The Golden Rule in Islam:
Ethics of Reciprocity in Islamic Traditions

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Abstract

The ethics of reciprocity, known as the "golden rule," is any moral dictum that encourages people to treat others the way they would like to be treated. The principle exists in the sacred texts of the world's religions as well as the writings of secular philosophers. Due to its ubiquity in many contexts, it has become an important focal point for interfaith dialogue and the development of international human rights norms. Islam, as a world religion with over one billion followers, has an important role to play in facilitating dialogue and cooperation with other groups in the modern world. The golden rule in Islamic traditions has been explicitly invoked by numerous Muslim leaders and organizations towards this end. This study examines the phenomenological appearance of the golden rule in Islamic texts and modern interfaith dialogue with Muslims. Sources include the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth traditions, exegetical commentaries, extracanonical or apocryphal literature, and contemporary works. Sections are organised by genre of literature and are loosely chronological. Key interpretive points from the classical period are related to modern interfaith initiatives and universal human rights, with a view of demonstrating the ways in which the classical heritage informs the experiences of Muslims today.

Table of Contents

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful

1. Introduction

1a. What is the Golden Rule?

The ethics of reciprocity, known as the "golden rule," is any moral dictum that encourages people to treat others the way they would like to be treated. The rule appears in a variety of forms and contexts, in different religions, philosophies, and peoples widely separated by time, place, and language, to the degree that it appears to be a nearly universal maxim among humankind.[1] It has a central role in theistic religious ethics as well as some secular philosophies; it is justified on the basis of scriptural authority or reason or both. It is expressed in both positive formulations ("do unto others…") and negative formulations ("do not do unto others…").

The rule often appears as a summarising principle of good conduct, perhaps as *the* supreme moral principle of right action between human beings. Though not always understood literally, as it has its own caveats and relationships with other moral imperatives, it generally functions as a method of moral reasoning in a process of emotional and spiritual development. Yet despite the different formulations, wordings, and contexts in which the rule appears across religions and traditions, Jeffery Wattles asserts that there is enough continuity in meaning and application to justify describing the ethics of reciprocity as *the* golden rule.[2] For the purposes of this study, we will refer to the ethics of reciprocity in Islamic texts as Islam's version of the golden rule.

Moral reasoning with the golden rule, under the guidance of one's conscience, does not exist in a vacuum. It requires complementary principles or values, consideration of context, and a maturity of thought to operate in a workable manner. Literal and fallacious applications of the rule can lead to absurd results, as pointed out by many of the golden rule's critics. For example, a monkey would prefer to stay out of the water for his own comfort, while a fish requires staying in the water to survive. If the monkey literally treats the fish as he would like to be treated, and thus removes it from the water, he would end up

[1] Joyce Oramel Hertzler, "On Golden Rules," *The International Journal of Ethics* 44, no. 4 (1934): 418.
[2] Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

needlessly killing the fish; an obvious ethical violation.[3] It was this kind of simplistic use of the golden rule that George Bernard Shaw criticised through the character of John Tanner, “Do not do unto others as you would that they do unto you. Their tastes may be different… The golden rule is that there are no golden rules.”[4] The potential for the golden rule – left underdeveloped or unqualified – to result in preposterous moral conclusions has led to its dismissal as a serious guiding principle by a number of philosophers.

To abandon the rule entirely based upon such simplified characterizations, however, would be a serious mistake. Harry J. Gensler, building upon the work of Wattles and others, attempts to formulate the rule in terms that dispel its common criticisms: “Treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation.”[5] Context matters in the process of moral reasoning; what the rule demands is not literal adherence as much as it is ethical consistency and the equal dignity of human beings on par with each other as the first principle from which a course of action is deliberated. Moreover, application of the rule ought to be informed by an array of principles, values, and virtues that are manifestations of the rule in action. For this reason, writers throughout history have used the rule “as a hub around which to gather great themes.”[6] Notions of justice, love, compassion, and other virtues have all been related to the rule by various authors and traditions. Accounting for all of these considerations and responding to common objections, both Wattles and Gensler have convincingly defended the golden rule from its detractors and have presented it as a viable first principle for a modern moral philosophy.

Viewed in light of their scholarship, we can appreciate why so many religions and philosophies have incorporated the rule as one of their central maxims. It is a simple, intuitive idea from which more refined ethical concepts, like universal human rights, can be derived and developed in a process of thoughtful conscience-based reasoning. The simplicity of the rule makes it comprehensible at any level of education; the far-reaching implications of the rule make it relevant to issues at the highest levels of society and the existential human

[3] Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.
[4] Bernard Shaw, *Nine Plays* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1944), 731.
[5] Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 2.
[6] Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 28.

condition. It has the potential to serve as an immediate point of connection, and agreement in principle, between people whose traditions might otherwise appear superficially antithetical to each other.

The book of Leviticus, a sacred text for Jews and Christians, states the golden rule as God's command to be a good neighbour:

> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.[7]

As Leviticus is a core text in the Rabbinic tradition of Judaism, this verse was recognised in commentaries as central to understanding the Torah as a whole. This sentiment was expressed by Rabbi Hillel (d. 10) in a story rather well-known in some interfaith circles:

> On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.'[8]

The axiomatic nature of the golden rule would continue in the Christian tradition as well, even as the early dissident Jewish sect gradually transformed into a global movement, a new and distinct religion with its own scriptures adding to the Torah and other Jewish texts.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, one of the New Testament's core texts, Jesus of Nazareth tells his disciples, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."[9] The golden rule of Christianity centres on the theme of selfless love, or *agape* (ἀγάπη), meaning "affection, good-will, love, benevolence."[10] It is understood to be love for one's

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[7] Leviticus 19:17-18; Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 171.
[8] Isidore Epstein and Maurice Simon, *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1960), v.3 folio 31a.
[9] Matthew 7:12; Coogan et al, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1756.
[10] Carl L. W. Grimm, Joseph H. Thayer, and Christian G. Wilke. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper, 1887), 4.

neighbour and enemies, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”[11] This type of Christian love, derived from the golden rule, has been distinguished from, and sometimes set in opposition to, the Platonic concept of *eros* (ἔρως), the ancient Greek word used to described the many different shades of the phenomena we call “love.”[12]

In the Mahabharata, the epic poem that inspires Hindu traditions, we find a proverb relating the golden rule to the principle of no-harm or non-aggression, “One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of Righteousness.”[13] As we have seen before, the rule is stated as a summarising principle of good conduct. Likewise, in Confucian tradition with its focus on ethical virtues and the Five Constants, the following anecdotes condense the master’s teachings into the golden rule:

> The Master said, ‘Tseng! There’s a single thread stringing my Way together.’ ‘There is indeed,’ replied Master Tseng. When the Master left, some disciples asked, ‘What did he mean?’ ‘Be loyal to the principles of your heart, and treat others with the same loyalty,’ answered Master Tseng, ‘That is the Master’s Way. There is nothing more.’[14]
>
> Adept Kung asked, ‘Is there any one word that could guide a person throughout life?’ The Master replied, ‘How about ‘*shu’* [empathy, altruism]? Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.’[15]

In Buddhist texts, we find a focus on compassion, an important expression of the golden rule, which recognises an inherent connection between human beings. If one loves himself or herself, he or she should necessarily love others the same or at least not harm them:

> As a man traversing the whole earth,
> Finds not anywhere an object more loveable than himself;
> Therefore, since the self is so universally loved by all,

[11] Matthew 5:44-45; Ibid., 1754.
[12] Anders Nygren and Philip S. Watson. *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 30.
[13] Råaya Pratåapachandra and Mohan G. Kisari, *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* (Calcutta: Bhåarata Press, 1889), 2:235.
[14] Confucius and David Hinton, *Analects* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2014), 40, IV15.
[15] Ibid., 123, XV24.

The man who loves himself so much,
Should do no injury to others.[16]

This brief survey of wisdom sayings in the world's great religions is to demonstrate that the golden rule is a key feature in their respective adherents' worldview, or *weltanschauung*, at least in theory if not in practice. Regardless of the precise metaphysical or theological doctrine underpinning their worldviews – whether monotheistic, polytheistic, or non-theistic – the golden rule occupies a fundamental place in their founders' teachings. It should not surprise us, then, that Islam, itself the second largest religion in the world, contains texts and traditions which express the ethics of reciprocity in similar ways and in relation to shared religious or moral themes.

1b. The Golden Rule in Islam

The canonical texts of Islam, the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth traditions, as well as their exegetical and commentary literature, contain a great amount of material that explicitly states golden rule formulations as a summarising principle or expresses ethical concepts in which the rule is implied. An exact formulation of the golden rule does not appear in the Qurʾān itself, but it is strongly suggested in a number of verses. These implications were not lost upon the Qurʾān's commentators, who would often refer explicitly to the rule in their exegeses.

The Ḥadīth traditions, on the other hand, express the rule explicitly in several forms. There occur both positive formulations encouraging benevolent treatment and negative formulations discouraging harm. The language used is sometimes inclusive and universal ("the people" "his neighbour") and sometimes it can be interpreted as specific to the Muslim community ("his brother" "the believers"). These golden rule traditions are expounded upon by Hadīth commentators in relation to a number of moral themes or virtues: faith (*al-īmān*), justice and fairness (*al-ʿadl wal-inṣāf*), love for the sake of God (*ḥubb fī Allāh*), brotherhood (*al-ikhwah*), altruism (*al-īthār*), good will (*al-naṣīḥah*), and good character traits (*maḥāsin al-akhlāq*). The rule is also contrasted with

[16] Dawsonne Melancthon Strong, *The Udāna, or the Solemn Utterances of the Buddha* (London: Luzac, 1902), 66.

destructive antithetical vices such as hatred (*al-bighḍā'*), envy (*al-ḥasad*), and malice (*al-ḥiqd*). Additionally, there are several golden rule traditions that are attributed independently to Muḥammad's early followers, as well as apocryphal sayings in early spiritual literature attributed to various Biblical prophets, such as David, Moses, and Jesus.

Aside from canonical texts and their commentaries, the golden rule was mentioned by classical jurists, philosophers, and mystics in a variety of contexts. Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111), a widely influential Sunni intellectual whose works fit into each of these three categories, typifies the use of the golden rule in areas such as theology, etiquette, character development, and even business relations.[17] The use of the rule by such authors has deep roots within the canonical texts of Islam; the rule is deeply embedded in the scriptures of Islamic tradition and it was not appended to the tradition by later writers of the classical period. The ethics of reciprocity was not, however, known to Muslims by the term "the golden rule," as it is used in this study. Rather, the concept was more often understood simply as the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad.

In the modern period, the closer social proximity of Muslims to non-Muslims, and the requirements of pluralism resulting from rapid globalization, have brought the golden rule into focus as a basis for interfaith dialogue between Muslims and other traditions, specifically Judaism and Christianity. For example, Muslim scholars issued the *A Common Word* interfaith letter and initiative that explicitly invokes "love of neighbour," a standard expression of the golden rule. The initiative grew into several publications and conferences, including the important and high-profile Marrakesh Declaration in early 2016, which cited *A Common Word* in its text as evidence of the compatibility between Islamic tradition and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[17] Justin Parrott, "Al-Ghazali and the Golden Rule: Ethics of Reciprocity in the Works of a Muslim Sage," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 16, no. 2 (March 2017): 68-78.

1c. Methodology and Scope

Religion is a phenomenon with many dimensions. Ethics, or law, is a common feature of most all religions and philosophies.[18] This study treats the golden rule as an *ethical phenomenon*. The purpose is to examine the rule as it manifests itself in core Islamic texts and throughout various historical genres of Islamic literature, along with its appearance and implications for the modern period. Metaphysical, social, and other dimensions of the phenomenological study of religion will be mentioned as far as they are related to the main topic and texts. Parallels with other religious traditions and philosophers will be noted wherever appropriate.

The presentation of the material will follow a loose chronological order – the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth traditions, classical authors and literature, and the modern period – but the interest here is not in the application of critical, linear historical methods. This is not an historical study, per se. For instance, apocryphal traditions that were circulated by the earliest Muslims attribute sayings to one or another figure from Judeo-Christian traditions. A critical historian would rightly question the historicity of such reports, if not frown upon them altogether. The intention here, though, is to examine the meaning and function of such reports in Islamic tradition and the way they were and are experienced by Muslims.

This study will examine primarily canonical and classical texts that are in Arabic. The vast majority of material under examination is from the majority Sunni tradition, although some specifically Shi'ite traditions were discovered in the course of this research and have been included in the analysis of extracanonical (from the Sunni point of view) literature. It is beyond the scope of this study to do justice to the golden rule as it appears in the expanse of Shi'ite literature; a separate study would be required and it is suggested as an area of further research. Critical translations of the texts are used when available, but much of the material presented has not been previously translated or has been translated inadequately for the purposes of this study. All citations to Arabic-

[18] Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 11.

language texts are the translations of this author and will be stated in footnotes. Arabic terms are transliterated according to the Library of Congress' Arabic Romanization standards. More texts that were originally written in English become available as the modern period comes under examination. The language of the texts – Arabic and English – are the main parameters for inclusion; there is no focus on any particular region or geography. Other Islamicate languages – such as Turkish, Persian, and Urdu – are outside the scope of this study.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that Muslims have recently encountered an increase of social hostility in Western countries, which is based upon the idea that Islam as a whole is *different* and *other,* perhaps even a subversive or threatening global political movement masquerading as a religion. Prejudice of Muslims has been characterised by scholars as, among other things, "the perception that the religion of Islam has no common values with the West, is inferior to the West [or to Judaism and Christianity], and that it really is a violent political ideology rather than a source of faith and spirituality, unlike the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity."[19] It is not the goal of this study to challenge these particular claims head on. Nevertheless, it is a desired outcome that by thoroughly documenting in Islamic texts and traditions the many expressions of the golden rule – a universal humanistic moral principle – that those who are apprehensive of Islam as a whole may discover the existence of much more common ground with Muslims than they might have expected.

[19] John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxiii.

2. The Golden Rule in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is the most important and authoritative text in the various interpretive communities of Islam, believed to be the literal word of God delivered to the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 632) by the Angel Gabriel over a period of twenty three years. It was and still is the primary source for the development of historical Islamic disciplines such as law, creed, theology, ethics, art, Arabic rhetoric and grammar. Muslim children all over the world are taught portions of the Qur'ān in its original Arabic with the goal of becoming a *ḥāfiẓ*, one who has memorised the entirety of its text. The Qur'ān has been translated into hundreds of languages, but the Arabic text, being perceived as God's original words, remains an essential component in congregational ritual prayers and in the broader consciousness of Muslims. Non-Arabic speaking Muslims even incorporate many of its Arabic phrases and terms into their daily lexicon. In sum, it could be said that the entire religious life of Muslims is built around the text of the Qur'ān.[20]

The Qur'ān does not contain an explicit formulation of the golden rule, perhaps owing to its liturgical function in Islamic practice; that is, it is recited in ritual prayer. As the word Qur'ān literally means "recitation," by comparison it most resembles the biblical genre of the Psalms, which is based upon the Septuagint's title *Psalmoi*, denoting its poetic and musical qualities. Modern scholars generally agree that the Qur'ān is a distinctively oral text that is performed according to an artistic style, making use of devices such as redundancy, repetition, rhyme, assonance, inflection, and exhortations.[21] In orthodox traditions, the text is recited aloud according to a complex set of rules called *tajwīd*, literally "making it good."[22] Sometimes referred to as the "music" of the Qur'ān, this ritual and liturgical function sets it apart from all other Islamic literature and is even considered a proof of its miraculous, inimitable nature.[23]

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[20] Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: English Translation with Parallel Arabic Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xi.
[21] Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Qur'ān Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission," *Oral Tradition* 4, no. 1/2 (1989): 12.
[22] Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 1:481.
[23] Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 7.

The Qur'ān itself describes this special function when it tells the Prophet to "recite what has been revealed to you of the Scripture."[24] It also implies a distinction between itself and other divinely revealed texts as it speaks repeatedly of "the Scripture and wisdom,"[25] with a number of Muslim exegetes identifying "wisdom" to be the Sunnah, or the Prophet's precedent, as recorded in the Ḥadīth traditions. For instance, the founding jurist, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 820), identified "wisdom" in these verses as the non-liturgical prophetic tradition, a separate body of literature from the Qur'ān yet essential as the second primary source of Islamic law.[26] This is not to say the Qur'ān itself is devoid of wisdom, but rather that it fits into a particular genre the purpose of which is to stir emotion and reflection in ritual prayer with its rich imagery and poetic flow. Because the text to a degree is bound by this stylistic function, it contains less pithy wisdom-sayings as compared to the complementary Ḥadīth traditions, wherein the vast majority of Islam's golden rule traditions are found. Even so, the Qur'ān's text contains verses that strongly suggest the golden rule, as well as a number of related key ethical themes and virtues associated with it. The concepts of charity, altruism, moral consistency, and preferring others over one's own self certainly run deep throughout the text. The classical exegetes, including the earliest among them such as Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 839), took notice of this and would often extract the golden rule in explicit terms in their exegeses, as will be detailed in this section. An important note of distinction should be made between Qur'ānic exegesis (*al-tafsīr*) and Ḥadīth commentary (*al-sharḥ*); interpretive literature on the Qur'ān is referred to herein as "exegesis," and interpretive literature on the Ḥadīth is referred to as "commentary."

Beginning with the nature of God as described in the Qur'ān, several themes and virtues relevant to the golden rule are expressed in the text as the very essence of God's attributes. The Qur'ān ascribes a number of "beautiful names" (*asmā' al-ḥusnā*) to God conveying virtues that Muslims, by implication, should

[24] Sūrat al-'Ankabūt 29:45; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 402.
[25] Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:129; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 21.
[26] Muḥammad I. Shāfi'ī and Joseph E. Lowry, *The Epistle on Legal Theory* (New York University Press, 2013), 66.

practice, “The most excellent names belong to him.”[27] Among the relevant names, some within the text and others derived from it, are Al-Raḥmān (the Merciful), Al-Wadūd (the Loving), Al-Ghafūr (the Forgiving), Al-Ra’ūf (the Kind), Al-‘Adl (the Just), Al-Karīm (the Generous), and so on.

Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazzālī[28] locates the golden rule within God’s loving nature as expressed in the verses, “My Lord is merciful and most loving,”[29] and again, “He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Loving.”[30] He wrote a treatise on the names of God in Islamic tradition with an explication of their theological meanings and his understanding of the proper way in which Muslims should act upon those names. God, in his view, intends to benefit all creatures without desiring any advantage or benefit in return:

> *Al-Wadūd* – The Loving-kind – is one who wishes all creatures well and accordingly favours them and praises them. In fact, love and mercy are only intended for the benefit and advantage of those who receive mercy or are loved; they do not find their cause in the sensitiveness or natural inclination of the Loving-kind One. For another’s benefit is the heart and soul of mercy and love and that is how the case of God – may he be praised and exalted – is to be conceived: absent those features which human experience associates with mercy and love yet which do not contribute to the benefit they bring.[31]

In other words, God should be conceived as entirely and selflessly benevolent towards his creatures, without any need or desire for repayment. God does not benefit from the worship of his servants, nor does he take pleasure in punishing the wicked, but rather God prescribes worship and righteous deeds for the good of their own souls. In reflecting this divine nature through action, believers should unconditionally want for others what they want for themselves, including enduring harm from them for their own sake:

> One is loving-kind among God’s servants who desires for God’s creatures whatever he desires for himself; and whoever prefers them to himself is even higher than that. Like one of them who said, ‘I would like to be a bridge over the fire [of hell] so that

[27] Sūrat Ṭāhā 20:8; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 313.
[28] Influential jurist, ethicist, theologian, and mystic (d. 1111). Introduced in section 1b., p. 9.
[29] Sūrat Hūd 11:90; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 233.
[30] Sūrat al-Burūj 85:14; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 233.
[31] Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī, David B. Burrell, and Nazih Daher, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God: Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), 118-119.

> creatures might pass over me and not be harmed by it.' The perfection of that virtue occurs when not even anger, hatred, and the harm he might receive can keep him from altruism and goodness.[32]

Most exegetes interpreted the meaning of Al-Wadūd as God's love and mercy shown to the righteous and to those who repent. In this way, they reconciled the meaning of God's love with His justice, although Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) notes that his colleagues would say, "He is absolutely merciful to those who repent and those who do not repent."[33] Even the wicked who earn punishment for themselves in the afterlife were recipients of God's love and mercy in the form of blessings, while at the same time they were given a lifetime to repent and make amends for any of their misdeeds.

The obligation of righteous action is an unmistakeable theme within the Qur'ān, repeatedly appearing in conjunction with faith, "Man is in [deep] loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds…"[34] The implications of this linguistic pairing are not unlike what we read in the Epistle of James, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."[35] Hence, terms such as good behaviour (*al-iḥsān*), the good-doers (*al-muḥsinīn*), good works (*ṣāliḥāt*), and good deeds (*khayrāt*) are ubiquitous throughout the Qur'ān:

> Worship God; join nothing with him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far, to travellers in need, and to your slaves. God does not like arrogant, boastful people.[36]

> God commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and he forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may take heed.[37]

The word *al-iḥsan* and its verbal cognates, often rendered as "good" by the translator Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem, carry the linguistic meaning of behaving well and doing good deeds. Readers of the Qur'ān are commanded with this word to behave well with virtually all social groupings, including

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[32] Ibid., 119.
[33] Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1999), 31:114 (author's translation).
[34] Sūrat al-'Aṣr 103:2-3; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 602.
[35] James 2:26; Coogan et al, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2122.
[36] Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:36; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an, 54.*
[37] Sūrat al-Naḥl 16:90; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 172.

strangers, travellers, and slaves. Lexicographer Edward Lane (d. 1837) notes that the verbal form of *al-iḥsan* "surpasses *'adl* [justice] inasmuch as it means the giving of more than one owes, and taking less than is owed to one."[38] Implicit in the language of these verses and several others like them is a positive formulation of the golden rule, not simply refraining from harm or fulfilling the minimum requirements of justice, but rather actively promoting good beyond what is necessary. Indeed, to treat others in a manner better than they have treated yourself.

