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DECONSTRUCTING PASTORAL THEOLOGY: AISHA BINT ABU BAKR AL-SIDDIQAH'S EMBODIED SPIRITUAL AGENCY THROUGH A TRAUMA-INFORMED LENS

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In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the intersections of pastoral theology, spiritual embodiment, and resilient agency in an Islamic theological framework through a phenomenological trauma-informed analysis of the life of Aisha bint Abu Bakr al-Siddiqa. Critically engaging with the concepts of *Qudra* (divine power) and *Qadir* (the all-powerful), this research deconstructs traditional narratives of pastoral theology forged in Christian hegemonic discourse. Utilizing a trauma-informed approach, I interrogate the complexity of the lived experiences of Aisha bint Abu Bakr al-Siddiqah in *"al-Ifk,"* the Hadith of Slander, as a microcosm of broader theological and psychological dynamics, demonstrating how divine attributes of power and capability can function as mechanisms of embodiment, identity, and praxis in soul-tending. This work challenges reductive interpretations of religious identity and female agency, asserting transformative *tawakkul* as a theological presupposition, reliance on God as a balance of faith and action. It presumes patience, assurance, constraint, empathy, and justice as the norm of spiritual care tools, reflected through personal experiences of vulnerability, strength, and transformation. Furthermore, Aisha's spiritual embodiment unveils transcendence from historiological limitations to transforming communities. As a contribution to broader interdisciplinary dialogues on religion, psychology, gender, and historical interpretation, it offers *Niswiyya* theology, asserting identity and praxis as a complex, adaptive mechanism of human experience.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CE	Common Era year, Anno Domini
AH	Al-Hijri, Islamic Lunar Calendar
As	Upon him be peace, honorific for the Companions of the Prophet (saw)
d.	Death date
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him, honorific for the Prophet Muhammad
ra	*Radiya Allahu Anha*, May Allah be pleased with her
ra	*Radiya Allahu Anhu*, May Allah be pleased with him

GLOSSARY

al-Ifk	False imputation
'Amal	Actions that do not refer to God
Christian Hegemonic	Religious chauvinism asserts dominant religious beliefs as normative social values and excludes all other theist or nontheist as valid expressions of tradition.
Feminist Theology	A movement that re-examines religious traditions and practices from a feminist perspective.
Feminized	The anthropomorphizing of characteristics, behaviors, or attitudes previously associated with men to women, physically and in essence.
Identity	The existential reality or the who or what of a person
Kalam	Islamic philosophy/theology: *yatakallam*, often used to connote discussion; *tatakalam*, often used to denote speaking about God.
Niswiyya Theology	A feminist movement that centers the experiences and perspectives of Muslimahs of color, addressing race, class, gender, oppression, and survival, reclaiming a sense of collective community and communal flourishing that is intentional about faith, family, and fecundity as individual and collective rights based on Qur'an and Sunnah.
Pastoral Theology	A form of practical theology that concerns itself with the human condition.
Performative Embodiment	Refers to the physical enactment of religious practices and rituals that express and reinforce Islamic faith through ministry praxis. This concept encompasses how Muslims use their bodies to manifest religious devotion, create sacred experiences, and fulfill religious obligations in service to God.
Phenomenology	The philosophical examination of experience
Practical Theology	A discipline of theological studies focused on applying religious teachings to church life and clerical praxis.

