose to peruse more of what I write in the future. I am but humble writer, not a paragon of virtue by any means. Please keep that in mind. May you find great use for this guidebook.