The exegete Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) interprets the command to do good to the "far neighbour" as inclusive of non-Muslims or unbelievers. After narrating some Ḥadīth traditions to this effect, he says:

> I say on the basis of this counsel on the neighbour, it is commanded and recommended to a Muslim or an unbeliever, and this is the right [opinion]. Good behaviour (*iḥsān*) comes with the meaning of sympathy and the meaning of good companionship, refraining from harm, and defending him from others.[39]

Later on in the lengthy discussion of this verse, he asserts that the scholars have said, "The traditions about honouring the neighbour are absolute without restriction, including the unbeliever as we have made clear."[40]

As a person's wealth, fame, or social status have no bearing on their reward in the afterlife, the Qur'ān encourages competition only in good deeds. "Race to good deeds,"[41] it declares, while praising "the ones who race toward good things, and they will be the first to get them."[42] Some exegetes found the golden rule in a verse about the foremost in such a competition, "And those in front — ahead indeed!"[43] Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) relies upon a Ḥadīth tradition to define the meaning of "those in front" (*al-sābiqūn*):

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[38] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:570.
[39] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Qurṭubī, *Jami' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'an* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Kutūb al-Miṣrīyah, 1964), 5:184 (author's translation).
[40] Ibid., 5:188 (author's translation).
[41] Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:148; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 24.
[42] Sūrat al-Mu'minūn 23:61; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 347.
[43] Sūrat al-Wāqi'ah 56:10; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 535.

> The Messenger of God (ṣ)[44] said, 'Do you know who are the foremost to the shade of God Almighty on the Day of Resurrection?' They said, 'God and his messenger know best.' The Prophet said, 'They are those who accept the truth when they receive it, who offer the truth when they are asked for it, and who judge people the way they judge themselves.'[45]

The foremost, according to this tradition, are those with a consistent fealty to the truth and who apply the golden rule in their judgments of other people, relating again to the broader Qur'ānic theme of justice and moral consistency. Compassion, though, could also be implied here, as it is explicit elsewhere in the Qur'ān, since one would probably want mercy if he or she were being judged for a sin. Ibn Kathīr does not comment on the authenticity of this tradition in his exegesis, but elsewhere he grades the chain of authorities to be "close enough" (*muqārib*), although he notes that some scholars dispute the reliability of the sub-narrator Ibn Lahī'ah.[46]

Two other words used to describe righteousness in the Qur'ān have been linked to the golden rule as well. Righteousness, as a concept in English, is reflected in the two Qur'ānic words and their cognates, *al-birr* and *al-taqwá*. The word *al-birr* in verbal form means "he was good, just, righteous, virtuous, or honest," and as a noun conveys "benevolent and solicitous regard or treatment or conduct… and kindness, or good and affectionate and gentle behaviour, and regard for the circumstances of another."[47] The word *al-taqwá* comes from the root meaning "to guard" and it signifies "fear of God… the preservation, or guarding, of oneself from punishment in the world to come, and from acts of disobedience, by righteous conduct; or righteousness, virtue, justice, or honesty."[48] Together they express righteousness from different angels; *al-birr* implies the proactive doing of good to others, whereas *al-taqwá* implies

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[44] The symbol (ṣ) represents the phrase *ṣall Allāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam* (peace and blessings of God be upon him). Because it is often repeated in several texts under discussion, the symbol is used to save space and for ease of reading.
[45] Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-'Aẓīm* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1998), 8:6 (author's translation).
[46] Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wal-Nihāyah* (al-Qāhirah: Dār Hajr, 1997), 19:389 (author's translation).
[47] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:175-176.
[48] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:310.

refraining from sinning against others. The complementary nature of both words as it pertains to righteousness is captured in the following verse:

> Goodness (*al-birr*) does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God (*al-muttaqūn*).[49]

The verse begins with *al-birr* and ends with *al-taqwá*, as if to say they are but two sides of the same coin. The translator chose to render the cognate of *al-taqwá* as "they who are aware of God," emphasising the aspect of self-preservation in the word, although it has been variously rendered as "the righteous," "the pious," and "those who fear God."

When *al-taqwá* is first mentioned in Qur'ān (while reading cover-to-cover), exegetes typically attempt to define it not only linguistically, but also by associated traditional wisdom-sayings. In this vein, some located the golden rule as implied in this language of righteousness. Abū Isḥāq al-Tha'labī (d. 1035) narrates several exegetical traditions to define and explicate the meaning of righteousness or *al-taqwá*. He attributes a saying to the early authorities Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778) and Al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyāḍ (d. 803) that the righteous man (*al-muttaqī*) is "he who loves for people what he loves for himself." Another authority, Al-Junayd ibn Muḥammad (d. 910), however, disagreed with them and took it a step further, "The righteous man is not he who loves for people what he loves for himself. Rather, the righteous man is only he who loves for people greater than he loves for himself."[50] In Al-Junayd's consideration, true righteousness is not simply the equality implied in the golden rule, but rather a preference for others that amounts to altruism (*al-īthar*), a virtue that would become a normative reference point for the Ḥadīth commentators when discussing the ethics of reciprocity.

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[49] Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:177; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 28.
[50] Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf wal-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Bayrut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2002), 1:143 (author's translation).

The Arabic word for altruism, *al-īthar*, comes from the root meaning "to prefer" and is used in such a sense as, "I preferred such a one before myself."[51] Altruism in this regard is actually a level above a literal understanding of the golden rule; one ought to treat others even better than he or she would like to be treated. The idea can be found in verses that describe the qualities of the believers:

> They give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves, saying, 'We feed you for the sake of God alone: We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you. We fear the Day of our Lord—a woefully grim Day.' So God will save them from the woes of that Day, give them radiance and gladness.[52]

Their distinguished virtue was feeding others first before themselves, despite their own desire for food. This altruism extends not simply to one's own tribe or coreligionists, but includes the "captive" or prisoner of war. According to Al-Ṭabarī, the captive here is "the combatant from the land of war who has been taken by force in victory… Thus, God praised these righteous people (*al-abrār*) for their feeding of these [prisoners], seeking closeness to God and his approval by that, and for their mercy for them."[53] If Qur'ānic righteousness implies the golden rule and the golden rule implies altruism, even with the wicked, then it can be deduced that the verse encourages Muslims to love for their enemies what they love for themselves.

Even still, love for enemies is tempered by the imperative to end wrongdoing against innocent victims. Warfare and criminal justice are realities of life acknowledged in the Qur'ān and traditional Islamic law. As other Western philosophers have noted, the golden rule always operates within limits and in conjunction with others values and social duties.[54] According to Al-Ghazzālī, who frequently invokes the golden rule, benevolent treatment is recommended to all enemies, but if those enemies are harming innocent people, then Muslims have a duty to intervene, as the victims are more deserving of good treatment,

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[51] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:18.
[52] Sūrat al-Insān 76:8-11; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 580.
[53] Abū Ja'far Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000), 24:97 (author's translation).
[54] Wattle, *The Golden Rule*, 145.

"For goodness to the wrongdoer is evil to the wronged."[55] Put differently, treat the victim the way you want to be treated first, before you show good to the wrongdoer. Yet as implied in the verse above, once the enemy aggression and harm was halted by their imprisonment, they became subject to altruistic treatment.

Justice is another theme in the Qur'ān from which exegetes extracted the golden rule. The Arabic word for justice, *al-'adl*, is used in the sense of, "He made such a one to be equal,"[56] which is to say one should be consistent in applying standards of fairness as one would expect for themselves. Readers of the Qur'ān are explicitly called to uphold justice at the expense of self-interest and against their inclinations toward hatred:

> You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly— if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.[57]
>
> You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer to awareness of God. Be mindful of God: God is well aware of all that you do.[58]

Al-Qurṭubī considered verses like these to prohibit injustice against unbelievers, "The verse [5:8] shows also that the unbelief of the unbeliever does not prevent justice for him."[59] Understood in this vision of justice is that the same standards of fairness enjoyed by the in-group should apply to those in the out-group. The equality of human dignity and the moral consistency of applied justice expressed in these verses is another hallmark of the golden rule.

In the ancient trading societies of Arabia, in which Islam was founded, justice was most apparent in the business transactions people performed on a daily basis. The Qur'ān severely rebukes cheaters in weights and measurements in a manner that strongly infers a negative formulation of the golden rule, "Woe to

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[55] Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1980), 2:167 (author's translation).
[56] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:1973.
[57] Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:135; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 101.
[58] Sūrat al-Mā'idah 5:8; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 109.
[59] Qurṭubī, *Jami' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, 6:110 (author's translation).

those who give short measure, who demand of other people full measure for themselves, but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!"[60] The golden rule was understood by Al-Rāzī to be the ramification of this passage, as he reports the saying of the early authority Qatādah, "Fulfil the measure, O son of Adam, as you would love it fulfilled for yourself, and be just as you would love justice for yourself."[61] A few centuries before Al-Rāzī, a slight variant of the tradition of Qatādah was used by Al-Ṭabarī to interpret the symbol of "the scale" (*al-mīzān*) in the verses of Sūrat al-Raḥmān, adding at the end, "Verily, in justice is the rectification of people."[62]

In another verse, the golden rule is implied in an exhortation to justly care for orphans and their inherited property, "Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern [for orphans]; let them be mindful of God and speak out for justice."[63] This verse tells those responsible for the care of orphans to conduct an imaginative role-reversal, as if the orphans were their own children. The early modern exegete Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) notes that a number of classical exegetes inferred the golden rule from this verse:

> Some of the commentators said that it is an obligation upon humanity to love for his brother what he loves for himself, and to love for the offspring of others among the believers what he would love for his own offspring. It is upon the orphan's caretaker not to harm the orphan. Rather, he should speak to him as he speaks to his own children, with good manners and hospitality, and to call the orphan, 'my son' or 'my child.' There have come numerous reports about gentleness to orphans.[64]

Good will (*al-naṣīḥah*) is yet another theme in the Qur'ān through which the golden rule is understood. The word *al-naṣīḥah* means "sincere, honest, or faithful advice… desire for what is good for the person who is the object."[65] Several of the prophets in the Qur'ān are depicted as approaching their people with good will and an intention to benefit them in this life and in the afterlife.

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[60] Sūrat al-Muṭaffifīn 83:1-4; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 588.
[61] Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 31:84 (author's translation).
[62] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 22:14 (author's translation).
[63] Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:9; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 79.
[64] Jamāl al-Dīn Qāsimī, *Tafsīr al-Qāsimī, al-Musammá, Maḥāsin al-Ta'wīl* (Bayrūt: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1997), 3:35-36 (author's translation).
[65] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:2802.

Noah says, “I am delivering my Lord's messages to you and giving you sincere advice. I know things from God that you do not.”[66] And Hūd says, “I am delivering my Lord's messages to you. I am your sincere and honest adviser.”[67] And Ṣāliḥ says, “My people, I delivered my Lord's messages to you and gave you sincere advice, but you did not like those who gave sincere advice.”[68] Honest concern for the well-being of others is simply another way of wishing for others what one desires for themselves. It is again important to highlight that the prophets’ sincere good will was offered to unbelievers, not only to believers.

In terms of good will, believers are warned that “a painful punishment waits in this world and the next for those who like indecency to spread among the believers: God knows and you do not.”[69] This verse is said to have been revealed in response to the story of the slander (*al-ifk*) against ‘Ā’ishah bint Abī Bakr (d. 613), the wife of the Prophet. The lesson from the story is that one ought to hold good assumptions about the believers and dislike for their reputations to be sullied. The exegete Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣaṣ (d. 942) writes:

> God has made clear in this verse the obligation to hold good beliefs about the believers and to love good and well-being for them. So in it he has made known his warning to those who love to see immorality, defamation, gossip, and evil for the believers.[70]

He supports this interpretation by citing some of the explicit golden rule Ḥadīth traditions that we will discuss in the next section. The link between good will and the ethics of reciprocity would also become a normative interpretive point in Ḥadīth commentaries.

The story of the slander also provides a lesson on forgiveness and compassion, especially to those who wrong us, another key theme of the golden rule. A following verse in the same chapter expresses the rule from a different perspective; the ethics of reciprocity in relation to the theological belief of divine reward and retribution. The story is that Abū Bakr (d. 634), the Prophet’s leading companion and ‘Ā’ishah’s father, swore an oath not to continue giving

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[66] Sūrat al-A’rāf 7:62; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 159.
[67] Sūrat al-A’rāf 7:68; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 160.
[68] Sūrat al-A’rāf 7:79; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 161.
[69] Sūrat al-Nūr 24:19; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 352.
[70] Aḥmad ibn ’Alī Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-’Arabī, 1985), 5:163 (author’s translation).

charity to Misṭaḥ, despite him being a man who had participated in the historical emigration to Medina, because of Misṭaḥ's role in the scandal against his daughter. The verse was revealed, "Let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful."[71] The exegete and grammarian Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) and others report that when the Prophet recited this verse to Abū Bakr, he replied, "Of course, I would love for God to forgive me!" Abū Bakr would then continue giving Misṭaḥ the charity he had always given to him. Al-Zamakhsharī adds as an interpretation, "Let them respond to them with forgiveness and pardon, and let them treat them the same as they hope to be treated by their Lord."[72] That is, treat people the way you want God to treat you.

Forgiveness is another important theme, particularly in the story of Joseph as told in Sūrat Yusūf. The narrative arc of the story begins with Joseph's betrayal by his brothers, his time in prison in Egypt and eventual rise to power, culminating in his confrontation with his brothers, at long last, from a position of power and authority over them. Despite years of hardship suffered at their hands and now capable of exacting revenge, Joseph instead chooses to forgive them, "You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you. He is the Most Merciful of the merciful."[73]

The story of Joseph, we are told, had an impact on how Prophet Muḥammad would react in a similar situation. Muḥammad, too, endured persecution and adversity because of his religious mission, including the forcible emigration to Medina from Mecca. Yet after twenty-three years of enduring oppression, he entered Mecca again victorious and magnanimous. With the means of vengeance at his disposable, Muḥammad instead forgives his enemies as Joseph did:

> They went to the Ka'bah [in the centre of the Sacred Mosque] and held to the posts of the door [to plead for mercy]. The Prophet said, 'What do you say and what do you think?' They said, 'We say you are the son of a brother and the son of an uncle who was forbearing and merciful.' They said so three times, so the

[71] Sūrat al-Nūr 24:22; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 353.
[72] Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1986), 3:222 (author's translation).
[73] Sūrat Yusūf 12:88-92; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 247.

> Messenger of God (ṣ) said, 'I say to you as Joseph said, 'You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you. He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.''[74]

Seemingly peripheral details of such Qur'ānic stories, however, sometimes had larger ethical implications for the exegetes. In the story of Joseph, his father Jacob tells his sons before they unknowingly meet Joseph to enter the city by different gates, "And when they entered as their father had told them, it did not help them against the will of God, it merely satisfied a wish of Jacob's."[75] The wish of Jacob, Al-Qurṭubī explains, was to protect his sons from the eyes of jealous strangers out of compassion for them. Even in this small detail, Al-Qurṭubī sees the Qur'ān expressing the golden rule, "This verse shows that a Muslim is obligated to warn his brother from what he fears for himself and to guide him to the way of safety and salvation, for the religion is good will and the Muslim is the brother of another Muslim."[76]

Finally, purity of heart is another relevant theme that has been related to the golden rule. The Qur'ān warns against the vice of arrogance or boasting of superiority (*'uluw*), saying, "We grant the Home in the Hereafter to those who do not seek superiority on earth or spread corruption."[77] Superiority in this verse has been understood to be the desire to be better or above others, the opposite of altruism and hence the opposite of the golden rule. Al-Ṭabarī attributes a saying to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 660), "Verily, a man may be impressed by the lace of his sandal, that it is better than the lace of his companions."[78] That a person is impressed by their better clothing here is a form of vanity, implying that they are not satisfied with the equality implied in the golden rule. On the contrary, the Qur'ān again exhorts its followers to prefer others to themselves. In another interpretation of the verse, the jurist 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Rajab (d. 1393) relates the saying of Fudayl ibn 'Iyāḍ that, "[The believer] does not love for even his sandal to be better than another's, nor for his lace to be better than

[74] Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrá* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2003), 9:199 #18275 (author's translation).
[75] Sūrat Yusūf 12:68; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 244.
[76] Qurṭubī, *Jami' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, 9:229 (author's translation).
[77] Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ 28:83; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 396
[78] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 19:638 (author's translation).

another's."[79] Something as seemingly innocent as preferring to have better shoes than others is considered a violation of Qur'ānic humility and, consequently, of the golden rule.

As discussed previously, readers are warned about feelings of hatred and envy as they hinder a person from fulfilling the requirements of justice. More importantly for the Qur'ān's theological cosmology, though, is its portrayal of the Day of Resurrection, "…when the only one who will be saved is the one who comes before God with a heart devoted to him."[80] The phrase rendered by the translator as "a heart devoted to him" (*qalbun salīm*) could also be rendered as a pure heart or a sound heart, that is, a heart free from spiritual defects. The exegete and jurist Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1148) understood a pure or sound heart to mean one free from hatred and bad will, "He does not have, in my view, a pure heart if it holds malice and envy, proudly and arrogantly, for the Prophet (ṣ) has made it a requirement of faith that he love for his brother what he loves for himself."[81] The golden rule, in this case, is set in opposition to hatred and arrogance, yet another notion that would become a normative position for the commentators on the Ḥadīth traditions.

This analysis of the Qur'ān and its exegeses demonstrates the presence within the text of a number of themes related to the philosophy of reciprocal ethics: love, benevolence, righteousness, justice, selfless altruism, good will, and purity of heart. Even without an explicit formulation of the golden rule in any verse, either positively or negatively, the exegetes often arrived at it by inference, implication, or the interpretations of the earliest Muslim authorities. This alone would be enough to join Islam within the family of golden rule religions. However, explicit and canonical formulations of the golden rule occur in a great number of Ḥadīth traditions, and many more so by implication, to which we now turn our attention.

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[79] 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad ibn Rajab, *Rawā'i' al-Tafsīr: Al-Jāmi' li-Tafsīr al-Imām Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī* (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-'Āṣimah, 2001), 2:66 (author's translation).
[80] Sūrat al-Shu'ara 26:89; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 234.
[81] Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdallāh Ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2003), 3:459 (author's translation).

3. The Golden Rule in the Sunnah and Ḥadīth traditions

The normative legacy of Prophet Muḥammad is known as the *Sunnah*, which linguistically means "an institute, a custom, a practice, a usage, or the like, to be followed."[82] The Sunnah is complementary to the Qur'ān as a canonical source of Islamic theology, law, and ethics. It is from this word that the majority branch of Muslims are known as Sunnis, i.e. followers of the Sunnah. The word 'Sunnah' as a technical term is sometimes defined differently through the lens of various Islamic disciplines. For instance, Sunnah in the terminology of creedal theologians means Islamic beliefs, or Islam itself, such as Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Barbahārī (d. 941), who begins his treatise by stating, "Know that Islam is the Sunnah, and the Sunnah is Islam."[83] In a different context, jurists use the term to describe recommended, non-obligatory religious practices; something the Prophet regularly practiced but did not make an obligation upon Muslims.[84] On the whole, it is an abstract concept in the sense that Sunni Muslims agree upon the need to adhere to the Sunnah, although in concrete terms that can take very different forms.

The diverse understandings of the Sunnah are the result of various interpretive approaches to the large body of preserved oral traditions ascribed to Muḥammad known as the *Ḥadīth* (pl. *Aḥādīth*), reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Prophet.[85] The Ḥadīth corpus is broad in its subject matter, containing pithy aphorisms, sermons, ritual and legal instructions, and extended historical narratives. In a sense, individual Ḥadīth reports are like snap-shots that fit into the larger narrative framework of the Prophet's biography, known as the *Sīrah*. The wide variety of textual material, coupled with the occasional ambiguity in the Arabic language, lends itself to an array of possible and plausible interpretations. In addition, early and classical scholars developed an elaborate and nuanced technical discipline to grade the validity or authenticity of each individual Ḥadīth by judging the reliability of their chain of

[82] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:1436.
[83] Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Barbahārī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah* (al-Madīnah: Maktabat al-Ghurabā' al-Atharīyah, 1993), 67 (author's translation).
[84] Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-Shu'ūn al-Islāmīyah, *Al-Mawsū'ah al-Fiqhīyah al-Kuwaytīyah* (al-Kuwayt: Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-Shu'ūn al-Islāmīyah, 1992), 25:264.
[85] Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2011), 3.

oral transmitters (*al-isnād*).[86] A Ḥadīth that is an acceptable piece of evidence to one scholar or school of thought is not to another. The Shi'ite branch of Islam also has its own set of different canonical Ḥadīth sources, which helps to explain their divergence of beliefs and practices from Sunni Muslims. Nonetheless, the Sunni tradition more or less coalesced around a set of canonical sources and individual Ḥadīth whose authenticity were widely accepted.