Praxis	Praxis in the theological context is to practice skills related to beliefs and duties.
Qadir	Arabic word meaning “powerful” or “capable.”
Qudra	Arabic word meaning “strength,” “ability,” or “resilience.”
Relationality	The correlation between the existence of two or more entities.
Resilient Agency	Action that requires one to understand the environment and adapt and using it to make choices to implement change.
Spiritual Care	Caregivers commit to healing praxis pilgrimage alongside care recipients in their longing for restoration, healing, or death.
Spiritual Embodiment	Mind, body, soul, spirit or *aql’* (intellect), *ruh* (spirit), *sifat* (essence), *nafs* (soul) to guide the mind and actions balancing righteous living and Islamic principles.
Taqwa	God-consciousness, piety.
Tawhid	is the foundation of Islamic theology, is the unicity of God, God is One, alone with no partners, sons, or children.
Tawakkul	means trusting and relying on God.
Trauma	is from the ancient Greek word “wound,” refers to a wounding of the mind, a soul hurt, a wound that is so powerful it alters a person’s perception of time, self, and the world.
Umm al-Mu’minun	“Mother of the Believers,” a title given to Aisha that derives from Qur’an 33:6
Umm al-Umma	“Mother of the Community” a name given to all the wives of the Prophet (SAW), specifically referring to Aisha bint Abu Bakr al-Siddiqa
Womanist Theology	A feminist movement that focuses on the experiences of women of color, inclusive of our relationship with our spouses, significant others, and the community.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'pastoral,' derived from the Greek *poimen* (shepherd), represents a terminological incongruity within Islamic discourse. This nomenclature functions normatively in Christian contexts to delineate ecclesiastical leadership and divine presence through practical theology. While shepherd imagery finds Islamic parallels, the prescriptive Christian connotations of pastoral terminology inherently exclude non-Christian theological traditions from this discursive framework and establish exclusionary boundaries that marginalize non-Christian theological systems, creating a problematic terminological hegemony that warrants critical interrogation.

Pastoral Theology is a form of practical theology concerned with human beings and the human condition. Sufferings, whether physical, psychological, or social disparities, interrogate embedded beliefs informing the need for caregivers to engage care recipients' longing for restoration, healing, and wholeness or death. Pamela Cooper-White describes this as "immersing into an open wound where caregivers commit to the healing marked by a self-perception that shapes what it means to be pastoral, other-centered, and self-sacrificing."[1] Underlying this descriptive framework for embodied agency and self-perception lies a matrix of constraints, notably pastoral theology's

[1] Pamela Cooper-White, "A Relational Understanding of Persons," in *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 35–66 pg. 35. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm8zn.5.

historical foundation as a "branch of theology based on Christian shepherding,"[2] which fundamentally contributes to the entrenchment of discursive formations regarding religious alterity. Christian hegemonic discourse constricts its epistemological scope at the intrapersonal level, positioning pastoral theology as antithetical to feminist theological perspectives. The demographic imperative for Muslim spiritual caregivers—predominantly women occupying increasingly recognized roles—necessitates a deconstruction of pastoral theological frameworks as both an equitable and epistemologically requisite intervention.

Contemporary scholars (Gillat-Ray, Ali, Pattison, Mattson, Ansari, Kholaki, Harris, Siegal, and Baig) contribute significantly to reconceptualizing pastoral frameworks within Islamic contexts. While hadith literature employs shepherding metaphors, these representations: (1) illuminate only one dimension of Islamic leadership, (2) perpetuate paternalistic constructs impeding female pastoral identity formation, and (3) undermine potential *Niswiyya* theological frameworks informing Muslimah approaches to pastoral care. Examining *Qudra* (power) as performative embodiment and *Qadir* (capacity) as spiritual agency provides evidence for effective leadership formation, particularly as traditional pastoral discourses exclude ontological considerations of survival, liberation, relationality, and transformation.

This research interrogates how pastoral frameworks engage with female epistemological standpoints, experiential narratives, and ontological concerns to enhance

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[2] Jay-Paul M. Hinds, "African American Pastoral Theology," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (University of St Andrews, 2024). https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/AfricanAmericanPastoralTheology/.

Islamic conceptualizations of embodiment and agency within spiritual care praxis. Through a phenomenological analysis of *"al-Ifk"* (the Hadith of Slander) employing trauma-informed hermeneutical methodologies, this study examines Muslim female self-perception within spiritual care contexts. I contend that symbolic pastoral claims that neglect multivocality in theological discourse fundamentally contradict interreligious dialogical imperatives essential for spiritual care identity formation. Jerusha Tanner Lamptey's transformative *taqwa*, as exemplified in the lived experience of Aisha *bint* Abu Bakr, constitutes a *Niswiyya* theological framework grounded in *tawhidic* principles where God-consciousness, ethical constraint, epistemic awareness, empathy, patience and moral virtue collectively sustain an ethic of survival through reflexive identity construction.[3]

[3] Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University, 2018).

CHAPTER 2.