Since much of the Ḥadīth corpus resembles wisdom traditions, the majority of Islam's expressions of the golden rule are found therein. A few golden rule Ḥadīth in well-known collections became quite popular and famous, being subject to extensive commentary and interpretation, while other traditions were lesser known in ancillary collections. Moreover, a number of Ḥadīth traditions imply the golden rule and its related themes; although the rule is not stated outright, it is understood and drawn out through commentary. In the following section, these traditions, their variant wordings, and their classical commentaries will be analysed in relation to their principal narrators, the companions of the Prophet.

3a. Anas ibn Mālik

Anas ibn Mālik (d. 712) was the Prophet's servant and one of the most prolific narrators of Sunni Ḥadīth. According to tradition, Anas was a young boy who served the Prophet for ten years and was never once mistreated or rebuked, not even with a mild word like "Uff!"[87] As a servant, he had intimate contact with the Prophet in his home and thus had a close experience with his private character, which is borne out in several themes in his traditions. Anas' tradition would become the standard expression of the golden rule in Sunni Islam, "None of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."[88]

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[86] Mohammad H. Kamali, *A Textbook of Ḥadīth Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification, and Criticism of Ḥadīth* (Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2014), 55.
[87] Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṭawq al-Najjāh, 2002), 8:14 #6038 (author's translation).
[88] Ibid., 1:12 #13 (author's translation).

The origin of this tradition's popularity can be traced back to a few important factors. The two leading Ḥadīth scholars, Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 875), both placed this tradition in their "book of faith," near the introductions of their respective collections. They did not include it in the sections on manners or virtues, even though commentators would later connect the tradition with those themes. The understanding is that the lesson in the tradition is essential to faith itself, and it is not simply a recommended practice.

The commentators sometimes mention that "all good manners" are derived from this tradition and three others. Like many religious writers and philosophers, Muslim scholars noticed the summarising function of the golden rule as a broad principle for good conduct. Alongside the tradition of Anas, they also include these comprehensive sayings on Islamic ethics, "Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him speak goodness or be silent," and, "It is from a man's excellence in Islam that he leaves what does not concern him," and, "Do not be angry."[89] In this way, the commentators brought attention to the golden rule and its central importance to ethics, ensuring that Anas' tradition would be given priority ahead of thousands of other Ḥadīth traditions from which to choose. The tradition of Anas was further popularised by the Shāfi'ī jurist Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 1277) when he included it in his succinct collection of Forty Ḥadīth. The purpose of this work was to compile the most important forty traditions in Sunni Islam. This collection would produce numerous subsequent commentaries, raising the awareness of the golden rule in Sunni Muslim societies. New commentaries, translations, and annotations of the Forty Ḥadīth of Al-Nawawī are being produced to this day.[90]

There was a practical social utility to the principle as well. In a variant of this tradition, Anas places the saying within the context of business. The lesson would have been relevant to the economic activities of Mecca and Arabia, as cultivating amicable trading relationships was important for their survival:

[89] Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf Nawawī and Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī Muslim*, Sharḥ al-Nawawī 'alá Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1972), 2:19 #47 (author's translation).
[90] See for example: Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf Nawawī and Abdassamad Clarke, *The Complete Forty Hadith*, (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 2009).

> I went out with a man to the market and some merchandise was being sold, so I bartered with him. He said, 'Thirty [coins].' The man thought to himself and he said, 'I will take it for forty.' His companion said, 'What makes you say this when I would give it to you for less?' The man thought to himself again and he said, 'I will take it for fifty.' His companion said, 'What makes you say this when I would give it to you for less?' He said, 'I heard the Messenger of God (ṣ) say that a servant does not have faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself, and I thought you would do better with fifty.'[91]

In the immediate context of the sale, paying more than required seems counter-intuitive. Over the long term, however, such good will might lead to more stable trading relationships, which makes it not only a matter of faith but also an astute way of securing a livelihood.

In terms of commentary, the first topic under discussion is usually the tradition's relationship to faith. The consensus is that "faith" in this context means "complete" or "perfect" faith; the statement is to be understood rhetorically, not literally. The golden rule is quite important, but not at the same level of the six articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam. Abū Āmir ibn Ṣalāḥ (d. 1245) summarises this view, repeated in several commentaries:

> This [tradition] is considered to be among the impossibly difficult, yet it is not so if it means one of you does not have complete faith until he loves for his brother in Islam what he loves for himself. That is achieved by loving for him to attain the same [blessings] in a way that does not compete with him for it, such that the blessings of his brother are not reduced in any way by his own blessings. That is easy for the pure heart, and indeed, it is only difficult for the corrupt heart.[92]

Like the Qur'ān's exegetes, the commentators of Ḥadīth understood the golden rule as a manifestation of purity of heart. It is possible for a Muslim to be a "believer" in the plain, outward sense of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, yet their internal state is deficient if it lacks adherence to the golden rule. By proposing this explanation, they reconciled the doctrinal structure of their legal and theological schools with the literal import of the tradition.

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[91] Abū Bakr Aḥmad Bazzār, *Al-Baḥr al-Zakhkhār al-Ma'rūf bi-Musnad al-Bazzār* (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Maktabat al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam, 2009), 14:81 #7548 (author's translation).
[92] Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Nawawī 'alá Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2:17 #45 (author's translation).

The tradition is also qualified in that it is not understood in a vacuum or without the aid of ancillary principles. In this respect, the commentators often refer to the variant tradition recorded by Ḥadīth scholar Aḥmad ibn Shuʿayb al-Nasāʾī (d. 915), which reads, "…what he loves for himself of the good (*min al-khayr*)."[93] Several commentators would use the same phrase as a qualification in their chapter headings or commentaries. The phrase "of the good," is generally explained as "acts of obedience [to God]" and "permissible matters," [94] or "types of good in the religion and in the world."[95] This interpretation covers everything from salvation itself to mundane, daily acts of kindness. The qualification intends to develop moral maturity in utilising the golden rule by discouraging an ultra-literal or fallacious understanding, such as the idea that one's subjective wishes in themselves, right or wrong, are the ultimate criteria for what is good. Rather, the results of golden rule reasoning must be good in both a religious and worldly sense; reason based upon conscience must be informed by the wisdom of revelation.

Equality is implied in the golden rule, as commentators noted, but its true import is altruism, or preferring others above one's self. The Shāfiʾī jurist, Ibn Daqīq al-ʾĪd (d. 1302), cites Abū al-Zinād ʿAbd Allāh ibn Dhakwān (d. 748), saying:

> The literal meaning of this tradition is equality, yet its reality is to give preference, for the human being loves for himself to be preferred over others. Thus, when he loves for his brother the same as himself, he is included among those who give preference to others. Do you not see that the human being loves to be treated fairly regarding his rights and violations against him? For if he completes his faith and his brother was wronged in front of him or he has a right [to be restored], he takes the initiative to serve justice from himself even if it were laborious.[96]

Abū al-Zinād's contention combines the golden rule with imperatives of justice, good will, and altruism. His conclusion is based upon an historical report in

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[93] Aḥmad ibn Shuʿayb Nasāʾī, *Sunan al-Nasāʾī* (Ḥalab: Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmīyah, 1986), 8:115 #5017 (author's translation).
[94] Muḥammad ʾAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn ʾAllān and Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf Nawawī, *Dalīl al-Fāliḥīn li-Ṭuruq Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Maʾrifah, 2004), 3:26 (author's translation).
[95] Muḥammad ibn Ismāʾīl Ṣanʿānī, *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmiʾ al-Ṣaghīr* (al-Riyāḍ: Muḥammad Isḥāq Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, 2011), 11:171 #9922 (author's translation).
[96] Muḥammad ibn ʾAlī ibn Daqīq al-ʾĪd and Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawīyah* (Bayrūt: Muʾassasat al-Rayyān, 2003), 1:64 (author's translation).

which Fudayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ[97] said to Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah (d. 814), “If you love for people to be equal to you, then you have not fulfilled sincerity for your Lord. How so while you love for people to be less than you?”[98] In other words, the golden rule puts people on the same level playing field in terms of essential rights and good conduct, although in practice there is a time when treating others as one’s self involves hardship and, therefore, a definite altruistic preference for another’s benefit. We can imagine firefighters rushing into a burning building to save its occupants, knowing that they would love to be saved if they were in the same predicament. They think of others as equal to themselves, but in practice, they put others above their own safety.

Another key question for the commentators was the meaning of “brother” in the tradition. It is generally understood that ‘brother’ refers to Muslims, but several commentators expanded the meaning to include non-Muslims or unbelievers. Al-Nawawī wrote in his own comments on the Forty Ḥadīth collection:

> Firstly, that [tradition] is interpreted as general brotherhood, such that it includes the unbeliever and the Muslim. Thus, he loves for his brother – the unbeliever – what he loves for himself of entering into Islam, as he would love for his brother Muslim to remain always upon Islam. For this reason, to pray for guidance for the unbeliever is recommended… The meaning of ‘love’ is to intend good and benefit, hence, the meaning is religious love and not human love.[99]

Al-Nawawī’s concept of “religious love” (*al-maḥabbat al-dīnīyah*), which he equates with good will, is strikingly similar to the way Christian writers made a distinction between *agape* (ἀγάπη) and *eros* (ἔρως). That is, the highest form of love in Islam is that which is purely benevolent for God’s sake and in opposition to love based upon sinful passions and caprice.

The same universal interpretation of brotherhood by Al-Nawawī was given, nearly word for word, by Ibn ‘Allān (d. 1647), which he attributes to Ibn ‘Imād al-Aqfahsī (d. 1405).[100] Each of these scholars was an authoritative Shāfi’ī jurist

[97] Early Muslim authority often quoted in exegeses and commentaries (d. 803). Introduced in section 2, p. 18.
[98] ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ’Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 48:418 (author’s translation).
[99] Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf Nawawī, *Kitāb al-Arba’īn al-Nawawīyah wa Sharḥuh* ([Cairo]: Dār Ḥarā’ lil-Kitāb, 1987), 38 (author’s translation).
[100] Ibn ’Allān, *Dalīl al-Fāliḥīn li-Ṭuruq Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 3:26 (author’s translation).

and their use of inclusive language was a normative position in the legal school's later commentaries on this tradition. Aḥmad al-Qasṭallānī (d. 1517) included the protected "people of the book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) in the brotherhood of humanity, writing, "It is possible that his saying 'his brother' includes the non-Muslim citizen (*dhimmī*) as well, that he loves for them to have Islam similarly."[101] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. 1567) likewise agreed with them, "It is apparent that the expression of brother here is based upon the general sense, as it is befitting for every Muslim to love Islam for the unbelievers and what arises from it of perfections."[102]

However, the wider conception of human brotherhood was not limited to the Shāfi'ī school. In a similar manner, the Mālikī jurist Aḥmad ibn 'Umar al-Qurtubī (d. 1258), not be confused with the famous Qur'ānic exegete,[103] uses inclusive language in his commentary, "The faith of no one will be complete and perfected until his Islam includes safety for people, the desire to do good to them, and to have good will for all of them in his dealings with them."[104] Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (d. 1316) was a Ḥanbalī jurist known for his bold use of the legal principle of public welfare (*maṣlaḥa*), often preferring ethical or utilitarian considerations over the literal letter of the law, an orientation that preceded and foreshadowed the intellectual activity of modernist reformers.[105] In his commentary on Al-Nawawī's Forty Ḥadīth, he takes another bold stance on the centrality of religious love:

> The objective of this tradition is to unite the hearts of people and rectify their circumstances, and it is a major principle in Islam that God Almighty has enjoined… In clarification of that, if every person loved for others what he loves for himself, he would treat them in the best manner, he would not harm them because he loves for himself to be treated well, and he himself would not be harmed. If he treats them well and does not harm those he loves,

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[101] Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Qasṭallānī and Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Bukhārī, *Irshād al-Sārī li-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Miṣr [Cairo]: al-Maṭba'ah al-Kubrá al-Amīrīyah, 1905), 1:96 (author's translation).
[102] Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥajar Haythamī, *Al-Fatḥ al-Mubīn bi-Sharḥ al-Arba'īn* (Jiddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2008), 305 (author's translation).
[103] Influential jurist and exegete (d. 1273). Introduced in section 2, p. 16.
[104] Aḥmad ibn 'Umar Qurṭubī and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Al-Mafhim li-mā Ashkala min Talkhīṣ Kitāb Muslim* (Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Kathīr lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 2010), 1:224 (author's translation).
[105] Felicitas Opwis, "Maslaha in Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 2 (2005): 195.

> then love will emanate from that between people, and with the emanation of love between them will be the emanation of good and the removal of evil, and with that the rectification of daily life and habits and the improvement of people's circumstances.[106]

Al-Ṭūfī sees the golden rule, as an expression of religious love, to have transformative power in its ability to bring about positive social change. If only everyone would practice it, problems in society would disappear and God's purpose would be fulfilled. While this passage is quite a spirited expression of the golden rule, traditional commentators like Al-Ṭūfī were not suggesting the adoption of a universalist or perennial philosophy, which overlooks all the intractable religious differences people have in doctrine and practice.

The commentators who proposed an idea of universal brotherhood, such as Al-Nawawī's interpretation previously discussed, almost always qualified their comments with the missionary imperative, that Islam should be shared with non-Muslims; a Muslim should desire for non-Muslims to embrace Islam. After all, if a Muslim truly believes that Islam is the only sure path to salvation, then the golden rule dictates that they should love others to be saved by Islam as well. This does not necessarily preclude Muslims from wishing unbelievers to acquire permissible, worldly blessings as well. In this way, the utility of the golden rule as a conceptual vehicle for managing interfaith relations remains intact, an important development that would come to play a role in the modern period's focus on human rights and interfaith conflict.

The proponents of universal brotherhood found a strong case for their position in all of the permutations of the golden rule in the Ḥadīth corpus. Even by analysing the traditions of Anas alone, without reference to other authorities, inclusive language was used by the Prophet often enough to justify including non-Muslims within the golden rule:

> None of you will find the sweetness of faith until he loves *a person* only for the sake of God.[107]

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[106] Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Qawī Ṭūfī, *Kitāb al-Ta'yīn fī Sharḥ al-Arba'īn* (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān, 1998), 1:124-125 (author's translation).
[107] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:14 #6041 (author's translation).

> None of you has faith until he loves for *the people* what he loves for himself, and until he loves *a person* only for the sake of God, the Great and Almighty.[108]
>
> The servant does not reach the reality of faith until he loves for *the people* what he loves for himself of the good.[109]

In particular, a variant in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim reads, "…until he loves for his brother – or he said *his neighbour* – what he loves for himself."[110] In this version, the sub-narrator says that Anas was unsure whether the Prophet said 'brother' or 'neighbour.' In the case of neighbours, it was generally understood that the term was inclusive of non-Muslims, as previously mentioned in the exegesis of the Qur'ān.

Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 1768) was a Yemeni reformer in the Salafi tradition, which eschews uncritical conformity (*taqlīd*) to one of the four orthodox Islamic law schools in favour of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) on the basis of direct interpretation of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth traditions.[111] Al-Ṣan'ānī includes in his legal commentary a chapter on "the rights of the neighbour," in which he utilises some of the broadest language of the late classical to early modern period. Based upon the word "neighbour" in the version of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, he concludes:

> The narration of the neighbour is general for the Muslim, the unbeliever, and the sinner, the friend and the enemy, the relative and the foreigner, the near neighbour and the far neighbour. Whoever accumulates in this regard the obligatory attributes of the love of good for him, he is at the highest of levels.[112]

Perhaps most significant is Al-Ṣan'ānī's inclusion of enemies (*al-'aduw*) in the list of people covered by the golden rule. In this case, the golden rule has at least some kind of application to every single human being regardless of his or her faith or deeds. He supports this interpretation by paraphrasing a tradition

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[108] Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal* (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 21:353 #13875 (author's translation).
[109] Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān* (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1993), 1:471 #235 (author's translation).
[110] Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ([Bayrūt]: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1955), 1:67 #45 (author's translation).
[111] Ṣan'ānī, *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr*, 1:13 (author's translation).
[112] Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Ṣan'ānī and Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Subul al-Salām: Sharḥ Bulūgh al-Marām min Adillat al-Aḥkām* (Qāhirah: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2007), 2:633 (author's translation).

that explicitly places good treatment of the neighbour in the context of interfaith relations:

> ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr's servant was preparing a sheep and he said, 'Young man, when you are finished, then begin with our Jewish neighbour.' A man from the people said, 'Jewish? God rectify you!' ʿAbd Allāh said, 'I heard the Messenger of God (ṣ) say, 'Gabriel continued to enjoin good for the neighbour until I thought he would make them my heirs.''[113]

The Prophet's companion ʿAbd Allāh would give gifts to his Jewish neighbour because he remembered that the Angel Gabriel continuously encouraged the Prophet to be good to his neighbours, to the point that he thought he might be required to leave his neighbours some inheritance. A local man objected to giving gifts to a Jew, perhaps recalling some of the early historical conflicts between Muslims and Jews. Still, ʿAbd Allāh persists and justifies himself with the Prophet's words, demonstrating that a neighbour should be treated well regardless of their religion. Having cited his supporting evidence, Al-Ṣanʻānī goes on to say:

> The unbeliever should be shown Islam and his interest in it be aroused with gentleness. The sinner should be admonished by what is appropriate with gentleness, his faults be concealed, and be prohibited [from sin] with gentleness if it is beneficial. Otherwise, he is boycotted, intending by that to discipline him, along with informing him of the reason that he might cease.[114]

Like classical Ḥadīth commentators, Al-Ṣanʻānī qualifies his inclusive language with Islam's missionary imperative. Unlike some in the classical period, though, he further qualifies that imperative with the necessity to be kind and gentle, and to do so with the intention to inspire hope or interest (*al-targhīb*) in unbelievers. Further measures in prohibiting evil are only disciplinary in nature, not vindictive or purely punitive. Al-Ṣanʻānī seems to be channelling the attitude of one of the major classical influences on the Salafi movement, Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymīyah (d. 1328), who asserted that, "…whoever punishes people for sins should intend by that goodness and mercy for them, as a father disciplines his child and as a

[113] Muḥammad ibn Ismāʻīl Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Adab al-Mufrad* (al-Rīyāḍ: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 1998), 1:69 #128 (author's translation).
[114] Ṣanʻānī, *Subul al-Salām*, 2:634 (author's translation).

doctor treats the patient."[115] Ibn Taymīyah and his most influential student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah (d. 1350), would often refer to the golden rule, as will be discussed in later sections.

Religious love understood this way, as an intention to bring about good even in disciplinary punishment, is not merely a show of affection, or what Al-Nawawī refers to as "human love." It also takes the form of "tough love," so to speak, an unpleasant action in the short-term for the sake of a person's greater or long-term benefit. This fuller conception of love, as an act under the guidance of the golden rule, was understood by some commentators to be intended whenever "love" was mentioned in a tradition without being qualified. That is, if the word love was not used in an obvious, purely linguistic sense, the technical altruistic meaning was assumed. Another tradition on the authority of Anas states, "No two persons love each other for the sake of God but that the better of the two is the one with the strongest love for his companion."[116] Zayn al-Dīn al-Munāwī (d. 1621), the distinguished Sufi mystic and scholar of Cairo, interpreted love in this tradition to be love rooted in the golden rule:

> 'The strongest love for his companion,' meaning, for the sake of God Almighty and for no other worldly purpose, and he affirms love is among the rights which are obligatory in a bond of fellowship. The measure of it is that he treats him as he would love to be treated by him. For whoever does not love for his brother what he loves for himself, then his fellowship is hypocrisy and it will be against him in the world and in the afterlife.[117]

The real criteria of authentic love is adherence to the golden rule in one's behaviour with another. The more virtuous Muslim is the one who is better at treating others the way he would love to be treated. Anything less is a degree of hypocrisy, for which divine punishment awaits in the afterlife and potentially before then.

Love is certainly a ubiquitous theme in the traditions of Anas, especially when one considers all of their variants. Anas reports that this greater religious sense

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[115] Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymīyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah* (al-Riyāḍ: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmīyah, 1986), 5:237 (author's translation).
[116] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, 2:325 #566 (author's translation).
[117] 'Abd al-Ra'ūf ibn Tāj Munāwī and Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī. *Fayḍ al-Qadīr, Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr* (Miṣr [Cairo]: al-Maktabah al-Tijārīyah al-Kubrá, 1938), 5:435 #7867 (author's translation).

of love was something the Prophet encouraged Muslims to express to one another:

> A man was with the Prophet (ṣ) when another man passed by and he said, 'O Messenger of God, I love this man.' The Prophet said, 'Have you told him?' He said no. The Prophet said, 'Tell him.' So he went to the man and he said, 'I love you for the sake of God.' The other man said, 'May God, for whose sake you love me, also love you.'[118]

This is not quite the warrior, hyper-masculine tribal culture that Islam is sometimes accused of nurturing. On the contrary, love – in the religious sense, not the physical sense – was to be proclaimed openly and without shame between men.