DECONSTRUCTING PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Poimen, meaning shepherd, comes from the Greek verb *poimaino* which typifies the action of shepherding "feed, guide, lead whether literally or figuratively and definitely spiritually."[4] The two words relate to a herdsman or shepherd, and are used in some modes of Western scholarship as models of pastoral leadership. In her Introduction to *A History of Pastoral Care*, G. R. Evans explains that throughout the church's life, the pastor, over and against the priesthood of all believers, has been a special designation.[5] Wrestling with the extent to which 'pastoral' reflects pastoral practices, she asserts two main tasks: administering the sacrament, preaching, teaching, and educating souls, and the practical task of ensuring that orphans and widows do not go hungry. Evans posits that this role is designed for the church in a paternal motif whereby one sits at the feet of the elders or the wiser ones and listens to their advice. It is exemplified in the ministry of Jesus, "the Good Shepherd," where Jesus cares for a flock who can never rise to be

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[4] James Strong, "Poimen," *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, last updated September 2011, https://biblehub.com/strongs.htm. *Poimen* is the Greek word for shepherd, which is defined as a feeder, prophet, or ruler. One contributor asserts that it is from the root word *poinomai,* meaning to toil for. This primary use is for one who cares for a flock of sheep, literally and metaphorically, for a leader or pastor who guides the worshipping community. Thayer's definition evolves to the pastor as the control of those who have committed themselves to the management of any assembly. The vital role of the shepherd, as understood in ancient Hebrew society, is being responsible for economic and cultural sustenance, and religious consciousness. God is depicted in the Bible as the ultimate shepherd, for instance in Psalm 23. 1. Thayer, "Thayer Greek Lexicon #4165," essay, in *Bible Hub* (Bible soft Inc.,2011).

[5] G. R. Evans, *A History of Pastoral Care* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 7.

shepherds.[6] Pamela Cooper-White writes that the motif of "the Good Shepherd" draws on Christian motifs where "he lays down his life for his sheep" (John 10:11).[7] This model was adopted by those who took spiritual, ethical, and social obligations seriously and "It also participated in a paternalistic paradigm that was then common and caused pitfalls in that it presented a type of sacrificial love as a dominant mode of pastoral ministry, which can lead to the belief that one is indispensable. The needs of a caregiver go neglected, and the pastor and family suffer."[8] According to the Oxford Annotated Bible, "God calls shepherds after his heart who will give you knowledge and understanding."[9] The call motif also plays into a paternalistic mindset. Men, created in the image of God, as in Christianity, restrict and subordinate all others to his God-given dominance, intellect, and governance, particularly outlined as shepherds. Hence, the shepherd could never be a feminized designation, although the Bible records women like Rachel and Leah, who had no brothers and shepherded their father's sheep, doing the same work as a male shepherd.[10]

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[6] Evans, A History of Pastoral Care, 7–8.

[7] Pamela Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom* (Lanham: 1517 Media, 2024).

[8] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 122–123.

[9] *Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2001), Jeremiah 3:15.

[10] The biblical narrative of Rachel and Leah shepherding their father's flocks (Gen. 29:9) provides an illuminating parallel to the concept of performative agency within a monotheistic framework. This narrative presents women exercising significant responsibilities within the patriarchal structure of ancient Near Eastern society, revealing a complex interplay between divine providence and human initiative. Rachel is specifically mentioned as a shepherdess: "While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess" (Gen. 29:9). This role required considerable skill, autonomy, and responsibility—qualities that resonate with the Islamic concepts of human agency within divine sovereignty.

Historical and Theological Context

In the twelfth century, tension developed in Medieval church settings within the Christian world between the pastoral and congregational style of ministry. People experienced dominating powers who openly displayed corruption and began to question the necessity of the priestly class to have complete control. One group began to develop their standards based on biblical passages and rational thinking that seemed to support the need for multiple resources in caring for people, including women, in ministry.[11] By the sixteenth century, some religious institutions began to dismiss leaders asserting the believer's priesthood, assigning tasks to the members of the community.[12] Christian history has been consistent in associating pastoral care ministry as solely Christian while rethinking beliefs and ideologies that propose God as relational. Early philosophical ideologies also maintained that pastoral care ministry was only for Christian-ordained clergy involved in tending souls.

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[11] Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy* (Basil Blackwell: Basil Blackwell. Basil Blackwell, 1992).

[12] The priesthood of all believers is a theological concept primarily associated with Protestant Christianity, particularly during the Reformation period. This doctrine asserts that all baptized Christians participate in a form of spiritual priesthood with direct access to God, rather than requiring the mediation of an ordained clergy. According to Luther's foundational articulation of this concept: "Every baptized Christian is, by faith, a member of the universal priesthood. All believers have been given direct access to God through Christ, 'the High Priest,' and consequently do not need a special mediator. All believers are called to offer God spiritual sacrifices and proclaim his wonderful deeds." Thipa, Joseph, "The Place of the Laity in the Church under the Priesthood of All Believers," in *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity*, ed. Volker Glissmann (Luviri Press, 2021), 36, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1k76jpp.6 This theological principle challenges the traditional hierarchical ecclesiastical structure by emphasizing the spiritual equality of all believers before God while maintaining distinctions in function and service within the church community.

Scholars, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whose philosophy and critical hermeneutics provided the impetus for modern Protestant theology, also began to rethink the influence of the Enlightenment on practical theological perspectives. While he did not oppose reason and religion, he saw religion as rooted in experience, where humanity is dependent on God. Subsequently, he associated the experience of human suffering with the reasoning of human action and moral responsibility, driving one into a deeper relationship with God, still Christocentric. Infused into literature in the 1900s, the word "pastoralia" (which denotes spiritual guidance) evolved, as governing the life and conduct of the priest. Teachers designate courses to expand knowledge to practical ministry.[13] In his ground-breaking work, *Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theology of Shepherding*, Seward Hiltner (1909–1984) examines Schleiermacher's theological presuppositions on practical theology and extends the focus of pastoral inquiry on persons and their ability to travail suffering and pastoral praxis as a source of theology.[14] His approach includes: (1) defining pastoral theology as a formal branch from which stems the study of Christian shepherding, (2) a shepherding perspective whose functions are healing, sustaining, and guiding, and an attitude of tender, solicitous

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[13] According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, "Pastoralia" came to designate the corpus of instructional literature that emerged following the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), specifically aimed at educating parish clergy about their pastoral responsibilities. The term was adopted by early twentieth-century historians of medieval religion to classify these materials as a distinct genre of pastoral care and clerical education. Katherine Little, "Pastoral," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature,* Oct. 27, 2020; Accessed Mar. 27, 2025. https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-1078.

[14] Seward Hiltner, preface to *Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958).

concern. Hiltner defines pastoral theology as follows: "that branch or field of theological knowledge and inquiry that brings shepherding perspectives on all the operations and functions of the church and ministers."[15] Hiltner acknowledges the difficulty in establishing academic respectability even alongside secular counterparts; while Hiltner developed two other aspects of faith leadership—communicating and organizing—he nevertheless maintained that shepherding is the dominant perspective and did not outline a triune systematic approach. Struggling to assert clarity and gain professional standing, he asserts that if pastoral theology is to remain a viable theological discipline, then it must show an awareness and sensitivity to the modern crisis that Christians are experiencing.[16]

Karl Rahner (1904–1984), a Catholic priest and philosopher, further frames practical theology that extends to the church and engages in a scientific evaluation of pastoral theology. Preferring the language practical theology, he posits that "pastoral theology refers to those principles and skills rendered to fulfill the primary duties, preaching, teaching, and caring for the sick. Yet, it is not solely clerical but extends to the people. It is not just for the cure of the souls, pastoral/practical is theology and acting

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[15] Hiltner, preface to *Pastoral Theology*, 20.

[16] Jay-Paul M. Hindss "African American Pastoral Theology," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, eds. Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (University of St Andrews, 2022-), Article published August 30, 2024. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/AfricanAmericanPastoralTheology.

in the church.[17] In the article "The Theology and Praxis of Practical Theology in the Context of The Faculty of Theology," authors Steyn and Masango argue that the Christocentric nature of pastoral theology is of concern. Excluding other religions can produce a problem-centered approach with the end goal of problem-solving.[18] People are problems or incur problems to be solved. Schleiermacher's notion of pastoral theology, the authors claim, begins with human suffering and creates a "change in dynamics that calls for change in perceptions and a new understanding."[19] Beginning with human suffering as a change in dynamics or perception liberates pastoral theology from its Christian context, making space for religious others in the face of human crises and not Christian concerns.