If the golden rule is encapsulated in the idea of religious love – equivalent to good will – then it follows that hatred, malice, and ill will are the golden rule's mutually exclusive opposites. Ibn Rajab[119] writes in his commentary on the tradition of Anas, "Indeed, a man only loves for his brother what he loves for himself if he is free from envy, rancour, malevolence, and malice, for that is an obligation."[120] Hatred (*baghḍa'*) and envy (*ḥasad*) are closely related in the Islamic lexicon, being recognised as "diseases of the heart," both of which indicate a desire to harm others. As Ibn Taymīyah put it, "The reality is that envy is animosity and hatred when one sees the good state of the envied person."[121]

Since these bad qualities are the antithesis of Anas' theme of love, naturally we find other traditions on his authority that strongly discourage these vices, "Do not hate each other, do not envy each other, do not turn away from each other, but rather be servants of God as brothers; it is not permissible for a Muslim to boycott his brother for more than three days."[122] And again, "Envy consumes good deeds just as fire burns wood; charity extinguishes sinful deeds just as

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[118] Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Lubnān: al-Maktabah al-Aṣrīyah, 1980), 4:333 #5125 (author's translation).
[119] Influential exegete, commentator, and jurist (d. 1393). Introduced in section 2, p. 24.
[120] 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad Ibn Rajab, *Fatḥ al-Bārī: Sharḥ Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī* (al-Madīnah al-Nabawīyah: Maktabat al-Ghurabā' al-Atharīyah, 1996), 1:45 (author's translation).
[121] Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymīyah, *Amrāḍ al-Qulūb wa Shifā'uhā* (al-Qāhirah: al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafīyah wa Maktabatuhā, 1966), 14 (author's translation).
[122] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:19 #6065 (author's translation).

water extinguishes fire."[123] Other traditions of Anas likewise encourage reconciliation and good relations between people, "Strive to make peace between people if their relations are corrupted, and bring them together when they are apart."[124] The principal narrators of Ḥadīth traditions themselves, like the commentators, connected virtues with their opposite vices. As Anas became aware of the true meaning of love, he also become aware of hatred; his traditions are a reflection of complementary themes that he understood to be among the most important teachings in Islam.

Hatred for the sake of God is an issue discussed often by classical scholars, but we should exercise caution against taking parts of this discourse at face value. In light of the golden rule, the commentator Shams al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 1384) noted in his interpretation of Anas' tradition, and repeated by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 1449), that "it is also part of faith to hate for his brother what he hates for himself of evil."[125] This type of hatred is the inverse of religious love; if one loves goodness for others, one must necessarily hate evil for others as well.

Religious hatred, properly understood, is hatred for evil and evil deeds in the abstract. It is not hatred of individuals in themselves, as explained by the commentator Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq al-'Aẓīmābādī (d. 1892), "He hates for God's sake, not to harm the one he hates, but rather [he hates] his unbelief and disobedience [to God]."[126] It is, in a sense, to hate the sin and to love the sinner. Ibn Rajab seems to adopt this opinion, which he attributes to the authority of the early generations (*al-salaf*):

> The people of love for God look by the light of God and have compassion upon the people in disobedience to God. They abhor their deeds and have compassion on them that by their preaching they will get rid of their [evil] deeds. They are worried for the bodies [to be burned] in the fire. The believer is not truly a believer

[123] Muḥammad ibn Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1975), 2:1408 #4210 (author's translation).
[124] Bazzār, *Al-Baḥr al-Zakhkhār*, 13:185 #6633 (author's translation).
[125] Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī and Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Bukhārī. *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1959), 1:74 (author's translation).
[126] Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq 'Aẓīmābādī, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī Abū Dāwūd, and Muḥammad Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *'Awn al-Ma'būd: Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2009), 12:285 (author's translation).

> until he is pleased for people to have what is pleasing to himself.[127]

The crux of the issue is that hatred for the individual, by which is meant a desire to harm them, is insidious to religious faith. A type of hatred bereft of compassion is not a praiseworthy instance of righteous indignation. As said by Al-Munāwī, anything less than loving others as yourself is mere hypocrisy at best.

A final point of interest is that at least some commentators looked to the golden rule tradition of Anas as an expression of reasoning based upon conscience, through which moral knowledge could be acquired. In his commentary, the Shāfi'ī jurist and grammarian 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 1402) relates an anecdote, "Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays was asked, 'From whom did you learn [sacred] knowledge?' He said, 'From myself.' It was said, 'How is that?' He said, 'If I hated something did by another, then I would never do the same to anyone else.'"[128] This report is extraordinary in that it recognises conscience as an independent authority, with the ethics of reciprocity acting as the mechanism of moral refinement. Al-Aḥnaf (d. 687), one of the Prophet's contemporaries, seems to foreshadow the work of modern psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (d. 1987), who was known for his theory of stages of moral development. The highest level of moral reasoning, according to Kohlberg, is based upon a mature understanding of the golden rule.[129] Understood in this light, Al-Aḥnaf became admired by those around him for the moral knowledge he gleaned from his own psyche by constantly reflecting upon the golden rule.

3b. Abū Hurayrah

Abū Hurayrah (d. 679) was by far the most prolific narrator of Ḥadīth traditions, with some estimates that he transmitted over three thousands traditions to over four hundred second generation narrators. His real name is generally considered to be 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr. Abū Hurayrah, meaning "father of

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[127] 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam* (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 1:308 (author's translation).
[128] 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Al-Tawḍīḥ li-Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Dimashq: Dār al-Nawādir, 2008), 2:512 (author's translation).
[129] Wattles, *The Golden Rule*, 108.

the kitten," was a nickname given to him because of his affection for his pet cat.[130]

The explicit formulation of the golden rule on the authority of Abū Hurayrah was recorded by Muḥammad ibn 'Īsá al-Tirmidhī (d. 892). The story begins when the Prophet asks his companions a question, "Who will take these words and act on them, or teach whoever would act on them?" Abū Hurayrah answers the call, to which the Prophet replies with five wisdom sayings:

> Beware of the forbidden, you will be the most pious of people. Be content with what God has apportioned to you, you will be the richest of people. Be good to your neighbour, you will be a believer. Love for people what you love for yourself, you will be a Muslim. Do not laugh too much, for much laughter deadens the heart.[131]

This tradition was popularised by Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī (d. 1340), who included it in his collection *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, and which was itself a rearrangement of *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunnah* by Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī (d. 1122). The preface of the tradition establishes Abū Hurayrah as a willing narrator of Ḥadīth traditions, and the sayings themselves point to the purpose of such traditions, i.e. transmission of wisdom to act upon. As implied by Al-Tirmidhī in his section heading, each of these five sayings touches on the theme of asceticism or temperance (*al-zuhd*), forsaking worldly pleasures in pursuit of good in the afterlife. The golden rule relates to asceticism in that the imperative to love others as one's self necessitates a denial of the desire to be over others or to gain pleasure at their expense.

Some variants of this incident include slightly different wordings. Muḥammad ibn Mājah's (d. 887) version reads, "Love for people what you love for yourself, you will be a believer. Be good to your neighbour, you will be a Muslim."[132] A notable difference between these versions is the swapping of the words 'believer' and 'Muslim.' This difference might have significance in some contexts, as the word believer, which implies inward fidelity, is considered by

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[130] G. H. A. Juynboll, "Abū Hurayra," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, consulted online 08 June 2017.
[131] Muḥammad ibn 'Īsá Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1998), 4:127 #2305 (author's translation).
[132] Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 2:1410 #4217 (author's translation).

the Qur'ān to be a higher level of virtue than merely a Muslim, which implies only outward fidelity.[133] However, the terms are also interchangeable and, in this context, they seem to be used as synonyms.

The version of Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066) expresses the golden rule in greater detail, "Love for the believing Muslims what you love for yourself and your household, and hate for them what you hate for yourself and your household, you will be a believer. Be a good neighbour to whomever will be your neighbour among the people and you will be a Muslim."[134] The golden rule is expressed here in both positive and negative formulations, but this particular formula frames the rule in relation to one's family; one should treat others as he would love his family to be treated. Moreover, the proximity in all of these variants between the golden rule and an exhortation to be good to neighbours indicates an important relationship; being good to one's neighbour means to treat them as one wants to be treated.

Similar to variants of Anas' tradition, the use of the phrase "love for the people" is significant according to commentators. 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1606), commenting on the tradition as it appears in *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, finds the use of the word 'people' here to be "in general" such that "even you love faith for the unbeliever and repentance for the wicked, and so on."[135] Again, the use of inclusive language universalises the golden rule, albeit within an understanding of the missionary imperative.

The theme of love is expressed in a number of traditions on the authority of Abū Hurayrah. As noted by some commentators, when love in a religious context is expressed by itself, it usually implies the golden rule. One tradition encourages Muslims to love each other as a means of earning God's love for themselves:

> A man set out to visit his brother from another town, so God sent an angel to watch over his steps. When the angel came to him, he said, 'Where do you intend to go?' The man said, 'I intend to visit a brother of mine in this town.' The angel said, 'Do you have a

[133] See Sūrat al- al-Ḥujurāt 49:14, "What you should say instead is, 'We have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts," in Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 518.
[134] Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān* (al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Rushd lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 2003), 13:457 #10615 (author's translation).
[135] 'Alī ibn Sulṭān Muḥammad Qārī al-Harawī, *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ: Sharḥ Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 2002), 8:3237 #5171 (author's translation).

> favour over him to be repaid?' The man said, 'No, except that I love him for the sake of God, the Great and Almighty.' The angel said, 'I am a messenger from God to tell you that God loves you as you love him.'[136]

Sincerity to God in love of others is the lesson in this tradition. The man who visited his brother in faith was questioned by the angel about his motives, replying that he was only doing so for God's sake. In this respect, love is selfless, altruistic, and ascetic in that it is not driven by worldly or selfish gains. Even so, this type of love is not completely without personal reward, just as Anas narrated that love for the sake of God is the "sweetness of faith."[137] Ultimately, it is in one's own long-term interest in this life and the afterlife to draw near to God by such acts of selfless love.

Another love-related tradition appears as a "sacred saying" (*ḥadīth qudsī*), a verbal statement that the Prophet attributed to God in its meaning, "Verily, God will say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Where are those who love each other for the sake of my glory? Today, I will shelter them in my shade on a day when there is no shade but mine.'"[138] Sacred sayings such as this were typically modes of transmitting proverbs relating to the nature of God and righteous behaviour, as opposed to purely ritual-legal injunctions or historical data. An ethical or theological teaching would be the clear purpose of such traditions. In this case, it is altruistic love, as implied in the golden rule, which God rewards in the afterlife by sheltering those who loved each other from the punishment and torments of Judgment Day.

Yet another of Abū Hurayrah's traditions connects love with the virtue of peace, "You will not enter Paradise until you believe and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I show you something that, if you did, you would love each other? Spread peace between yourselves."[139] A variant of this tradition contrasts love and peace with hatred, adding the phrase, "Beware of hatred, for it is the razor. I do not say it shaves hair,

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[136] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1988 #2567 (author's translation).
[137] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:14 #6041 (author's translation).
[138] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1988 #2566 (author's translation).
[139] Ibid., 1:74 #54 (author's translation).

but rather it shaves away the religion."[140] Peace, of course, is an important value in Islam, as it is in most every religion. The word 'Islam' itself is derived from the same linguistic root as "peace." A number of earlier commentators of the Qur'ān, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās (d. 687), Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 722), and Qatādah ibn Di'āmah (d. 736) interpreted 'peace' (*al-silm*) as it appears in a Qur'ānic verse to be synonymous with Islam.[141] Al-Nawawī elaborates on these themes in his commentary on this tradition. He cites an extraordinary statement attributed to the Prophet's companion 'Ammār ibn Yāsir (d. 657) that an essential characteristic of faith is "to offer peace to the world." Then, he writes that these sayings "include the removal of broken relationships, boycotting others, hostility, and corrupted relations, which are the razor, and that his [offer of] peace is for God, not following his caprice and not restricted to his companions and loved ones."[142] Love and peace are the default states of being one should aspire towards; hatred and hostility are the aberrations. Peace is something to be sought for the sake of God, not simply for worldly reasons, nor is it to be limited to "loved ones," here using the word's basic linguistic meaning ("human love") to refer those loved naturally such as friends, family, co-religionists, and so on.

Like Anas, Abū Hurayrah's theme of love is complemented with warnings of the destructive nature of hatred, envy, and bad will. Cynical assumptions, hair-splitting, and seeking the faults of others are all prohibited sinful deeds:

> Beware of suspicion, for it is the most false of tales. Do not scrutinise one another, do not spy on one another, do not envy one another, do not turn away from one another, do not hate each other, rather be servants of God as brothers.[143]

Similarly, envy, which can be synonymous with hatred, has the potential to destroy a person's good deeds in the afterlife, "Beware of envy, for it consumes good deeds just as fire consumes wood or grass."[144] Hence, traditions of this

[140] Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 1:137 #260 (author's translation).
[141] Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:208; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 4:251 (author's translation).
[142] Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Nawawī 'alá Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2:36 #54 (author's translation).
[143] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:19 #6064 (author's translation).
[144] Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 4:276 #4903 (author's translation).

nature, while not explicitly stating a formula of the golden rule, strongly imply it in that altruistic love and abandonment of hatred revolve around the golden rule's key theme of good will towards others.

Love is not the only relevant theme Abū Hurayrah relates to the golden rule. Another longer tradition expresses the ethics of reciprocity through the words of Moses in his dialogue with God:

> Moses said, 'Who is the best in judgment of your servants?' God said, 'Those who judge people as they would love to be judged themselves.' Moses said, 'Who are the most honoured of your servants?' God said, 'Those who forgive when they have power over others.'[145]

This tradition is a different formulation of the golden rule, with an emphasis on justice and fair judgment. Certainly, people would like to be judged leniently, or to be judged otherwise in a favourable way. If judgment were passed in restoration of one's own rights, the full measure of justice would be desired. On the other hand, if judgment were passed against one's self, a measure of mercy and forgiveness is desired. Hence, appropriately judging with justice or mercy depends upon the context. Perhaps, this is why the instruction to judge others as one's self is coupled with the virtue of forgiveness as opposed to vengeance. Justice and compassion often exist in tension with each other, although both are related to the same golden rule.

Compassion is another important theme found in the traditions of Abū Hurayrah. These ideas are embedded in the word 'mercy' (*raḥmah*) and its cognates. The Qur'ān's first chapter extols the mercy of God, as do the opening benedictions of every chapter but one. In one of Abū Hurayrah's traditions, it was God himself who decreed from the beginning of creation that compassion would inevitably triumph over justice, "When God finished the creation, he wrote in his book with him above the throne, 'Verily, my mercy has overcome my anger.'"[146] One can infer from this tradition that, in the tension between justice and compassion, it is compassion that deserves more weight. Moreover, a person bereft of compassionate behaviour will not be saved on Judgment Day, according to Abū Hurayrah's tradition, because, "Mercy is not removed but from

[145] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, 14:100 #6217 (author's translation).
[146] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:106 #3194 (author's translation).

the damned."[147] This seemed to be the message that Muslim jurists took to heart as they developed, based upon the Prophet's teachings, a legal theory that expressed a moral concern for avoiding the strict application of the relatively harsh *ḥudūd* criminal punishments, if reasonably possible.[148]

Empathy, as implied in the word *raḥmah*, involves the ability to share the feelings of another person (or creature) and thus inspires action to relieve their hardship and misfortune. The empathetic role-reversal is an important manifestation of the golden rule. Astonishingly, one of Abū Hurayrah's traditions commends a man's imaginative switching places with a suffering dog:

> A man had intense thirst while he was walking on a journey. When he found a well, he climbed down into it and drank from it. Then he came out and saw a dog lolling its tongue from thirst and licking the ground. The man said, 'This dog has suffered thirst just as I have suffered from it.' He climbed down into the well, filled his shoe with water, and caught it in his mouth as he climbed up. Then, he gave the dog a drink. God appreciated this deed, so he forgave him.

Upon this, the companions said, "O Messenger of God, we will have a reward in these beasts?" The Prophet said, "In every moist liver is a reward."[149] As the thirsty man encountered the thirsty dog on his journey, he put himself in the place of the dog, saying to himself, *this dog has suffered thirst just as I have suffered from it*. The man felt the pain of the dog and likened it to his own experience, so he fetched some water for the dog. In other words, he treated the dog the way he wanted to be treated. The lesson, then, is that the golden rule applies even to animals, to a reasonable extent. Charity for any animal with a "moist liver" is rewarded by God. On this basis, Muslim jurists such as 'Izz al-Dīn al-Sulamī (d. 1262) declared the inherent "rights of beasts and animals" to good treatment and comfort within their utilization as livestock.[150]

Since the man was forgiven for his charity to the dog, meaning he entered paradise in the afterlife, the reasonable inference is that the virtue readily

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[147] Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 3:387 #1923 (author's translation).
[148] Intisar A. Rabb, *Doubt in Islamic Law: A History of Legal Maxims, Interpretation, and Islamic Criminal Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 114 (author's translation).
[149] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3:132 #2466 (author's translation).
[150] 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Salām Sulamī, *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Kullīyāt al-Azharīyah, 1991), 1:167 (author's translation).

transfers to human beings and even more so. By this implication, the tradition encourages the golden rule to both people and creatures; any of a number of traditions encouraging good treatment to animals have an underlying lesson applicable to humans as well. Just as the Confucian philosopher, Mencius (d. 289 BCE), counselled a king who had compassion for an ox, but was unable to have compassion for his own people, saying, "Take this very heart here and apply it to what is over there."[151] Acts of compassion, even for animals, have tremendous potential in the eyes of God. Indeed, another variant of Abū Hurayrah's tradition suggests the same redeeming power of kindness to animals:

> God forgave a woman who was a prostitute. She passed by a dog, weakened and panting, nearly killed by thirst. She pulled off her slipper, tied it to her veil, and pulled out some water for him. Thus, God forgave her for that.[152]

Prostitution, as a derivative of adultery (*al-zinā*), is undoubtedly one of the major sins in Islamic law. It is not a small infraction, in fact, requiring criminal punishment if brought into the public space. Nonetheless, this act of kindness on her part was so appreciated by God that her sins in prostitution were forgiven. The tacit question to ask is this: If God greatly rewards such good acts to animals, how much greater is the reward for good acts to people?

3c. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr (d. 685), according to tradition, was the author of *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Ṣādiqah*, the "Truthful Page," one of the earliest written documents recording Ḥadīth traditions.[153] The work is not extant, but it was likely absorbed entirely into later and larger collections. ʿAbd Allāh was one of the few companions to be given permission from the Prophet to write Ḥadīth traditions, as there was a concern that the Qur'ān would be mixed with Ḥadīth, again demonstrating the distinct and complementary functions of both sets of texts. He was also well-

[151] Mencius and D. C. Lau, *Mencius* (London: Penguin, 2004), 12 #1A7.
[152] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:130 #3321 (author's translation).
[153] Muḥammad M. A'ẓamī, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature: With a Critical Edition of Some Early Texts* (Berkeley: Islamic Publications International, 1992), 43.

known due to the fame of his father, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d. 663), who became governor of Egypt after the defeat of the Byzantines.

ʿAbd Allāh’s formulation of the golden rule is unique compared to others previously mentioned. In this version, the same strong emphasis on faith exists, although the focus is on outward behaviour instead of an act of the heart, “Whoever would love to be delivered from Hell and admitted into Paradise, let him meet his end believing in God and the Last Day, and let him treat people as he would love to be treated.”[154]

This statement in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim is part of a longer narrative that discusses the inevitability of trials and tribulations to come, warning that the Muslim nation would experience periods of hardship and suffering, one upon another, with the previous trial eclipsed by the magnitude of the following. In this situation, Muslims should aspire to die with faith in God and while behaving with people according to the golden rule. The narrative continues with an exhortation to unite around the Caliph, but only if he orders obedience to God; if he orders people to sin, then they have a duty to disobey. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj seemed to consider leadership the most salient lesson of the larger narrative, placing it in his sections on governance. The golden rule statement of this Ḥadīth was also narrated as a stand-alone tradition, without the extended narrative, in the works of founding jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) and others.[155]

Al-Nawawī sees in this tradition a general and summarising rule of conduct, “This is among the comprehensive sayings of the Prophet (ṣ), his marvellous wisdom, and an important rule. It deserves to be given close attention, that the human being must not deal with people except in a way he would love to be treated by them.”[156] In his very popular topical compilation of traditions *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, the “Meadows of the Righteous,” Al-Nawawī places this tradition in the chapter on “the prohibition of harming others,” although the import of the tradition is not limited to this one point. Ibn ’Allān asserts in his extended commentary on Al-Nawawī’s compilation, “The meaning is that he behave well in his dealings with people, he refrains from harm, and he is generous as he

[154] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 3:1472, #1844 (author’s translation).
[155] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 11:411 #6807 (author’s translation).
[156] Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-Nawawī ‘alá Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 12:233 #1844 (author’s translation).

would like that for himself from them."[157] Not only should a Muslim not harm others, he or she must also be proactively good to them in terms of charity and manners.

Like Abū Hurayrah, compassion appears in traditions on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh as well, "Those who are merciful will be shown mercy by the Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the one in heaven will have mercy upon you."[158] Compassion is again connected to virtues of charity and peace, "Worship the Merciful, feed the poor, and spread peace. You will enter Paradise in peace."[159] If one wants to receive mercy from God, he or she needs to be compassionate and forgiving with others, "Be merciful to others and you will receive mercy. Forgive others and God will forgive you."[160] Not only compassion, but also love in the form of the golden rule, expressed openly, is a means of salvation in the afterlife. The greater is one's love for others, the greater their rank in the afterlife:

> Whoever loves a man for the sake of God, he should say, 'I love you for the sake of God.' They will both enter Paradise together. He whose love is greater will be raised in status over the other; he will be joined with the one he loved for the sake of God.[161]

Conversely, ʿAbd Allāh is the main character in a long story about the virtue of purifying one's heart from hatred and envy. On one occasion, the Prophet announces to his congregation that a man from the people of Paradise would soon arrive. The person who appears is a simple man of no great distinguishing features, but the Prophet repeats his announcement day after day, only to be followed up by the same humble worshiper. ʿAbd Allāh is intrigued by all of this, so he concocts a fictitious family dispute as an excuse to ask the man to stay with him in his home for three days. As the days pass, ʿAbd Allāh observes him closely, wondering what special acts of worship the man is doing. At the end of three days and having not determined anything particularly extraordinary about the man, ʿAbd Allāh admits he told him a little white lie just to see what the man was doing to get into Paradise. "I am not but what you see," the man said. As

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[157] Ibn 'Allān, *Dalīl al-Fāliḥīn li-Ṭuruq Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 8:407 (author's translation).
[158] Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 3:388 #1924 (author's translation).
[159] Ibid., 3:351 #1855 (author's translation).
[160] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 11:99 #6541 (author's translation).
[161] Bazzār, *Al-Baḥr al-Zakhkhār*, 6:414 #2439 (author's translation).