Pastoral theology that begins with human suffering is an important distinction. However, Schlmeiecher's new perceptions did not readily include other faith traditions, which renders practical theology created mainly with a colonial or missiology framework. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf began thinking early about religious inclusivity. Johan Gottfried Herder was instrumental in his early work around cultural pluralism, including Islamic thought and traditions. And yet, renderings about pastoralism revealed the type of cultural chauvinism that excludes

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[17] Bridget Agnes Downing, "Karl Rahner's Pastoral Theology: A Study of its Implications for the Christian in the Modern World." (PhD diss., Fordham University, 1986. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/karl-rahners-pastoral-theology-study-implications/docview/303466994/se-2.

[18] Tobias Steyn and Maake Masango, "The Theology and Praxis of Practical Theology in the Context of The Faculty of Theology," *HTS Theological Studies* 67 (2010): 1–7. http;//doi.org/10.4102/hts. v67i2.956/.

[19] Steyn and Masango, "The Theology and Praxis of Practical Theology," 1–7.

the religious other, namely, as scholars assert, pastoral theology for the church and its people. The Islamic context, which does not politicize care language, may see a more adept response to how one understands pastoral theology, particularly as it undergirds embodiment and agency in practice.

Shepherding: An Islamic Pastoral Construct

Scholars of Islam have begun to examine shepherding as a basis for understanding pastoral theology. Ibrahim J. Long and Bilal Ansari provide a framework to consider regarding shepherd and shepherding as it relates to pastoral care in a non-Christian context.[20] They espouse that caregiving is essential to the Muslim faith and identity. As exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah, it is the duty of the pious and the saved to provide care for Muslims and non-Muslims. Al-raaei (الراعي in Arabic is the definite article 'the' and رعي is the word for 'shepherd'), means the one who leads.[21] Long and Ansari cite a hadith transmission reported by ibn Umar that the Prophet stated: "All of you are shepherds, and each of you is responsible for his flock."[22] A man is the shepherd responsible to his house, and a woman is the shepherd responsible for her husband, children, and all that belongs to him. In Islam, the

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[20] Ibrahim J. Long and Bilal Ansari, "Islamic Pastoral Care and the Development of Muslim Chaplaincy," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 12, no. 1 (August 2, 2018), https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.10381607.0012.105.

[21] Hans Wehr, "رعى," essay, in *Arabic-English Dictionary; The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithaca, New York: Spoken Language, 1994), 401–401, 401

[22] Long and Ansari, "Islamic Pastoral Care," 109–121, 110.

shepherd to familial and communal responsibilities referred to as flock."[23] Community leaders, husbands, and wives each shepherd in their way, and thus provide pastoral care. Long and Ansari include Amanah, trust, honesty, and loyalty, which suggests responsibility. The "Islamic moral imperative is to carefully shepherd the people, based on Surah 2:104, which instructs the believers to ask God to *unzurna* (be attentive to us) rather than *ra'ina* (look at us). Although *ra'ina* is a request to be mindful (derived from the trilateral root *ra'una*), shepherding is a duty or trust. Long and Ansari further claim that in Islamic communities, shepherding is within the capacity of both women and men and is supported in the sacred text as one duty and function of a pious Muslim.[24]

Naveed Baig cites *khidmah* (service to humanity) as the foundation of Islamic pastoral theology.[25] Like Long and Ansari, Baig asserts that care for self, family, parents, and community is normative as an essential part of the Islamic faith. Gilliatt-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, *In Understanding Muslim Chaplaincy*, posit that this type of concern moves beyond the immediate family into the wider social construct, namely, beyond the Islamic community into what is described as the community of God.[26] Hence, one reason to

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[23] Muhammad al-Bukhari, "XIII. Consultation," in *Hadith Al-Adab al-Mufrad I* (Islamic Books, 1990), 1–394, here 105.

[24] Ibrahim J. Long and Bilal Ansari, "Islamic Pastoral Care and the Development of Muslim Chaplaincy," 110.

[25] Naveed Baig, "The Islamic Theology Behind Spiritual Care and Hospital Chaplaincy," in *Complexities of Spiritual Care in Plural Societies Education, Praxis and Concepts*, ed. Anne Hege Grung (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 102. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110717365-005.