ʿAbd Allāh began to leave, disappointed and confounded by the mystery, it occurs to the man to say, "I am not but what you see, except that I do not find in myself any ill will towards the Muslims and I do not envy anyone due to the good that God has given them."[162] This secret act caused the humble man to enter heaven. He was sure to cleanse his heart every night of bad intentions toward others.

3d. ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib

ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 660) was the Prophet's cousin and husband to his daughter Fāṭimah. He is most well-known in the Sunni tradition for his role as the fourth and last of *al-Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn*, the "Rightly Guided Caliphs." The Shi'ite tradition differs by rejecting the first three of these caliphs and designating ʻAlī as the first Imām, or leader, and legitimate successor to Muḥammad. Either way, ʻAlī is a very important figure to all Muslims.

ʻAlī's golden rule tradition is in the context of a set of rights, and corresponding duties, that Muslims have towards each other:

> A Muslim has six [rights] over another Muslim in good conduct: to greet him with peace when he meets him, to answer his invitation, to bless him when he sneezes, to visit him when he is sick, to follow his funeral prayer when he dies, and to love for him what he loves for himself.[163]

The Prophet obligates these manners as a matter of "good conduct" (*al-ma'rūf*), an important word in Qur'ānic and Islamic terminology denoting goodness, kindness, or acts of benefaction. The term comes from the root meaning, "to know," which implies that these acts of goodness are recognised by human nature or society at-large. Specifically, *al-ma'rūf* signifies "any action, or deed, of which the goodness is known by reason and by the law."[164] The golden rule, then, is itself an act of goodness that is acknowledged to be a religious prescription as much as it is a conclusion of sound reason. Once again, reason

[162] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 20:125 #12697 (author's translation).
[163] Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 4:377 #2736 (author's translation).
[164] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:2014.

and conscience are associated with the proper application of the golden rule, because what the Prophet prescribes is known by the mind to be good.

This tradition does not carry the same strength of authority as that of Anas, Abū Hurayrah, and ʿAbd Allāh, but it is not owing to the reliability of ʻAlī himself. Rather, unlike other golden rule traditions that are accepted as "authentic" (*ṣaḥiḥ*), Al-Tirmidhī graded ʻAlī's tradition to be "fair" (*ḥasan*), a step down from the others but still good enough for many classical scholars to consider it as acceptable evidence. ʻAlī's tradition is also strengthened by supporting evidence (*shawāhid*) elsewhere. Abū Hurayrah narrates a variant of higher authority that mentions only five duties, excluding the golden rule statement at the end.[165] Perhaps, ʻAlī's version adds the statement after the five duties to emphasise it as the comprehensive principle underlying them all.

Despite questions about the tradition's authenticity or its discrepancy with other more authoritative variants, ʻAlī's golden rule statement would come to be included in long lists of similar duties developed by later ethicists and jurists. For instance, the Ḥanbalī jurist, Ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī (d. 1362), penned a chapter on the duties of Muslims towards one another as part of his larger work on the "Manners of the Law" (*al-Ādāb al-Sharʿīyah)*. He encourages Muslims, among other things, "to support [his Muslim brother] against his oppressor, to restrain him from oppressing others, to not surrender him, to not abandon him, and to love for him as he loves for himself and to hate for him as he hates for himself."[166] Similar to ʻAlī's tradition, Ibn Mufliḥ mentions the golden rule at the end of the list, in both its positive and negative formulations, as if to summarise everything previously mentioned. Notably, a Muslim is required to prevent his brother from committing wrong against others, to hate for him to sin as he would hate for himself to sin.

The Ḥanbalī jurist, Muḥammad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1774), likewise repeats a very similar list of duties and closes the passage with the golden rule.[167] Al-Saffārīnī discusses elsewhere the rights of Muslims in the context of good character. He

[165] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:71 #1240 (author's translation).
[166] Muḥammad ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī, *Al-Ādāb al-Sharʿīyah* (Bayrūt: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1999), 1:305 (author's translation).
[167] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Saffārīnī, *Ghidhāʾ Al-Albāb fī Sharḥ Manẓūmat al-Ādāb* (Miṣr: Muʾassasat Qurṭubah, 1993), 1:266 (author's translation).

describes the ways in which a Muslim can acquire positive character traits and asserts that such virtues can only be achieved by establishing the rights of Muslims, including, “to love for them what he loves for himself, to be humble with them, and to neither brag nor boast over them.”[168] Once more, the implied equality in the golden rule is the embodiment of humility, the opposite of arrogance and pride. Muslims are prohibited from aggrandising themselves and looking down upon others, as this violates the even plane that brothers and sisters in faith, or in humanity, ought to share.

3e. Other Ḥadīth traditions

Several traditions from other authorities express the golden rule, explicitly or implicitly, as well as its key themes. These traditions vary in their fame and the extent to which they are considered reliable narrations. Like many verses of the Qur’ān, commentators derived the golden rule by implication if it was not explicit. For example, as discussed earlier, an important principle in Islamic ethics is the concept of sincerity or good will (*al-naṣīḥah*), understood as delivering well-meaning advice to others and holding good motives towards them. In other words, it is a sincere intention to benefit others, a hallmark of the ethics of reciprocity as understood by commentators.

Tamīm al-Dārī (d. 661) reports that the Prophet said three times, “Religion is sincerity.” The companions said, “To whom?” The Prophet replied, “To God, to his book, to his messenger, and to the leader of the Muslims and their commoners.”[169] This tradition was popularised by Al-Nawawī, who included it in his collection of Forty Ḥadīth, ensuring that it would be subject to numerous commentaries. Ibn Daqīq explains at length the meaning of good will in each context. As it relates to the common people, he writes that sincere good will, among other things, is “to take care of them with beautiful preaching, to abandon ill will and envy for them, and to love for them what he loves for himself of the good and to hate for them what he hates for himself of the

[168] Ibid., 1:369 (author’s translation).
[169] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:74 #55 (author’s translation).

bad."[170] The Ḥanafī scholar, Muḥammad Ibn al-Malak (d. 1450), states outright that the Prophet intended the golden rule to be understood from this tradition, "Sincerity for the Muslims is to intend good for them and to love for them what he loves for himself."[171] Al-Saffārīnī also defines sincere good will for the common people as a function of the golden rule, adding that it is "to have pity for them, to be merciful with their young, to honour their elders, to be saddened by their sadness, and to be happy by their happiness."[172] In this case, the golden rule was inferred by parsing the rich, multi-layered meaning of a single Arabic word.

The golden rule was understood from another tradition due to the literary imagery involved. Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr (d. 684) relates the Prophet's parable of the faith community as a single body, "You see the believers in their mercy, affection, and compassion for one another as if they were a body. When a limb aches, the rest of the body responds with sleeplessness and fever."[173] A variant of this tradition reads, "The Muslims are like a single man. If the eye is afflicted, the whole body is afflicted. If the head is afflicted, the whole body is afflicted."[174] The idea is that Muslims should have compassion and empathy for one another by sharing the burden of each other's pain. Indeed, such is stated directly in yet another variant from a different authority, "The believer feels pain for the people of faith just as the body feels pain in its head."[175] The early scholar Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥalīmī (d. 1012) inferred the golden rule from this parable:

> They should be like that. As one hand would not love but what the other loves, and one eye or one leg or one ear would not love but what the other loves. Likewise, he should not love for his Muslim brother but what he loves for himself.[176]

Later commentators would develop this idea further. Ibn Daqīq draws upon the parable of the single body in his commentary on the tradition of Anas, writing, "Some scholars said in this tradition is the understanding that the believer is

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[170] Ibn Daqīq, *Sharḥ al-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawīyah*, 1:52 (author's translation).
[171] Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Laṭīf ibn al-Malak and Al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas'ūd Baghawī, *Sharḥ Maṣābīḥ al-Sunnah lil-Imām al-Baghawī* (al-Kuwayt: Dār al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmīyah, 2012), 1:211 (author's translation).
[172] Saffārīnī, *Ghidhā' al-Albāb fī Sharḥ Manẓūmat al-Ādāb*, 1:46 (author's translation).
[173] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:10 #6011 (author's translation).
[174] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2000 #2586 (author's translation).
[175] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 37:517 #2287 (author's translation).
[176] Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-Imān*, 13:467 #10627 (author's translation).

with another believer like a single soul. Thus, he should love for him what he loves for himself as if they were a single soul."[177] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī makes the same connection, saying that to love another means "that he will be with him as one soul (*al-nafs al-waḥīdah*)."[178] Hence, the golden rule is found in the allegorical meaning of the parable, that whoever considers himself of a piece with another will necessarily treat them how they would like to be treated.

At times, the golden rule could be derived from seemingly unrelated meta-physical beliefs. The behaviours of angels in the Ḥadīth traditions often function as clues for how Muslims should act. Angels are depicted as blessing or cursing certain deeds, or responding in certain ways to human deeds. In one tradition, the manner in which angels supplicate to God suggests the golden rule applies to prayer on behalf of others. Abū al-Dardā' (d. 653) reports that the Prophet said, "There is no Muslim servant who supplicates for his brother behind his back but that the angel says, 'For you the same.'"[179] Whenever a person prays for some blessing for another, an angel repeats the same prayer for the one who first made it. It was then understood by early Muslims, as mentioned in commentaries, that prayer on behalf of another is simultaneously a prayer for one's self. As stated by Ibn al-Malak:

> This, in reality, is a supplication from the angel with what is similar to his supplication for his brother. It is said the [righteous] predecessors, if they intended to supplicate for themselves, would supplicate for their Muslim brother with the same supplication, so that the angel would supplicate for them in the same way. Hence, it would have more support in being answered.[180]

Therefore, one ought to pray for others as one prays for himself. Al-Ghazzālī considered such prayers to be a duty for Muslims towards each other:

> [Among his rights are] to supplicate for his brother in his life and after his death for everything that he loves for himself, his family, and everything related to him. Thus, you supplicate for him as you supplicate for yourself, without distinction between yourself and him. Indeed, your supplication for him is a supplication for yourself in reality.[181]

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[177] Ibn Daqīq, *Sharḥ al-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawīyah*, 1:64 (author's translation).
[178] Haythamī, *Al-Fatḥ al-Mubīn*, 306 (author's translation).
[179] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2094 #2732 (author's translation).
[180] Ibn al-Malak and al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ Maṣābīḥ al-Sunnah*, 3:71 (author's translation).
[181] Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 2:186 (author's translation).

The key point in this passage is that there should be no distinction between one's self and others, as the golden rule implies such union like "a single soul." Similar to the parable of the body, every person in the community is a part of each other; harming others in prayer is harming one's self, just as benefitting others in prayer is beneficial to one's self.

The golden rule appears explicitly again in some lesser-known traditions, using similar wordings as mentioned by other authorities. Yazīd ibn Asad recalls that the Prophet said to him, "O Yazīd ibn Asad! Love for people what you love for yourself!"[182] In a variant of this tradition, the Prophet asks him, "Do you love Paradise?" He says yes, and the Prophet replies, "Then love for your brother what you love for yourself."[183] In yet another variant of this tradition, Yazīd's grandson quotes the Prophet on the pulpit, "Do not treat people but in the way you would love to be treated by them."[184] Once again, the inclusive language in most versions of the tradition, referring to "the people," is more evidence that the golden rule applies universally, not simply for Muslims. Al-Munāwī asserts in his commentary on this tradition that "the word 'people' includes the unbelievers, thus every Muslim should love for the unbeliever to have Islam and what arises from it of perfections."[185]

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 652 or 653), a prominent companion and Ḥadīth narrator, reports a familiar wording of the golden rule in a different context:

> Verily, the first generations of this nation are the best of them, and the last of them are the worst of them in differing and sectarianism. Thus, whoever has faith in God and the Last Day, let him meet his end while he treats people the way he would love to be treated.[186]

The rule here follows a warning about the splitting or breaking up (*tafarruq*) of the Muslim community in its latter generations. It is very close to ʿAbd Allāh ibn 'Amr's tradition, both in its wording and context of communal trials. Muslims who witness such end-times sectarianism should concentrate on their faith and live

[182] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 27:217 #16656 (author's translation).
[183] Ibid., 27:216 #16655 (author's translation).
[184] Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad Ṭabarānī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1995), 4:215 #4013 (author's translation).
[185] Munāwī and Suyūṭī, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, 1:176 #122 (author's translation).
[186] Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad Ṭabarānī, *Al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr* (al-Qāhirah, al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat Ibn Taymīyah, Dār al-Ṣumayʿī, 1983), 10:216 #10517 (author's translation).

by the golden rule. Al-Ṣan‘ānī expresses the importance of the tradition using an idiomatic expression, “It is a comprehensive statement and among what the believer should keep between his eyes when dealing with the servants of God.”[187] That a Muslim should “keep it between his eyes” (*naṣb ‘aynayhi*) is similar to how it is said in English to keep something in front of the mind. The golden rule is a principle one should consult and refer to often, actively and consistently in daily life, in the same way that Al-Aḥnaf used it to acquire moral knowledge from his conscience.

The concept of benefit (*naf’a*) is important to Islamic thinking, especially as it relates to legal judgments. The founding jurist, Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), records an incident in his legal manual, the earliest surviving book of Islamic law to be written, regarding a dispute over irrigation pathways. A man, Al-Ḍaḥāk, wished to water his fields using a source that needed to be directed through another man’s fields, Ibn Maslamah. Al-Ḍaḥāk considered it a win-win situation, as the new pathway would be useful to both men, yet Ibn Maslamah continued to refuse stubbornly. The issue was taken to the second caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), who admonished Ibn Maslamah, saying, “Why would you prevent your brother from what benefits him, while it will benefit you by drinking from it?”[188] It can be deduced that Ibn Maslamah, for whatever reason, did not wish to benefit Al-Ḍaḥāk even at his own expense. In insisting against helping his brother, he would end up harming himself. Had he treated him as he wanted to be treated, he would have seen it as a mutually beneficial partnership. As such, benefiting others is a way of drawing close to God. The son of the caliph, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 693), reports the tradition, “The most beloved of people to God are those who are most beneficial to people.”[189] Relationships with others ought to be based upon a humanitarian impulse and, to an extent, a utilitarian concern for their well-being.

Care for the prosperity of others, in both this life and the afterlife, necessitates avoiding transgressions against the rights of others or collaborating with them in an evil deed. A helpful way to avoid such crimes is to imagine one’s family in

[187] Ṣan‘ānī, *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr*, 3:605 #2246 (author’s translation).
[188] Mālik ibn Anas and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa’ al-Imām Mālik* (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-’Ilmīyah, 2003), 1:296 #836 (author’s translation).
[189] Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘jam al-Awsaṭ*, 6:139 #6026 (author’s translation).

the place of the victim or accomplice. Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī (d. 705) tells the story of a young man who came to the Prophet to ask for permission to indulge in adulterous sexual intercourse. The Prophet engages him in an imaginative role-reversal by asking a series of Socratic questions, appealing to the young man's conscience to convince him against it, "Would you like that for your mother? Would you like that for your sister?" The young man, naturally, expresses his disapproval had someone else committed adultery with the women of his household. The logical conclusion, as stated by the Prophet, is to consider the golden rule, "Then hate what God has hated, and love for your brother what you love for yourself."[190] If the young man really loves for others what he loves for himself, he would hate tempting another woman into sin as he would hate it for his own family.

Since the golden rule is often expressed as an essential characteristic of faith, it has been stated in some contexts alongside the five pillars of Islam. Abū al-Muntafiq recalls his meeting with the Prophet:

> I said, 'O Messenger of God, teach me what will save me from the punishment of God and admit me into Paradise.' The Prophet (ṣ) said, 'Worship God and associate none with him, establish the prescribed prayers, give the obligatory alms, and perform the pilgrimage.' (And I think he said), 'Fast Ramadan, and consider how you would love people to treat you, then treat them that way, and how you hate for them to treat you, then spare them of it.'[191]

The wording of this tradition is unusual as compared to others. Abū al-Muntafiq is told to observe how he would like to be treated and then to behave accordingly. Like one who keeps the golden rule in front of his or her mind, it is a principle to be consulted before taking action. A nearly identical tradition is reported on the authority of the companion Al-Mughīrah with the wording, "…and treat people the way you love for them to treat you, and hate for people what you hate for them to do to you."[192]

These traditions are significant in that the golden rule accompanies the pillars of Islam, but they are also clear wordings of the rule's negative formulations, to dislike for others what one dislikes for one's self. Hatred for the sake of God is a

[190] Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrá*, 9:271 #18507 (author's translation).
[191] Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 19:210 (author's translation).
[192] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad*, 38:232 #23164 (author's translation).

fine line to walk, between righteous indignation and unjustified animosity. At least some of the early Muslims, as mentioned, focused their ire on tangible sins and evil in the abstract, instead of sinners themselves. According to the tradition of Mu'ādh ibn Anas, this is how the Prophet defined hatred for the sake of God:

> The Messenger of God (ṣ) said, 'The best faith is to love for the sake of God, to hate for the sake of God, and to work your tongue in the remembrance of God.' Mu'ādh said, 'How is it, O Messenger of God?' The Prophet said, 'That you love for people what you love for yourself, hate for them what you hate for yourself, and to speak goodness or be silent.'[193]

The noble form of hatred is simply the inverse of the golden rule; if one sees another sinning, hatred should be for the evil deed because it is harming its doer, while at the same time one loves good for the sinner by hoping for their repentance and divine forgiveness.

Hatred that devolves into a desire to harm others misses the mark completely. On the other hand, love that ignores the self-harming behaviour of others is not truly love in the complete, religious sense. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reportedly said, "Let not your love be infatuation and let not your hatred be destruction." It was said, "How is this?" 'Umar replied, "When you love someone, you become infatuated like a child. When you hate someone, you love destruction for your companion."[194] Moderation is essential in matters of the heart, that neither emotion of love or hatred becomes too extreme as to produce harmful results.

Hatred of a destructive nature is detrimental to communal relations and, indeed, to religion itself. It has been likened to a blade with the potential to ruin religious practice, the exact opposite of altruistic love. Al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām (d. 656) reports that the Prophet said:

> There have come to you the diseases of the nations before you, envy and hatred, and hatred is the razor. It shaves the religion and it does not shave hair. By the one in whose hand is the soul of Muḥammad, you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I tell you something which, if you did, you would love each other? Spread peace between yourselves.[195]

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[193] Ibid., 36:446 #22132 (author's translation).
[194] Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 1:744 #1322 (author's translation).
[195] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 3:29 #1412 (author's translation).

In this tradition is a warning of the impending struggle Muslims need to face in confronting hatred and envy; enemies not from outside, but rather from within the heart and soul. These spiritual diseases are considered pernicious forces capable of destroying the religion itself. The antidote to such hatred is to embrace selfless love for others and to aim for the social peace that would inevitably follow the permeation of such love.

To summarise, this analysis of Ḥadīth traditions related to the golden rule reveals several themes of importance to religious experience: altruistic love, sincere good will, justice and equality, compassion and forgiveness, human brotherhood and community, charity and empathetic role-reversal, reason and conscience, and so on. The classical commentators, taken together, laid a hermeneutical foundation for the utilization of the rule in the modern period. The rule was considered by them to be integral to Islamic faith, yet even today their interpretive points overlap with many modern values, common to other religions and philosophies, which enables its great potential to serve as a reference point in interfaith dialogue based upon humanitarian objectives.

4. The Golden Rule in Extracanonical Traditions

When we venture beyond canonical sources, instances of the golden rule become ever more prevalent. The definition of "extracanonical" in this context is any supplementary genre of literature that is not strictly the core texts of the Qur'ān and agreed upon Sunni Ḥadīth. Unlike the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth traditions, evidence from extracanonical or apocryphal sources are not considered foundational to Islamic creed and law, but instead function to complement an argument or narrative at the selective discretion of whichever scholar cites them. Some genres of literature under discussion may indeed be canonical to a doctrinal sub-set of Muslims, such as a particular Sufi order or legal school, but are nonetheless included in this analysis by virtue of being statements or writings attributed to someone other than the Prophet himself. It should also be noted that some genres of literature overlap with one another, such as historical works containing Sufi aphorisms or Sufi works containing Israelite wisdom.

4a. Weak Ḥadīth traditions

There are a variety of reasons that Muslim scholars might consider a Ḥadīth tradition to be "weak" (*ḍa'īf*), either due to anomalies or defects in its chain of authorities or in the text itself or both.[196] Some scholars reject weak traditions outright, while others allow them to be used to promote moral virtues or in lieu of one's own personal opinion.[197] As such, weak traditions can be a contentious source of disagreement.

There are golden rule traditions that fit into this scriptural grey-zone. For instance, it is reported that the Prophet said, "Righteousness will not perish, nor will sin be forgotten. The Judge does not sleep. Thus, be as you will, for as you judge you shall be judged."[198] Al-Bayhaqī notes that this tradition is "disconnected" (*mursal*), as its narrator Abū Qilābah (d. 724) was a second generation successor and not a companion to the Prophet. In other words, Abū

[196] Kamali, *A Textbook of Ḥadīth Studies*, 144.
[197] Ibid. 149-150.
[198] Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Asmā' wal-Ṣifāt* (Jiddah: Maktabat al-Suwādī, 1993), 1:197 #132 (author's translation).

Qilābah certainly did not witness the Prophet make this statement, thereby casting doubt upon its authenticity. Nevertheless, it still has some supporting evidence. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal narrated it as a statement of Abū al-Dardā' (d. 652) through a different chain of authorities in his book on asceticism.[199] The presence of supporting evidence might cause a scholar to upgrade his judgment of a tradition, but in this case, none of the scholars examined have seemed to do so.

The pithy phrase of relevance here is "as you judge you shall be judged" (*kamā tudīn tudān*). This is not unlike the statement in the Sermon on the Mount, "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged."[200] Juxtaposing the active and passive forms of the verb "to judge" express Islam's golden rule in its most concise form, a mere three words, easy to say and memorise. As one behaves badly with others, so will God respond in kind. According to Al-Ṣan'ānī's commentary on this tradition, "Whoever betrays will be betrayed, whoever steals will be stolen against, and in the afterlife are similar types of recompense."[201] The phrase "you judge" is also etymologically related to debt and credit, invoking a transactional imagery.[202] How you repay debts is how you will be repaid, or as you take a debt of sin, you will be repaid in equal measure. Hence, one ought to treat others as he would like to be treated by God, for God will treat one as he or she treated others.

4b. Historical reports from companions and successors

Complementing the Ḥadīth literature is a vast body of historical reports about the Prophet, his companions, and their successors. Unlike Ḥadīth traditions, historical works might be utilised as supporting evidence in a broader narrative but do not enjoy the same authority as an authentic Ḥadīth. Historians were more interested in documenting reports than in scrutinising their chains of authorities, if they even had any. It is possible that a Muslim historian would

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[199] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Zuhd* (Bayrūt: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1999), 1:117 #765 (author's translation).
[200] Matthew 7:2; Coogan et al, The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 1756.
[201] Ṣan'ānī, *Al-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr*, 9:565 #8179 (author's translation).
[202] Hans Wehr and J. M. Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: (Arabic-English)* (Ithaca, N.Y: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 352-353.

question the validity of a report they have recorded. Al-Ṭabarī,[203] author of *Tārīkh al-Umam wal-Mulūk* ("History of Nations and Kings"), one of the earliest complete histories in Islamic tradition, notes in the introduction of his own major work that it contains material likely to offend some readers. History, he asserts, can only be discovered from second-hand and sometimes unverifiable accounts. For this reason he attributes the reports to those who reported them and not to the historical figures themselves, "We have only communicated them as they were communicated to us."[204] Even still, historical reports provide an important additional resource for scholars to include in their exegesis, commentaries, and Ḥadīth collections.

On the theme of justice and equality, Ibn Masʿūd reportedly said, "Whoever would love for himself to be just with people, let him treat people the way he would love to be treated."[205] The same statement was also attributed to ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[206] The word for justice in this tradition is *al-inṣāf*, which is derived from the same root word as "half" and "to divide in the middle."[207] The implication is that justice involves a general sense of equality between people – two equal parts – in their basic rights and duties. The word would become closely associated with the golden rule in later writings and commentaries. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah,[208] for instance, made the connection in his biography of the Prophet. A "sense of justice," he writes, is necessary for the fulfilment of both God's and people's rights, the implications of which is that "he deals with them as he would love to be dealt with by them, he pardons them as he would love to be pardoned by them, and he judges for them and over them as he would judge for himself and over himself."[209]

Tales of honourable leadership feature prominently in the historical literature. Saʾīd ibn ʻĀmir (d. 640), governor of Homs in Syria in the time of Caliph ʻUmar, reportedly exhorted the Caliph with the golden rule, saying, "O commander of

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[203] Influential exegete and historian (d. 923). Introduced in section 2, p. 13.
[204] Abū Jaʼfar Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Umam wal-Mulūk* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Turāth, 1990), 1:8 (author's translation).
[205] Bayhaqī, *Shuʻab al-Imān*, 13:465 #10623 (author's translation).
[206] Ibn ʻAsākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 42:517 (author's translation).
[207] Wehr and Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 1139.
[208] Influential jurist, theologian, and ethicist (d. 1350). Introduced in section 3a., p. 36.
[209] Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Zād al-Maʼād fī Hady Khayr al-ʼIbād* (Bayrūt: Muʼassasat al-Risālah, 1994), 2:372 (author's translation).

the faithful! Fear God regarding people, yet do not fear people regarding God. Love for the Muslims what you love for yourself and your household, and hate for them what you hate for yourself and your household."[210] As noted in the exegesis of the Qur'ān, the golden rule is sometimes framed as an expression of the righteous fear of God. The lesson to rulers everywhere is that a true leader treats his subjects as he would want to be treated.

Perhaps the most fascinating expression of the golden rule in this literature is its explicit connection by some to *jihād*, the struggle against evil. Jihād, which is derived from the root meaning "to strive" or "to exert one's self," has been understood by Muslims in both a military sense, as an armed struggle against outward enemies of the faith, and a spiritual sense, as an inward struggle against caprice and spiritual evil.[211] Indeed, early Sufi texts would refer to the spiritual jihād against the personal ego as *mujāhadah*, derived from the same linguistic root, to distinguish it from the martial jihād.[212] Some of the earliest Muslims regarded living according to the golden rule as a type of spiritual jihād. One Muslim wrote a letter to Yūnus ibn 'Ubayd (d. 757) asking for religious advice. Yūnus wrote back to him, saying, "Verily, I struggled (*jahadtu*) for my soul to love for people what it loves for itself, and to hate for people what it hates for itself."[213] A variant of this tradition reads, "I encouraged my soul to love for people what it loves for itself, and to hate for them what it hates for itself, yet it is far from that."[214] To practice the golden rule for Yūnus was an incredibly difficult act of spiritual jihād, as he acknowledged his own shortcomings concerning it. Yūnus' letter appears to be the earliest instance of associating jihād or mujāhadah directly with practicing the golden rule.

Another report offers more supporting evidence to the claim that one should only hate the sin, but love good for the sinner. Ibrāhīm Ad'ham (d. 782) recalls during his travels that he overheard a pair of ascetics discussing the love of God amongst themselves. Intrigued, he interjects himself into the conversation

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[210] Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 21:158 (author's translation).
[211] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London : Kegan Paul International, 1994), 27-34.
[212] Harry S. Neale, *Jihad in Premodern Sufi Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 48.
[213] Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Imān*, 13:467 #10627 (author's translation).
[214] Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Iṣbahānī Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā'* (Miṣr: Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, 1974), 3:18 (author's translation).

to ask how anyone who truly loves God could be compassionate with those who disobey God. The unnamed ascetic turns to him to say:

> They abhor their sinful deeds and have compassion for them, that by their preaching they might leave their deeds. They feel pity that their bodies might be burned in hellfire. The believer is not truly a believer until he is pleased for people to have what is pleasing to himself.[215]

The pair of men then leave, only to never be seen by Ibrāhīm again. Though in most cases divine wisdom is usually attributed to a known figure, a prophet or a sage, here the wisdom came from two pious strangers. It was the truth in the statement itself, not the authority of the one who said it, which made it worth writing down.

4c. Sufi traditions

A genre of literature appeared in early Islamic history that was devoted primarily to piety, spirituality, and ethics. ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797) was a pioneering figure in this regard with his composition of *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, ‘the Book of Asceticism.’ Asceticism, or temperance, in this context refers to a broad spectrum of virtues taught by the Prophet and early Muslims that would lay the foundation for the development of the Sufi tradition, the branch of Islam concerned with spiritual practice.[216]

Golden rule traditions are fairly common in this literature. It was noted previously that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal narrated traditions of this kind in his own compilation on asceticism, even though he was most famous for his contribution to the development of Islamic law. Ibn al-Mubārak similarly narrated that Mu’ādh ibn Jabal (d. 639) exhorted his companions, “A servant will not reach the peaks of faith until humility is more beloved to him than nobility, less in the world is more beloved to him than plenty, and it is the same whether he is loved or hated for the truth, judging for people as he judges for himself and his

[215] Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’,* 8:25 (author’s translation).
[216] Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunni Scholasticism: ‘Abdallah B. Al-Mubarak and the Formation of Sunni Identity in the Second Islamic Century* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 3.

household."[217] Judging according to the golden rule is, in this instance, associated with a humble otherworldly manner of living.

Aside from specifically ascetic literature, the history books often absorbed wisdom-sayings within their narratives. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Būshanjī (d. 959) was one such mystic from Khorasan. He was reportedly asked about his view of the peculiar Sufi concept of "chivalry" (*al-futuwwah*). Citing a Qur'ānic verse about altruism and a golden rule tradition as his inspiration, he asserts, "It means to love what is good, and to hate for his brother what he hates for himself. Whoever combines these two traits will be chivalrous."[218] All of Sufi virtues relating to honourable behaviour with other people, in al-Būshanjī's estimation, could be extracted from the golden rule.

It seems likely that Al-Būshanjī's interpretation of chivalry would influence the views of 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), another Sufi scholar from Khorasan. Al-Qushayrī was a prominent author of works in different fields, including Qur'ānic exegesis, in which he synthesised the views of Sufis with conventional Sunni creed and practices. His most famous work is his Epistle on Sufism, *Al-Risālah*, which has functioned as a popular textbook of Sufism until the present day, nearly a thousand years later.[219] Regarding chivalry, Al-Qushayrī writes that "the basis of chivalry is that the servant is forever [concerned] with the matter of others."[220] Like altruism in other Islamic traditions, Sufi chivalry is to care for others in a way that prefers them above one's own self. As put by another early Sufi quoted in the Epistle, "Chivalry is that you do not see yourself favoured over another besides you."[221] Al-Qushayrī locates the origins of these teachings in Ḥadīth traditions such as, "God continues to fulfil the needs of the servant as long as he fulfils the needs of his brother."[222] The principle of reciprocity operates here in relation to the divine:

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[217] 'Abd Allāh ibn Al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd, wa-Yalīhi Kitāb al-Raqā'iq* (Bayrūt: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1980), 2:52 (author's translation).
[218] Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 41:216 (author's translation).
[219] 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin Qushayrī, Alexander D. Knysh, and Muhammad S. Eissa. *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism: Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-Tasawwuf* (Reading, UK: Garnet Pub, 2007), xxiv.
[220] 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin Qushayrī, *Al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyah* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1995), 2:380 (author's translation).
[221] Ibid., 2:380 (author's translation).
[222] Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 5:118 #4801 (author's translation).

God only helps those who help others, hence, treat others as you want to be treated by God. It is not simply that other people deserve equal or better treatment as compared to one's self, but also that such altruism is the only way to ensure advancement on the path of one's spiritual journey towards God.

Al-Ḥārith al-Muhāsibī (d. 857) was another mystic who laid much of the groundwork that later Sufis would follow, especially his development of what would become the concept of "purification of the soul" (*tazkīyat al-nafs*).[223] As such, Al-Muhāsibī expounds on numerous Sufi virtues implicitly related to the golden rule, while sometimes referring to the rule directly. In discussing the reality of good will, he claims, "There is nothing better to encompass truth and justice, and nothing more pleasing to the elite and common folk, than that you love for people what you love for yourself and hate for people what you hate for yourself."[224] He clearly accepts the summarising function of the golden rule as a fundamental principle of Sufism. The same can be inferred in another place where he writes in condemnation of self-pride and arrogance, that a proud person is "unable to love for people what he loves for himself while within him is pride."[225] The passage is distinctly rhetorical in that he lists a number of virtues that a proud person is unable to fulfil, repeating at the end of each assertion, "while within him is pride." The golden rule, moreover, was the first of these neglected virtues. Therefore, we can assume it is the most important of which an arrogant person fails to accomplish. Al-Muhāsibī's ideas gained significant traction later on due to his influence on Al-Ghazzālī,[226] who in his magnum opus often cites Al-Muhāsibī directly and, in one instance, repeats his rhetorical condemnation of self-pride almost word-for-word.[227]

It should be appreciated that law, theology, and spiritual ethics, while separate Islamic disciplines, inevitably overlap in religious discourse. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah was one such prolific author who had a talent for combining all three subjects into books and treatises that are still popular to this day. In one major

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[223] Gavin N. PIcken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of Al-Muḥāsibī* (Oxon [England: Routledge, 2011), 123.
[224] Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, 1984), 125 (author's translation).
[225] Ibid., 105 (author's translation).
[226] Influential jurist, ethicist, theologian, and mystic (d. 1111). Introduced in section 1b., p. 9.
[227] Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 3:344 (author's translation).

work, he discusses the Sufi spiritual station, or rank, of "tranquillity" (*al-sakīnah*) when one holds the soul to account. It consists of being kind to the creation and maintaining awareness of the divine truth; that is, to set things right between one's self, God, and the creation. This rank "is that over which hover the people of Sufism (*ahl al-taṣawwuf*)." A key component of this rank is kindness to creation, which he describes as "dealing with them in a way he would love to be treated kindly by them, and not treating them harshly, strictly, or roughly, for that would alienate them from him, estrange them, and corrupt his heart and his relationship with God."[228] The golden rule, in this context, is the realization of an important step along the Sufi path, without which one cannot progress.

4d. Shi'ite traditions

The Ḥadīth traditions narrated in Shi'ite books are, for many Sunnis, suspect by default and, at worst, lies against God and His Prophet. Shi'ite traditions include much material claiming the divine Imamate, or office of leadership, for 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his perceived successors, which is an anathema to Sunnis who believe the Caliphate was rightly passed onto Abū Bakr.[229] Despite this intractable difference, however, Shi'ite traditions often overlap with Sunnis when it comes to ethics and spirituality. The golden rule is one such instance of this overlap.

Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 941) is the chief narrator of Shi'ite traditions, whose credibility among Shi'ites is analogous to the way Al-Bukharī is viewed by Sunnis. Al-Kulaynī, in organising traditions related to faith and unbelief, includes a chapter devoted to "fairness and justice." In one incident, an Arab man comes to the Prophet while he was on his way to a battle, asking for a deed that will admit him into Paradise. The Prophet responds, "However you love for people to treat you, treat them so, and however you hate for people to treat you, do not treat them so."[230] That the Prophet declares the golden rule

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[228] Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij al-Sālikīn Bayna Manāzil Īyāka Na'budu wa Īyāka Nasta'īn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1996), 2:478 (author's translation).
[229] The first of the four Sunni "Righteous Caliphs" (d. 634). Introduced in section 2, p. 22.
[230] Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Aḍwā', 2010), 2:153 (author's translation).

while heading into a battle might seem contradictory, but not so when considered through the eyes of a victim of aggression. Any victim wishes that someone would come save them, and they are considered more deserving of compassion until their oppressor is reigned in.

In the same chapter, the Imām Abū ‘Abd Allāh relates a *ḥadīth qudsī* (a quote attributed to God but not the Qur’ān) about when God created Adam and revealed to him four wisdom-sayings, under which fall all other wisdom: a saying for God, for humankind, for God and the individual, and for the individual and his fellow creatures. God tells Adam to worship God alone and avoid idolatry (a saying for God), to know his deeds will be rewarded (a saying for humankind), to know his prayers will be answered (a saying for God and the individual), and finally (a saying for the individual and his community), “As for what is between you and people, it is that you are pleased for people to have what pleases yourself and to hate for them what you hate for yourself.”[231] Like many instances in Sunni literature, the summarising effect of the golden rule appears in both its positive and negative formulations, an important area of agreement between Sunnism and Shi’ism. It is unclear from this particular text whether this is referring to Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī (d. 680) or Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), since both men carry the nickname (*kunyah*) “Abū ‘Abd Allāh.” However, it seems the story is likely attributed to Ja’far as the sub-narrator Ya’qūb ibn Shu’ayb is considered to be his contemporary.[232]

To be sure, Sunnis did not always discard Shi’ite traditions wholesale. ‘Alī al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (d. 1567), for example, records a long sermon attributed to ‘Alī that includes the exhortation:

> Make yourself a scale between you and others. Love for those besides you what you love for yourself and hate for them what you hate for yourself. Do not wrong others, as you would love not to be wronged. Be good to others, as you would love to be treated well.[233]

[231] Ibid., 2:154 (author’s translation).
[232] Abū al-Qāsim ibn ‘Alī Akbar Khū’ī, *Mu‘jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth wa Tafṣīl Ṭabaqāt al-Ruwāh* ([Najāf]: Maktabat al-Imām al- Khū’ī, 1992), 21:149 #13758.
[233] ‘Alī ibn ’Abd al-Malik Muttaqī, *Kanz al-’Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wal-Af‘āl* (Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1981), 16:172 (author’s translation).

The imagery of the scale evokes a sense of justice alongside an eloquent statement of the golden rule; the rule itself is the measure of justice. The origin of this sermon, and its golden rule, is a Shi'ite text of 'Alī's sermons and wisdom-sayings entitled *Nahj al-Balāghah* ("the Peak of Eloquence"). However, it was included within the Sunni compilation of wisdom-sayings entitled *Kanz al-'Ummāl*.

The *Nahj al-Balāghah* itself was also subject to analysis by Sunni scholars. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 1258), a Shāfi'ī jurist with rationalist theological leanings, was best known for his attempt to distinguish what he perceived to be true or false in the *Nahj*. One particular remark on the golden rule stands out. In explanation of 'Alī's imagery of the scale, he offers a surprising anecdote, "One of the captives said to a slave-owner, 'Deal with me as you would love to be dealt with by God,' so he freed him."[234] The golden rule then becomes a rationale for freeing slaves. If you were a slave, would you not want to be free?

The *Nahj* continued to interest Sunni scholars, particularly in the last century with a commentary published by Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), the late Grand Mufti of Egypt.[235] A proper analysis of Shi'ite golden rule traditions and their relevant literature would require an in-depth investigation beyond the scope of the present study.

4e. Isrā'īlīyāt traditions

Stories that have their origin in Jewish or Christian traditions are known to Muslims as *Isrā'īlīyāt*, or Israelite traditions. The early Muslims, including some in the first and second generations, would relate stories about Israelite prophets or characters that they had not learned from nor attributed directly to the Prophet. These traditions, some of which were viewed by later scholars as spurious or problematic, were nevertheless relied upon quite liberally by exegetes to embellish details where the Qur'ān was silent.[236] In spite of their

[234] 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Hibat Allāh ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* (Qāhirah: 'Īsá al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964), 16:84 (author's translation).
[235] Muḥammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Sharīf al-Raḍī. *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Bayrūt: Dār Balāghah, 1985).
[236] Kamali, *A Textbook of Ḥadīth Studies*, 72-74.

doubtful nature, sharing Israelite stories seems to have been a precedent set by the Prophet himself, "Narrate from the children of Israel, for there is no harm."[237] It is said that the Prophet would narrate Israelite stories all night until the morning, "He would not stand [and stop narrating] but for greatness of prayer."[238] Accordingly, jurists such as Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī[239] mitigated this broad permission by restricting it only to narrations known not to be false.[240]

The spiritual literature portrays some of the early Muslims as eager to uncover wisdom in the previous divine scriptures, wisdom often related to the golden rule and its virtues. 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 713) reports wisdom-sayings that he must have heard from Jewish sources, "It has reached me that it is written in the Torah: Gentleness is the head of wisdom,"[241] and again, "It has reached me that it is written in the Torah: As you show mercy, you will receive mercy."[242] It was put differently by Mālik ibn Dinār (d. 748), "It is written in the Torah: As you judge you shall be judged, as you reap you shall sow."[243] This is, again, the pithy statement of a golden rule formulation discussed earlier, you will be treated by God as you treat others. A Ḥadīth tradition of questionable authenticity, reported by Al-Daylamī (d. 1115), ascribes this particular saying to the Gospel, not the Torah, and adds, "By the measure with which you measure you shall be measured."[244] The transactional imagery again expresses the golden rule in terms of weights and scales, suggesting a theme of justice.

It has been suggested by some early Muslims that the essence of all divine revelations are summed up by the golden rule. Ṭawūs ibn Kaysān (d. 723) once asked a companion of his if he would like for him to summarise all of the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Qur'ān – the entire canon of Abrahamic faiths – in a single sitting. When his companion eagerly accepted, Ṭawūs replied,

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[237] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:170 #3461 (author's translation).
[238] Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3:322 #3663 (author's translation).
[239] Founding jurist of the school that bears his name (d. 820). Introduced in section 2, p. 13.
[240] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 6:499 (author's translation).
[241] 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Shaybah, *Al-Muṣannaf* (al-Riyādh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2004), 5:209 #25308 (author's translation).
[242] Ibid., 5:215 #25365 (author's translation).
[243] Muḥammad ibn Idrīs Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Al-Zuhd* (al-Riyāḍ: Dār Aṭlas, 2000), 1:67 #76 (author's translation).
[244] Shīrawayh ibn Shahradār Daylamī, *Al-Firdaws bi Ma'thūr al-Khiṭāb* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1986), 4:124 #6386 (author's translation).

"Fear God Almighty more than anything else, hope in God more intensely than you fear him, and love for people what you love for yourself."[245] Ṭawūs, like Jesus of Nazareth, acknowledges that true religion at its core involves faithfulness to its two dimensions – the vertical God-centred dimension and the horizontal human-centred dimension. When it comes to behaviour with our fellow human beings, the teachings of all divine religions throughout history are encapsulated by the golden rule.