[26] S. Gilliat-Ray, M. Ali, , and S. Pattison, *Understanding Muslim Chaplaincy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013).

deconstruct pastoral theology is to counter the normative Christian construct. Also, while a hadith uses shepherd metaphorically, it is not sacerdotal, requiring a non-prelatic construct. Schleiermacher's synthetization of the Enlightenment's rational thought and Romanticism's sensibilities was groundbreaking in recognizing religious diversity, but it was not fully developed. While he argued that "Every religion which has any significance for the world has in its way truth and dignity," his framework remained fundamentally Christocentric. As a result, human suffering remained monolithic. Schleiermacher's phenomenology of religious experience, while revolutionary, was primarily filtered through a European Christian intellectual lens. His approach, while more open than contemporaneous theological thinking, still did not fully engage with non-Western religious experiences or systematically consider how suffering might be interpreted across different religious traditions.[27]

Schleiermacher's philosophical synthesis of religious experience, which sought to understand spirituality beyond institutional boundaries, provides a compelling lens through which we can examine the nuanced Islamic concept of shepherding. The work of Long and Ansari illuminates this further by revealing how the Islamic understanding of spiritual leadership fundamentally differs from Christian theological constructs. While Schleiermacher challenged Enlightenment rationalism by positioning religious experience as a direct, personal intuition of the infinite, Islamic shepherding takes this concept even deeper. The Islamic image of shepherding is not about hierarchical

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[27] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman, *On Religion Speeches to Its Cultured Despiers* (London, England: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trunner and Co., 1893), https://www.google.com/books/edition/On_Religion/lH1AAAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

mediation but about embodying divine attributes and serving as a conduit of God's essence. Unlike the Christian concept of the 'priesthood of all believers,' which implies a mediatorial role, Islamic shepherding rejects any intermediary between humanity and the divine. Instead, it conceptualizes spiritual leadership as a humble service that reflects God's attributes, emphasizing that all creation exists through and because of divine presence.

This understanding suggests that shepherding is less about institutional authority and more about a profound, lived expression of the divine essence - a perspective that resonates with Schleiermacher's emphasis on religion as a deeply personal, intuitive experience that transcends formal religious structures. In Islamic spiritual practice, women's roles as shepherds are profound and multifaceted, transcending the narrow limitations often imposed by external interpretations. While traditional congregational leadership (imamate) may be reserved for men, women's spiritual shepherding is deeply integral to the community's religious life. Women shepherd through leading prayers within women's congregations, offering spiritual care for the ill, fulfilling sacred duties of service to those under their care, providing spiritual guidance within family and community contexts, and embodying devotional practices that nurture collective and individual spiritual growth.

Women shepherding is not defined by institutional position but by the depth of their spiritual intuition, commitment to service, and roles in maintaining the sacred fabric of daily religious life. This approach recognizes that spiritual leadership emerges from the quality of one's relationship with the divine, not from gender-prescribed limitations. For Muslims, shepherding emerges not through institutional hierarchy but through

individual and communal acts of charity. In attending to suffering, believers embody divine attributes of *qudra* and *qadir*—manifesting God's ability and capability through a loving, prayerful presence in the most mundane yet sacred moments of human existence.

CHAPTER 3.

QUDRA AND QADIR: DIVINE AGENCY AND SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE

In Islamic philosophy (Kalam), *qudra* represents divine capacity, while *qadir* embodies resilient agency. This framework offers a dynamic view of spiritual service that moves beyond institutional boundaries. It suggests that divine power is reflected not through hierarchical structures but through the intimate, caring acts of individuals who embody God's attributes in their service to others. The concept illuminates a spiritual landscape where divine capacity is mirrored in human caregiving—a perspective that resonates with Schleiermacher's argument that religious experience is fundamentally about one's relationship with the infinite, expressed through deeply personal, transformative acts of service and compassion.

In the early developments of *kalam,* philosophers delve into the complexity of concepts, such as the "nature of the possible, the ground of its being, and the existential reality of its epistemological and ontological existence."[1] Within this complexity, a relational God is understood in terms of God's causation, whereby, for instance, one might claim God as merciful and see that reflected in answered prayers. The Qur'an states, "And when (O Messenger) my servant asks you about me, surely, I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to me."[2] Numerous instances are

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[1] Frank M. Richards, "Chapter 4: Remarks on the Early Development of Kalam: Atti Del III Congresso de Studi Arabi e Islamici, Naples, 1967," *Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism in Medieval Islam*, vol. 1 (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 1967), 315–29, esp. 317.

[2] Ali Unal, "Al-Baqarah, 2:186," *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (Clifton, NJ: Tughra Books, 2019), 85–86.

reported regarding the context of this verse; one arises from the question, "Where is our Lord?" or "At what hour should we call Him?" Another instance recounts a Bedouin who asked the Prophet, "Is our Lord near so that I can whisper to God, or far so that I must shout to God?" In discussions about God's location, this verse is frequently quoted to illustrate God's nearness and the reciprocity between the human call to God and God's response.[3] The causation attributed to God is significant in this context; humanity experiences mercy along with answered prayers. The Prophet Muhammad emphasizes that calling upon God constitutes worship, stating, "Calling renders du'a'."[4] Seyyed Hossein Nasr cites M. Ling's translation of the Qu'ran, "I answer the prayer of the prayer when he prays to Me," and suggests references to 27:62 regarding prayer in distress, 7:55 regarding humility in prayer, and 50:16, where it is indicated that God is nearer than our jugular vein, contrasting idol worship with God's nearness to us.[5] The complexity of understanding divine presence emerges not through abstract theological constructs, but through the lived experience of divine nearness.

Schleiermacher's philosophical exploration of religious experience finds a profound parallel in the Islamic theological developments of kalam, where divine essence is understood through lived expressions of *qudra* (divine capacity) and *qadir* (resilient agency). The philosophical complexity of early *kalam* centers on the "nature of the possible" and its existential reality, revealing a theological framework where divine

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[3] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Al-Baqarah, 2:186," in *The Study Qur'an* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 81.

[4] Nasr, "2:186," 81.

[5] Nasr, "2:186," 81.

proximity is not an abstract concept but a tangible, experiential reality. The Qur'anic verse "Surely, I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to me" embodies this fundamental understanding of shepherding as a dynamic, reciprocal spiritual practice. When a Bedouin asks, "Is our Lord near, so that I can whisper to God, or far, so that I must shout to God?", the question itself becomes a metaphysical exploration of divine nearness. This nearness is not geographical but ontological, a lived expression of God's essence manifested through human compassionate service. The act of calling upon God, as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasizes, is itself an act of worship. Shepherding, in this context, becomes a profound embodiment of divine attributes. In this practice, human capacity mirrors divine essence, transforming spiritual leadership from an institutional role to an intimate, caring presence.

Landscape of Early Islamic Thought

Early Muslim philosophers like Abu l-Hudhayl al-Allah radically reframed theological understanding by proposing that Qudra is not merely a passive concept of power, but a dynamic interplay between will, action, and moral existence. This conception transcends simple notions of ability, instead characterizing human spiritual potential as a complex negotiation between intention, agency, and divine proximity. The philosophical depth emerges in the understanding of transcendence through agent causation—where individuals move beyond the immediate boundaries of human experience, they transcend. This occurs not through mystical separation but through intimate engagement: in prayer, worship, and service, humans simultaneously realize their own agency and reflect divine attributes. This concept challenges Western

theological frameworks and Enlightenment rationalism by presenting human capacity as a participatory, dynamic spiritual practice. Spiritual leadership transforms from a privileged, hierarchical, top-down, divided construct to a universal responsibility to daily acts of service. It is reimagining more profound ways individuals embody divine essence through intentional, compassionate action.

In Al-Bukhari 2442 and Muslim 2580, narrated by Abu Hurayrah, it is said:

> Whoever removes worldly hardships from a believer, Allah will remove one of his hardships on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever will grant him respite to (a debtor) who is in difficulty, Allah will grant him relief in this world and the Hereafter. Whoever conceals him (the fault of a Muslim in this world, Allah will conceal him (his faults) in the world and the Hereafter. Allah will help a person if he is helping his brother. [6]