Early Muslims likewise found inspiration in stories of Biblical characters that they probably heard from Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.728), a second generation scholar famous for his knowledge and piety, said, "Moses (ṣ) asked his Lord about what encompasses all goodness, so God said, 'Be a companion to people as you would love for them to accompany you.'"[246] Another tradition of Ḥasan apocryphally ascribed to Moses quotes God as saying, "Be merciful to the young as you would be merciful to your own child."[247] In these traditions, we are reminded of the encompassing nature of the golden rule, but now in relation to companionship, or friendship, as well as parenting and communal relations. Be a good friend as you would like your friends to be good to you; be good to every child as if he or she were your own.

The character of David is known in Islamic tradition for being a righteous prophet and king, an epitome of wisdom and leadership. The Qur'ān retells the story of his miraculous victory over Goliath, his gift of sound judgment, his penchant for repentance, and it lists him, alongside other prophets, as "those who do good."[248] Naturally, traditions attributed to him often deal with themes of justice and judgment. In one story, God tells him ten things he must do in order to avoid backbiting and envy. David feels he is unable to do three of them, so instead he asks about the seven types of people most beloved to God. The first of these is "a ruler who has mercy on people and judges people the way he judges himself."[249] Being a ruler himself, it is the type of advice one might expect God to give David; the golden rule tailored to the duties of leadership.

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[245] Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 4:10 (author's translation).
[246] Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Imān*, 13:465 #10622 (author's translation).
[247] Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 6:37 (author's translation).
[248] Sūrat al-An'ām 6:84; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 139.
[249] Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd,* 1:161 #471 (author's translation).

Unsurprisingly, Jesus frequently makes an appearance in the spiritual literature, with his character usually functioning as a means of passing along ascetic wisdom.[250] One particular saying of his expresses the golden rule again in the context of a humble, otherworldly life:

> O son of Adam, be disinterested in what people own and they will love you. Be content with what God has apportioned for you and you will be the richest of people. Love for people what you love for yourself and you will be a believer. Do not harm your neighbour and you will be a Muslim. Do not laugh too much, as it will deaden the heart.[251]

The impression one has after examining this literature is that at least some of the earliest Muslims closest to the Prophet, in their ambition to absorb wisdom from any source, recognised common truths among the Abrahamic faiths and specifically in the principle of the golden rule and its virtues. Revisiting these apocryphal sayings in greater detail could potentially prove fruitful in developing better interfaith appreciation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

4f. Legal traditions

The vast legal literature of Islam is distinct from spiritual literature in its focus on measureable, quantifiable actions. In contrast, spiritual literature often focuses on qualitative concepts like “justice” and “love,” which cannot be measured in the same manner as, for example, four units of ritual prayer. Consequently, it is uncommon to find a jurist referring to the golden rule in writings with a specific emphasis on law; though as an ethical principle, it certainly animated the intellectual activities of the jurists from behind the scenes.

Al-Shāfi’ī was known for his impressive skills of debate against leaders of competing theological and legal schools. The key to his success, as expressed by him in a later biography, is this, “I never debated anyone and loved for him to be wrong. There is no knowledge in my heart but that I wish everyone would

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[250] Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 32.
[251] Ibn ’Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 47:439 (author’s translation).

know it and attribute none of it to me."[252] The golden rule here works as the criteria for one's intention in debating others. One should desire nothing but the truth and that one's opponent be led to it and benefitted by it, not merely to defeat them in the public square. Al-Ghazzālī, himself an accomplished jurist, was influenced by Al-Shāfi'ī's example and cited this particular statement of his when drawing up the rules of debate. Al-Ghazzālī condemns the evil of polemical debates, as it leads to rejoicing at the failure of others in contradiction to the golden rule, "For whoever does not love for his Muslim brother what he loves for himself is far away from the character of the believers."[253]

Upholding a good intention towards intellectual opponents was not an aberration limited to Al-Shāfi'ī, either. Ḥātim al-'Aṣm (d. 852), a gifted scholar of the third generation, declared, "I have three traits that give me an advantage over my adversary… I rejoice when he is correct, I am saddened when he is wrong, and I guard myself from insulting him." When news of Ḥātim's altruistic attitude reached the founding jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, he said, "Glory be to God! How smart is he!"[254] The characteristic to be admired in scholars such as Al-Shāfi'ī, Ḥātim, and Aḥmad was their benevolent stance towards the opposite side, for they sincerely wanted others to be saved even at the expense of a humiliating public defeat.

The golden rule sometimes makes an appearance in the genre of independent legal opinions (*fatāwá*), or responsa, particularly when scholars are known to weave together their understanding of law with theology, ethics, and spirituality. Ibn Taymīyah[255] was one such scholar whose works in a number of Islamic disciplines have been recognised as original contributions in their respective fields.[256] Celebrated as the "Shaykh of Islam" or denounced as an extremist, depending upon who you ask, Ibn Taymīyah wrote many legal opinions that

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[252] 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Ādāb al-Shāfi'ī wa Manāqibuh* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2002), 1:247 (author's translation).
[253] Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 1:46 (author's translation).
[254] Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām wa Akhbār Muḥaddithīhā wa Dhikr Quṭṭānihā al-'Ulamā' min ghayr Ahlihā wa Wāridīhā* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), 9:149 (author's translation).
[255] Influential jurist and theologian who had an impact on the later Salafi reform movements (d. 1328). Introduced in section 3a., p. 35.
[256] Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19.

were often intertwined with moral and theological subjects. In the great compendium of his legal opinions, Ibn Taymīyah frequently cites the golden rule tradition of Anas, usually alongside a number of other scriptural citations, to support a variety of arguments.[257] In terms of theology, he asserts that lack of adherence to the golden rule is an example of faith that is deficient and failing in its obligatory elements.[258] This is part of a broader theological point he continues to make that "faith" is not the same as "Islam," as God in the Qur'ān promises heaven to "the believers" and not to "the Muslims."[259] The golden rule is "part of the realities of faith by which it is qualified, so whoever is not characterised by them is not among the true believers."[260] As a matter of ethics expressed in legal terms, the golden rule is a "right" that the believers have over one another.[261] In this example, the golden rule is a matter of "law" in the sense that it is believed to be God's divine command, yet it is not the type of law that can be enforced by an earthly court, because the subtleties of the human soul cannot be quantified in a legal manner.[262] We would better classify it as an ethical principle, not strictly "legal," but one that still informed many of Ibn Taymīyah's juristic opinions. Unlike the rights of life and property, there is no enforcement mechanism against a person who does not love others as themselves, aside from God's judgment in the afterlife.

Ibn Taymīyah also utilises the pithy maxim, "As you judge, so shall you be judged." The discussion turns to the essential meaning of "emigration" (*al-hijrah*), which he defines as emigrating away from "sin and its people." Emigration is, in its essence, a lifestyle change and not necessarily an actual physical journey. As an example, he brings up the Qur'ānic prohibition of believers marrying adulterers, writing:

> For the recompense is of the same kind of deed, as you judge you shall be judged and the punishment of an evil deed is an evil deed

[257] Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwà* (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1995), 3:419, 7:12, 7:161, 7:245, 7:257, 10:128, 10:758, 22:251, 28:14.
[258] Ibid., 7:41, 7:305 (author's translation).
[259] Ibid., 7:347 (author's translation).
[260] Ibid., 7:427 (author's translation).
[261] Ibid., 11:93, 11:101, 35:94 (author's translation).
[262] For an overview of the problems involved in classifying the entire Islamic legal tradition as "law," see A. Kevin Reinhart's essay "Law" in Elias, Jamal J. (ed.), *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 220-244.

> thereafter. Indeed, if a man is pleased to marry an adulteress, he is pleased for his wife to commit adultery. God Almighty has placed between spouses affection and mercy, such that one of them loves for themselves what they love for the other, so if the wife marries an adulterer she is pleased with his deed.[263]

The pithy maxim is here explicitly connected to the golden rule. Spouses generally apply it between themselves. Indeed, it is part of the love and mercy God ordained in marriage. However, an interesting point in this passage is that the principle of reciprocity can have an insidious, subversive manifestation; one who is entirely satisfied for themselves to commit sin will be satisfied, or at least indifferent, when others commit the same sin.

Another prominent jurist of the same period, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1355), touches on the golden rule in his own legal responsa, albeit because it incidentally happened to be a detail in the original question. Al-Subkī is asked about an unusual ritual being popularly practiced in his times involving, among other things, the recitation of Qur'ānic verses out of context. At some point, one of the gatherers in this ritual stands up to exhort his companions to enjoin good and follow the golden rule. Al-Subkī rules that some parts of the affair are "without a doubt" an unlawful "innovation" (*bid'ah*), which is to say it is considered an unauthorised change to the religion of Islam. Other parts of the ritual are neutral, neither good nor bad. However, the golden rule is one part of the discourse that is itself entirely correct, "As for what it contains, besides that [innovation], of enjoining good, forbidding evil, following the purified law, and hating for another what he hates for himself and hates for himself what he hates for another, all of it is good."[264] It was not the golden rule that made the strange ritual objectionable, but rather it was one of its few redeeming factors. Al-Subkī's response is further evidence that, while the golden rule is largely absent from purely legal writing, it tends to exist in the background of a jurist's mind and will occasionally appear when ethics and spirituality overlap with the law.

[263] Ibid., 15:319 (author's translation).
[264] Taqī al-Dīn 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Kāfī Subkī, *Fatāwá al-Subkī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1980), 2:548-550 (author's translation).

5. The Golden Rule in Modern Islam

5a. Modern commentaries and interpretations

As we have seen during the classical period, the continuing trend has been towards universalising the golden rule to include non-Muslims within the "brotherhood" of humanity. The broad language of ethical concepts in the Qur'ān and the inclusive language of many golden rule statements in the Ḥadīth traditions provide a strong case for a universal Islamic golden rule. It may also be that increased contact between cultures through modernization, and later globalization, has accentuated the need for extending the moral edifice of Islam's golden rule to all humanity. In this regard, a hard distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims becomes tenuous when Muslims are interacting with non-Muslims more regularly in developing pluralistic societies.

Modern commentators on the Ḥadīth traditions tend to accept the idea of universal human brotherhood in principle, albeit within the boundaries of the missionary imperative to spread Islam. Muḥammad Ḥamzah al-Qāsim was a top-level graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah (*Madrasat al-'Ulūm al-Shar'īyah*) in Medina, Saudi Arabia. He was well-known for giving religious lessons in the Islamic holy city. Al-Qāsim wrote a commentary on an abridged version of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the most authoritative book of Sunni Ḥadīth, in which he compared interpretations between the four orthodox legal schools and with an aim to express the opinions of the scholarly majority.[265] On the golden rule tradition of Anas analysed previously in section 3a, Al-Qāsim is explicit in sayings that "his brother" refers to "his brother in humanity," as opposed to brother in Islam. Citing Ibn al-'Imād (d. 1679), he essentially repeats the verbiage of universal brotherhood offered by Al-Nawawī and Al-Haythamī, while adding his own connection to the broader narrative of the prophetic biography:

> The Prophet (ṣ) had called the unbelievers of the Quraysh [tribe] to goodness and he loved it for them. He would say, 'O God, guide my people for they do not know,' which confirms that the meaning is to love good for all people; there is no difference between a Muslim and an unbeliever.[266]

[265] Muḥammad Ḥamzah Qāsim, *Manār al-Qārī: Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Dimashq: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, 1990), 1:4.
[266] Ibid., 1:91 (author's translation).

To him, true faith is realised by compassion (*al-ʻāṭifah*) for unbelievers, which, in addition to the missionary imperative, also means to love permissible things (*mubāḥat*) such as safety, security, and comfortable living. This interpretation of Islam's golden rule expresses perhaps its fullest potential to function as a means of harmonious interfaith relations. The missionary imperative and desire for non-Muslims to be granted salvation in Islam remains operative, of course, but it need not be an obstacle to wishing good for non-Muslims in worldly terms as well. Al-Qāsim's interpretation of the golden rule is about as expansive as it can be within the confines of the orthodox missionary imperative.

An important development in modern Islamic thinking has been a greater reliance on personal moral reasoning for guidance. Reason and conscience are both necessary for the application of the golden rule in a universal context. Some traditionalist Muslim scholars have appreciated the role of reason and conscience in moral deliberation, even if they did not explicitly engage in the classic debate over philosophical ethics. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī (d. 1956) was a prolific scholar with particular influence in Saudi Arabia. In one of his works, Al-Sa'dī compiled what he deemed to be the most concise Ḥadīth traditions and provided his own brief commentary on each. The way he approached the golden rule in this work indicates that he supported, or at least sympathised with, a universal interpretation of brotherhood. Instead of selecting the narration of Anas, he instead chose the narration of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr, previously analysed in section 3c, with its reference to "people" instead of "brother." It is quite an interesting decision given that Anas' tradition is much more famous and subject to greater commentary. Perhaps, Al-Sa'dī intended to leverage the inclusive language of ʿAbd Allāh's tradition itself without getting derailed by discussing the meaning of "brother." Al-Sa'dī affirms that the golden rule means to "be good with people," without any indication that he is restricting the meaning of "people" to refer to Muslim believers only. He then encourages his readers to exercise their personal moral reasoning in tandem with the golden rule, "For every vague matter in which you deal with people, ask yourself: would love for them to deal with you in this manner or not?"[267] Al-Sa'dī here seems to

[267] 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir Sa'dī, *Bahjat Qulūb al-Abrār wa Qurrat 'Uyūn al-Akhyār fī Sharḥ Jawāmi' al-Akhbār* (al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2002), 1:206 (author's translation).

assign a role for golden rule reasoning and conscience in moral decision-making. To do so has important metaphysical implications for universal human rights, as will be discussed in a following section. However, it is likely that he did not view reason or conscience as absolutes in any sense, as he recommends their use regarding "vague matters," which implies golden rule reasoning might not apply to the sort of decisive issues in Islamic law.

It should be noted that Al-Qāsim and Al-Sa'dī, as religious scholars in Saudi Arabia, lived in a fairly homogeneous and conservative Muslim society. It is unlikely that they adopted the universal position under the pressure of modernization or pluralism. Other influential religious voices in Saudi Arabia found the proposition of universal brotherhood unacceptable. The late Grand Mufti 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz (d. 1999) was direct in arguing that an unbeliever is not a Muslim's brother. Ibn Bāz prohibited love and friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims, and he even encouraged Muslims to hate them for the sake of God. By "hate" he did not necessarily mean malice, per se; he is clear in saying that he does not allow a Muslim to harm or deceive a non-Muslim, as long as they are not fighting against Islam. He encourages Muslims to be good to their non-Muslim neighbours and to invite them to Islam with patience. On the basis of Ibn Bāz's interpretation, English-language commentator Jamaal Zarabozo (b. 1960) argues that it is not an obligation for a Muslim to apply the golden rule to non-Muslims, "Therefore, this hadith does not imply that to be a true believer one must love for non-Muslims what he loves for himself – with the possible exception of wanting them to embrace Islam. However, this hadith does apply to all other Muslims."[268] In taking this position, Ibn Bāz and Zarabozo apparently abandon the obligation or recommendation by other scholars to apply the golden rule with non-Muslims in permissible worldly matters.

On this issue, Ibn Bāz and Zarabozo are taking direction from the controversial movement led by Muslim reformer Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), an ultra-conservative strain of thought originating in Saudi Arabia, sometimes pejoratively referred to as "Wahhabism." Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's reform

[268] Jamaal D. M. Zarabozo, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of Al-Nawawi* (Denver, CO: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2008), 1:502.

movement was exclusivist from its inception. He preached that Muslim communities around him had fallen into idolatry (*al-shirk*) and, therefore, adherents to his reform movement were required to create sharp distinctions between themselves and non-conforming Muslims, as well as non-Muslims at large. He was cautious not to declare any individual Muslim to be an unbeliever (which itself was an implied death sentence under the classical apostasy law), although he and his followers were less careful about excommunicating entire groups and geographical areas from Islam.[269] Ibn Bāz and Zarabozo, as proponents of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s movement, replicate his sharp distinctions in their restrictive interpretation of the golden rule. While their views are more nuanced than many Wahhabi detractors claim, their rejection of at least some level of universal brotherhood is a problematic challenge to the ontological premise of modern universal human rights.

Arabic-speaking Muslims in the classical period did not attach a label to the ethics of reciprocity, simply referring to it as the Prophet’s Ḥadīth or his teachings. In modern English-language publications, it is not uncommon for Muslims to refer to the ethics of reciprocity as “the Golden Rule.” The use of the term originated in 17th century sermons by Anglican ministers such as George Boraston.[270] The equivalent Arabic phrase, *al-qā’idah al-dhahabīyah*, was used by classical jurist Ibn Rajab[271] to denote the legal maxim of “do no harm.”[272] As a jurist, this was a logical designation due to the ubiquity of this maxim in Islamic legal thinking, although the maxim itself is not far removed from the premise of the golden rule.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1952) was an Indian Muslim and Dean of the Islamic College at Lahore, most famous for his English translation and commentary of Qur’ān. In his exegesis of the verse condemning those who “deal in fraud,” like

[269] Abdulaziz H. Al-Fahad, “From Exclusivism to Accommodation: Doctrinal and Legal Evolution of Wahhabism,” in *Wahhabism: Doctrine and Development* edited by Esther Peskes (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2016), 2:112.
[270] George Boraston, *The Royal Law, Or, the Golden Rule of Justice and Charity: A Sermon at the Anniversary Meeting of the Gentlemen, Inhabitants of London, and Others, Born Within the County of Worcester, at St. Lawrence Church, Nov. 29. 1683* (London: Printed by Walter Kettilby, 1684), 1.
[271] Influential exegete, commentator, and jurist (d. 1393). Introduced in section 2, p. 24.
[272] ’Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad ibn Rajab, *Al-Qā’idah al-Dhahabīyah: Lā Ḍarar wa Lā Ḍirār* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1990), 1 (author’s translation).

Al-Rāzī[273] he notices the implied ethics of reciprocity. This is "a statement of the Golden Rule," he declares, but he considers the verse to go beyond mere equality, "You must give in full what is due from you, whether you expect or wish to receive full consideration from the other side or not."[274] Like many classical commentators before him, Ali links the golden rule with the concept of altruism, that is, to give others preference. In a similar manner, Asad Tarsin's guide for the newly converted claims the tradition of Anas is "the golden rule Muslims learn as children but struggle with all their lives."[275] Tarsin's guide was endorsed by the influential American Muslim scholar Hamza Yusuf, currently the president and co-founder of Zaytuna College, the first accredited Muslim undergraduate college in the United States. These scholars' use of the term "golden rule" may serve to connect themselves better to English-speaking audiences, or it may simply be useful, as it was to Anglican ministers, to apply a pithy label to an important religious precept. The "Golden Rule" as a specific term, from this perspective, does not seem to be the exclusive property of any particular religious tradition, despite its origins in Anglicanism.

Interestingly, the influence of English-speaking Muslims, or perhaps the West more generally, has brought the term into use in Arabic-speaking publications. Khalīfah Muḥammad al-Zaʿābī is an international trainer in business management at the Al-Khalifa Social Development & Management Centre, whose clients include a number of government agencies in the United Arab Emirates and elsewhere. Al-Zaʿābī wrote a book to help Muslims bring their business practices in line with the "path [or law] of God" (*shar' Allāh*), while simultaneously achieving worldly success. Explicating the meaning of "karma" in business (incidentally, another borrowed religious term), his book centres on the apocryphal Islamic proverb and golden rule statement previously analysed, "As you deal with others, so are you dealt with." When it comes to dealing with employees, Al-Zaʿābī encourages his readers to follow the Prophet's "golden rule" in the workplace, "For you are like a business man who loves for himself

[273] Influential exegete and philosopher (d. 1209). Introduced in section 2, p. 15.
[274] Abdullah Y. Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (Beltsville, Md: Amana Publications, 2011), 1616.
[275] Asad Tarsin and Shaykh H. Yusuf, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide* ([n.p.]: Sandala Inc, 2015), 113.

that his employees deal with him honestly, so you need to start with yourself. Even if you see people are not accustomed to it, they will learn and they will deal with you as you deal with them."[276] Dr. Adnan Ibrahim, a contemporary Muslim thinker, is another Arabic-speaking intellectual who in his sermons has referred to the Prophet's tradition as "the golden rule" (*al-qā'idah al-dhahabīyah*).[277]

The theoretical development of Islam's golden rule throughout the classical period until today has laid a hermeneutical foundation with significant ramifications for international relations in the 21st century. In the modern period, the golden rule has served as a fundamental axiom through which Muslims have engaged in dialogue with different nations and religious communities. The following sections examine the manner in which Muslims have employed the golden rule to meet contemporary challenges of interfaith dialogue and human rights.

5b. Interfaith dialogue

On September 12th 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered what became known as the "Regensburg lecture," aiming to highlight the compatibility of faith and reason. In the course of the lecture, the Pope quoted harsh criticism of Islam's founder from the 14th-century Byzantine Christian emperor, Manuel II Paleologus (d. 1425), "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."[278] The international reaction was sharp and swift, with rebukes pouring in from Muslim religious and political leaders all over the world. The Pope stopped short of offering a full-throated

[276] Khalīfah M. Za'ābī, *Kārmā al-A'māl: Kayfa Tudīr A'mālak wa-Mashrū'ak bi-Najāḥ Wifqan li-Shar' Allāh?* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Yaqīn lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2011), 100 (author's translation).
[277] Adnan Ibrahim, "Al-Qā'idah al-Dhahabīyah: ḥatta' yuḥib li akhīhi mā yuḥib li nafsihi," *Adnan Ibrahim*, accessed September 10, 2017, http://www.adnanibrahim.net/القاعدة-الذهبية-حتى-يحب-لأخيه-ما-يحب-لن/.
[278] Ian Fisher, "Vatican Says Pope Benedict Regrets Offending Muslims," *New York Times*, September 17, 2006, accessed September 10, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/world/europe/17pope.html.

apology, although he expressed regret and amended the text of his lecture with a footnote declaring his personal disagreement with Paleologus.[279]

What seemed like a serious setback in Christian-Muslim relations would give way to a positive initiative with the golden rule at its centre. On October 13th 2007, an open letter entitled *A Common Word* was issued to Pope Benedict and to worldwide Christian leaders by 138 leading Muslim scholars – including the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Oman, Bosnia, and Russia. The letter asserted that Islam and Christianity share "the twin 'golden' commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving one's neighbour."[280] The most important public reaction came a month later, known as the "Yale Response," which was signed by more than 300 Christian leaders and scholars. A response was also issued later by the Chief Rabbis of Israel at the Second Meeting of the Chief Rabbis of Israel and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Yale Response expressed encouragement at the initiative, but also acknowledged the challenge of putting the words into real practice. The next step would be "determining how God would have us fulfil the requirement that we love God and one another."[281] The uncertainty surrounding the letter is not the theory itself, but rather its application. Lofty words and ideals in *A Common Word* are welcome indeed, but a number of critics remained sceptical.

To be sure, there are serious fault lines between communities of Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other religions that are exacerbated from time to time, despite shared religious values. Religious people, after all, do not operate in a social vacuum; their actions and attitudes are informed by politics, culture, and many other factors. Exactly how the golden rule can be employed to solve crises related to human rights, religious freedom, secular governance, and social justice is an ongoing discussion with real barriers to progress. Indeed, the original letter was criticised for its lack of specifics, which prompted the authors

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[279] Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," *The Vatican*, September 12, 2006, footnote 3, accessed September 10, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.
[280] Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt lil-Fikr al-Islāmī, *A Common Word between Us and You* (Amman: The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012), 7.
[281] Attridge et al, ""A Common Word" Christian Response," *Yale Center for Faith & Culture*, accessed September 10, 2017, http://faith.yale.edu/common-word/common-word-christian-response.

to respond by saying the letter is “a first step, but one that strives to lay a solid foundation for the construction of many worthy edifices. The document cannot be expected to do everything at once.”[282] Nevertheless, the golden rule, on the basis of its interfaith commonality and utility, has been directly acknowledged by major political leaders, including former US President Barack Obama, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan, as an important foundation for developing humanitarian solutions to the world’s most pressing problems.[283]

5c. Universal human rights

Sociologist Joyce Oramel Hertzler wrote in the early 20th century, before issuance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), that the ethics of reciprocity was not the property of any particular religion or social class. Instead, it was “a universal behaviour policy.” Hertzler called for the golden rule to operate as “an actual working philosophy” in the modern world. As societies develop, more and more people are affected by the behaviour of others. Norms and laws, she insists, always lag behind the requirements of society at any given time. Hence, we are in need of a principle that can determine socially appropriate conduct before new norms or laws are standardised. In other words, we need a principle to govern behaviour in new, unexperienced social situations. The golden rule properly understood, Hertzler claims, is capable of serving as this universal principle.[284]

About a decade later, Hertzler’s call would be answered in the form of the UDHR. The golden rule is implied as the metaphysical premise for universal human rights when the UDHR declares, in Article 1, that human beings “are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”[285] According to Johannes Morsink, mention of reason and

[282] Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (eds.), *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010), 177.
[283] Ibid., ix-xi.
[284] Hertzler, "On Golden Rules," 435.
[285] United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, accessed September 10, 2017, article #1, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.

conscience deliberately allows two complementary epistemic routes to arrive at inherent human rights. Either reasoning in the context of the golden rule supplies the framework for moral intuition, or moral intuition supplies the background for the correct application of the golden rule. In this way, the authors of the UDHR aimed for the document to resonate with laypeople across the world, rather than only legal experts.[286] Despite this approach, Morsink notes that the golden rule has serious obstacles that prevent it from acting as an instrument for the advancement of universal human rights.[287] However, many of his objections mirror criticisms of the golden rule that have been addressed by Jeffery Wattles, Harry J. Gensler, and others. The golden rule can certainly be applied in a manner inconsistent with its spirit, yet it is the rule's intuitive humanitarianism itself that is its most important feature. It is not necessarily a concept to apply literally in analytical philosophy or through a particular train of legal logic.

Islamic law scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im asserts that the wide appeal of the golden rule, or the "principle of reciprocity," can be the basis for the universal cultural legitimacy of human rights. The golden rule should be formulated in this manner, "that one should concede to the other person whatever one claims for oneself." Accordingly, "human rights are those that a person would claim for herself or himself and must therefore be conceded to all other human beings." Understood this way, golden rule-inspired human rights have the potential to develop universal standards originating from within diverse cultures, as opposed to external standards being imposed from without.[288] In fact, external standards imposed by stronger countries on weaker countries contradicts the idea of universality in the first place. An enduring international consensus on human rights needs to have broad grassroots inter-cultural support to maintain its legitimacy. To this end, the pervasiveness of the golden rule seems like a natural and perhaps the only conceptual vehicle capable of building such unanimity. However, An-Na'im concedes that a major challenge to

[286] Johannes Morsink, *Inherent Human Rights: Philosophical Roots of the Universal Declaration* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 55-56.
[287] Ibid., 113.
[288] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im and Francis M. Deng. *Human Rights in Africa: Cross-cultural Perspectives* (Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution, 1990), 366-367.

this approach is the fact that many traditions tend to restrict the golden rule to those in the in-group. Those in the out-group are denied such equal treatment. Hence, the golden rule must be understood in truly universal terms if it is to support a common definition of human rights.[289] Muslim scholars have universalised the golden rule, both in its classical and modern iterations, but as we have seen, there is not an entirely unanimous agreement on this point among contemporary Muslims worldwide. Furthermore, other real-world obstacles prevent some Muslims from buying into the idea of universal human rights. It is not simply a matter of the exegesis or interpretation of scriptural texts; history and politics play an important role.

Segments of Muslim societies, particularly the conservative *'ulamā'* (religious scholars), initially resisted the modern system of human rights because it came attached with the alien institution of constitutionalism, which originated in Western legal thinking.[290] Moreover, the UDHR was philosophically grounded in abstract moral reasoning, while the dominate current in Sunni Islam at the time was theological voluntarism, or divine-command theory – the concept that the morality of any action is declared by God alone without recourse to human reasoning or conscience. Thus, the religious discourse tended to focus more on duties owed to God instead of rights to which human beings are entitled.[291] This made Western-led initiatives on human rights appear to some Muslims as subversive to a divinely ordered society, as if it were the same historical colonialism in a new rhetorical form. Others criticised the UDHR, or Western-thinking more generally, as asymmetrically focused on rights to the neglect of duties.

'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Azzām (d. 1976), for instance, was the first Secretary General of the Arab League from 1945 to 1952. The UDHR was proclaimed in 1948 during his tenure. In his classic presentation of Islam, 'Azzām claims that duty should be the basis of equality, not rights. Society should honour a person who fulfils his or her duty, instead of those who demand their rights. Every right has

[289] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives: A Quest for Consensus* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 28.
[290] Ann E. Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2013), 47.
[291] Ibid., 45.

a corresponding duty, i.e. one person's right to property is another person's duty not to steal. Rather than denying or downplaying human rights, attention to duty necessarily involves fulfilment of the rights of others:

> For the training which focuses on duty as the goal of the refined human beings leads to a form of respect for the rights of others, which is more protective and beneficial than the employment of force in establishing and safeguarding those rights.[292]

Emphasising duty, 'Azzām maintains, is the only real way to ensure human rights are respected, "To teach what constitutes duty and to sanctify it would be to erect and immortalise the citadel of the right."[293] 'Azzām's critique raises a valid point in regards to the ethics of reciprocity. Religious traditions, and Islam specifically, usually express the golden rule as a duty towards others, not as a right to which we are entitled. Certainly, the UDHR can be interpreted as a reflection of duties and not simply rights, since rights and duties are the inverse of each other. However, the UDHR mentions the words "right" and "entitled" dozens of times while only mentioning the word "duties" once near the end, in Article 29 of 30, as if it were an after-thought. Needless to say, Muslims in the mid-20th century had a variety of reasons to be sceptical of the UDHR, even if they agreed with a number of its principles.

In an attempt to synthesise the UDHR with Islamic tradition, the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) was drafted by the majority of the member states of the UN-affiliated Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1990. It is not unusual that Muslims have sought to interpret key articles of the UDHR as consistent with divine revelation, as opposed to being based purely on reason. Unlike the UDHR, the CDHRI derives its authority from Sharī'ah law, or divine commandments. It is viewed by proponents as complementary to the UDHR, a local expression of universal human rights within a particular traditional framework. Many OIC countries are also signatories of the UDHR. CDHRI's critics, on the other hand, claim it undercuts the UDHR with its language that frequently qualifies rights-statements as

[292] 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Azzām and Caesar E. Farah, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 282.
[293] Ibid., 283.

requiring consistency with Sharī'ah law.[294] These concerns are warranted considering the fact that "Sharī'ah" as traditionally understood involves a multiplicity of legal interpretations and applications, some of which, like the death penalty for apostasy, flatly contradict the UDHR. Sharī'ah is morally understood as God's law, but put into practice it is interpreted by Muslims in many different ways. As put by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, "So what are Muslims calling for when they say they want sharī'ah as a source of legislation? The answer to this is as diverse as the Muslim community."[295] There simply is not any uniformity in the detailed legal content of Sharī'ah, despite what many may claim, which makes the CDHRI, notwithstanding its many well-intentioned declarations, a document vulnerable to abusive interpretations.

Take, for example, the modern controversy over apostasy or blasphemy laws in Muslim-majority countries with legal systems inspired by classical Islamic law. A number of countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have contemporary laws, based upon these classical prohibitions, that variously prescribe capital punishment for apostates (a Muslim who converts to another religion) or perceived blasphemers (guilty of "insulting Islam"). These laws have been used to deprive the rights of religious minorities or political dissidents, rights which are granted to them by the UDHR's freedom of thought clause in Article 18. Extrajudicial violence, from angry mobs to terrorist attacks, has also been used to suppress religious expression and practice in these countries.[296]

It is not very effective to challenge such "Islamic" human rights abuses based on the UDHR alone. Rather, a more effective approach has been put forth by contemporary Muslim scholars who use traditional Islamic legal principles to justify the repeal or mitigation of apostasy and blasphemy laws. Ṭāhā 'Alwānī's (d. 2016) argument rests upon a thorough historical and scriptural analysis of Sharī'ah sources. Classical Muslim jurists tended to view apostasy as a repudiation of the entire Muslim society and therefore as a credible political

[294] David Boersema, "Cairo Declaration of Human Rights," in *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* edited by Deen K. Chatterjee, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 99-100.
[295] John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2009), 35.
[296] Paul A. Marshall and Nina Shea, *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.

threat. ‘Alwānī asserts that the preponderance of evidence, from the Qur’ān to historical abuses of the law, support a reinterpretation, “It would be impossible for the Qur’ān to affirm human beings’ freedom of choice in more than two hundred verses, then punish those who exercise this freedom with such a stern penalty, particularly when they have done nothing to hurt anyone but themselves.”[297] Thus, the apostasy law should not apply to non-violent Muslims who convert to another religion. By working within the tradition, ‘Alwānī is able to marshal a compelling argument against human rights abuses from the same legal premises upon which those abuses are justified. Organic arguments of this kind are more potent in building grassroots Muslim support for the UDHR.

Although there is broad, inter-cultural agreement on the most basic human rights in principle (life, security, property, etc.), interpretations of the UDHR begin to diverge on sensitive issues such as gender norms, abortion rights, and assisted suicide, problems by no means resolved universally in the West or elsewhere. There is a significant potential for disparate cultural and religious interpretations of the UDHR as rapid technological advancement and social development open new frontiers of moral dilemma. To narrow the field of disagreement in the context of *A Common Word*, Nicholas Adams looks to the Peace of Westphilia of 1648, which ended the European wars of religion, as an historical model for modern times. These treaties established “minimal rules” that allowed Catholics and Protestants, once bitter enemies, to be able to live together in peace. In a similar manner, Adams calls for communities of Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others to work together to establish minimal rules for engagement in the public space, “to find ways to reason together.”[298] This is in contrast to the view of human rights as single “maximal framework” to which all traditions and localities are subordinated, a view which could potentially bestow hegemonic superiority on whatever group of powerful nations holds the dominate interpretation of the UDHR. Adams is careful to say that he does not intend to provide cover for irrational and anti-philosophical dogmatism, but rather that he encourages treating the UDHR as an articulation of minimal rules,

[297] Ṭāhā J. F. ‘Alwānī, Nancy Roberts, and Iqbal Unus, *Apostasy in Islam: A Historical and Scriptural Analysis* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011), 130.
[298] Nicholas Adams, “In Pursuit of a ‘New Secular,’” in *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of "a Common Word*," 183-184.

to be reasoned through by different communities in an ongoing engagement with their traditions and with each other.[299]

Towards this end, Islam's golden rule as a force of rational engagement on the world stage has been potent. However, the utility of the rule faces a number of challenges from traditional Islamic law in order to be relevant in the legal arena of modern human rights. Most importantly, the rule has to be acknowledged, in principle, as applying to all groups of people without distinction. Classical scholars have already laid a foundation for this thinking, although a minority of contemporary Muslims resist labelling non-Muslims as their "brother" in a universal sense. Those who reject the universalisation of the golden rule ought to be convinced otherwise.

Islamic legal methodologies also need to re-evaluate their moral epistemologies to allow greater consideration for reason and conscience – essential to the application of the golden rule – in the derivation and deliberation of civil laws. Mariam al-Attar argues that the classical Asharite doctrine of ethical voluntarism, with its devaluation of reason and conscience, has hindered the socio-political development of Muslim societies; therefore, it should be challenged. It is not Islam itself, al-Attar claims, that has stunted development, but rather it is only the result of a particular and, in her opinion, weak theological and philosophical position.[300]

The use of reason in Islamic ethics and law, while discouraged in traditional Asharite theology, was a distinguished opinion in the classical heritage. According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah,[301] there were many jurists from the four orthodox Sunni law schools who claimed that evil was known by "reason" (*al-'aql*), that "the deed in itself is good or evil."[302] In other words, reason has a place alongside revelation in this classical Islamic moral epistemology. In fact, there was a paradigm shift led by reformers in the 20th century away from ethical voluntarism and in favour of creative legal reasoning (*al-ijtihād*) based upon the "purposes of the law" (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). In this approach, scriptural

[299] Ibid., 186.
[300] Mariam Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012), xii.
[301] Influential jurist, theologian, and ethicist (d. 1350). Introduced in section 3a., p. 36.
[302] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, 1:247.

texts remain dominate in terms of ritual and creed, but in transactions (*al-mu'āmalāt*), including civil law and politics, a greater role is given to moral reasoning as a means of deriving new Islamically valid legal solutions to modern problems.[303] Within this trend, Jasser Auda argues that a *maqāṣid*-based philosophical approach to human rights can assuage the fears of CDHRI critics while simultaneously marshalling Islam's moral authority in support of consensus over the UDHR.[304] Moreover, the UDHR is already considered a source of Islamic law in some modernist trends, as the human rights document represents "rational norms" based upon human experience.[305]

By empowering reason and considering human custom as valid sources of Islamic law, efforts are being made to translate these modern legal theories into action. On January 25th 2016, hundreds of Muslim scholars and leaders from over 120 countries held a major conference in Marrakesh, Morocco, on the rights of religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries. The conference concluded with a statement, known as the "Marrakesh Declaration," which calls upon Muslim scholars and intellectuals to develop a new Islamic jurisprudence of citizenship rooted in tradition.[306] The declaration explicitly draws inspiration from *A Common Word* and the Charter of Medina, a rudimentary constitution of sorts that governed relations between Medina's Jews and Muslims during the life of the Prophet, as well as the United Nations Charter and the UDHR.

No doubt, the Marrakesh Declaration is a bold statement that has the potential to put the golden rule into concrete action. Yet more than statements are needed to realise its idealistic vision. The contractual and reciprocal nature of equal citizenship creates an opportunity for Muslim scholars to reinterpret traditional Islamic laws that restrict religious freedom. Instead of overturning tradition, tradition is applied to a new social contract, a *quid quo pro* arrangement that will ultimately benefit Muslim societies; the freedom that

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[303] David Johnston, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl Al-Fiqh," *Islamic Law and Society*, v. 11 no. 4 (2004): 233-235.
[304] Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 23.
[305] Ibid., 159-160.
[306] Marrakesh Declaration, "Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities." *Marrakesh Declaration*, accessed September 10, 2017, http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/marrakesh-declaration.html.

protects non-Muslims is the same freedom that protects Muslims. Miroslav Volf has suggested that Muslims can use golden rule reasoning along these lines to support the right of all people to peacefully witness for their faith.[307] For this initiative to succeed, however, it must get the broader Muslim public in these countries to "buy-in" to the Declaration's principles, especially in places where minority rights were historically used as a pre-text for colonial intervention.[308] In order to gain momentum beyond a circle of elites, the Declaration must be turned into a coordinated international movement that highlights the importance of minority rights in Muslim-majority countries, while fending off accusations that it is a Western-led effort to undermine Sharī'ah law.[309]

[307] Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 15.
[308] Susan Hayward, "Understanding and Extending the Marrakesh Declaration in Policy and Practice," *United States Institute of Peace*, September 2016, 1, accessed September 10, 2017, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR392-Understanding-and-Extending-the-Marrakesh-Declaration-in-Policy-and-Practice.pdf.
[309] Ibid., 7-9.

6. Conclusion

The irreversible march of globalization is producing an urgent need for people of different backgrounds and beliefs to find common ground among constantly shifting sands. As the world grows closer together, with it grows the imperative to recognise each other as members of one human family with a single planet for a home. The ethics of reciprocity – the golden rule – is the best conceptual vehicle to advance a necessary inter-cultural dialogue on international norms for the modern world.

Islam is one of the world's great religions, with over one billion followers living on every continent and speaking hundreds of languages. If peace on earth is to become a reality, Islam must be a partner in it. This study has been a critical and sympathetic examination of the golden rule in Islam's religious history exactly because it is vitally important for Muslims and others to connect with each other. Muslims need an entry point for understanding non-Muslims, just as non-Muslims need a way to begin understanding Muslims. Islam's golden rule provides for a bridge between these worlds.

A key to engaging with Muslim communities is understanding the religious narrative that has emerged over the course of this study. Over fourteen hundred years ago, Muslims believe an ordinary man, Muḥammad, had secluded himself in a cave for worship when he was encountered by the Angel Gabriel, who delivered to him the first verses of what would become the Holy Qur'ān. The verses revealed the attributes of the Almighty God, to be worshiped alongside no other, a loving and merciful God but one who gives warning of Judgment Day, when the unrepentant will answer for their sins. The believers were told to have faith and perform good deeds, to be fair at the expense of self-interest, to prefer others to themselves in charity, to forgive transgressions, and to purify their hearts of malice.

The message continued to spread across Arabia and, despite the best efforts of the aristocracy to suppress it, the Prophet returned from exile to his homeland victorious and magnanimous. The believers committed the recited verses to memory and wrote them down, while the Prophet continued to preach and teach the good word. If the faith described in the Qur'ān could be summarised

in one statement, the Prophet taught, it was to love for your brother what you love for yourself; the golden rule.

The Prophet said it in different ways, explicitly and implicitly; he conveyed it in parables and stories. His closest companions memorised his sayings and, when the Prophet died, they set out into the world to transmit the spiritual knowledge they had learned. Their students, and their students' students, passed down these wisdom-sayings by word of mouth through chains of authority until they were compiled, organised, authenticated, and preserved by scholars.

A tradition of exegesis developed around the verses and the Prophet's sayings. In their works, scholars established an interpretive structure for the golden rule that would continue to be relevant in the modern period. An unbeliever is the brother of a Muslim by virtue of their humanity, the scholars said. To love another for God's sake means to have good will for them, to truly care for them, to hate the sin but to love the sinner. Selfless love, the heart of all prophetic teachings from Adam to Muḥammad, permeated throughout genres of Islamic religious literature and even influenced the development of its laws. It was understood to be a teaching that Muslims have in common with the children of Abraham, if not the entire human family, the way of peace in this life and the next. Such is the type of narrative that Muslims *experience* regarding the golden rule, ideally if not in reality.

It is not reasonable to expect that the golden rule can solve all the conflicts of the modern world, but what it can do is activate the innate conscience of human beings in a process of collective, inter-cultural moral reasoning. By accepting at the outset the premise of human equality and the obligation of moral consistency, we can work together to discover a set of "minimal rules" required for people of different beliefs to live together in harmony. The golden rule itself is not the answer, rather it is the right question at the start; it is the first step in a journey we must take together, the first conversation in a dialogue we must have. Not everyone believes in holy books or prophets, yet everyone has a heart (conscience) and a mind (reason). At the level of heart and mind, different ways of knowing the good can meet and agree with each other. Or if they do not agree, then at least they can agree to disagree.

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