How does one remove hardships, grant relief, and conceal faults except by God? Where human capacity transcends epistemological limitations, it creates a dynamic spiritual process of becoming. *Qudra* emerges not as a static concept of power, but as a transformative understanding of human potential. Unlike traditional philosophical distinctions between higher and lower knowledge functions, this suggests that human beings can surpass physical and material existential constraints when conditions are favorable. The ontological landscape reveals knowledge as a multifaceted process: legal judgments through intellect, empirical observations of patterns, and rational deductions. Yet, the profound insight lies in understanding contingency—the world and its inhabitants as potential rather than fixed states, with God as the necessary, empowering

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6 al-Ḥāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, "16 The Comprehensive Book, Hadith 29" narrated by Abu Huraira and compiled by Muslim in *Bulugh al-Maram*, reprinted in Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم), accessed March 13, 2025, https://sunnah.com/bulugh/16/29

source. *Qudra* and *qadir* are shared attributes where divine capacity is not imposed but embodied. God empowers human becoming, transforming spiritual agency from an institutional construct to a lived, intimate experience of divine presence.

This ontological reframing suggests human experience is a continuous unfolding and inspires revealing that emphasizes the individual capacity to become beyond pre-determined limitations, and where human potential is open and contingent. *'Ilm al-kalam* (the science of kalam) means speech or words. *Yatakallam fi*, means to discuss theological matters, conserving theological circles guarded against as *bid'ah* (unwarranted innovations) in Islamic rhetoric. The better is *takallama fi,* which is to keep silent, or as Malik (d. 179/795) discusses matters regarding '*amal*, defined as actions from precedence deeds, work, and action, legal authority, but not about God.[7] 'Amal can also refer to labor or hard work, speech in this context is as in hope for one's future. Kalam is also offered for further development of *tawhid*, the oneness of God, prophethood, God's attributes, epistemological, ontological, and eschatological suppositions. Islamic history records countless times that women discussed matters of faith and theological presuppositions, helping dispel doubt regarding women and men.

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[7] The word *takallama* (تكلّم) derives from the Arabic root *k-l-m* (ك-ل-م), which relates to speech and communication. In Arabic, *takallama* is the Form V verb (تفعّل pattern) from this root, meaning 'to speak' or 'to talk.' This linguistic origin is documented in various Arabic lexicographical works. According to Lane's classical Arabic lexicography, the root *k-l-m* fundamentally relates to speech, discourse, and verbal communication. The form *takallama* specifically indicates the act of speaking or engaging in discourse, often with a sense of deliberateness or formality. The theological discussion of the concept of speaking about or remaining silent on theological matters represents a specialized application of this linguistic term within Islamic scholarly discourse, particularly in discussions of proper theological methodology in the formative period of Islamic thought. Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863).

The theological controversies of the mid-seventh century were fundamentally struggles for political legitimacy disguised as philosophical and religious debates. The First Fitna (656-661 CE/36-40 AH) represented a critical moment of political fracture within the nascent Islamic community, where competing interpretations of divine sovereignty directly challenged the established political order. The Kharijites emerged as a radical political movement that transformed theological discourse into a revolutionary challenge to established power. Their central argument was not merely theological but profoundly political: they contested the hereditary succession of leadership to Muhammad's (PBUH) Quraysh tribe. By arguing that Muslims who commit grave sins should be considered *kafir* (infidels), the Kharijites developed a radical egalitarian theology that challenged the emerging aristocratic structure of Islamic political leadership.

This period of intense theological negotiation was not a masculine domain of exclusive philosophical speculation. Women were active and sophisticated interlocutors in these complex debates, challenging interpretations and contributing substantive insights that complicated narratives of religious and political authority. The Mutazilite philosophers and Qadarites engaged in debates that were thinly veiled political commentaries. Their discussions about divine power, human agency, and the nature of causation were intellectual strategies for negotiating political authority. By proposing that humans have *qudra* (power over actions) and that God's power might be constrained by wisdom and goodness, these thinkers were effectively challenging absolute political authority.

Women scholars played a pivotal role in these theological investigations. Their epistemological contributions explored the nature of divine knowledge (*'ilm*), while their ontological insights examined the fundamental relationship between divine existence and created beings. Through eschatological discourse, they interrogated concepts of divine judgment, human accountability, and community destiny. The concepts of *illa* (cause) and *asabiyya* (shared purpose) became intellectual tools for negotiating the relationship between divine mandate and human political agency. These philosophical frameworks allowed scholars—both men and women—to articulate complex arguments about leadership legitimacy, divine selection, and human responsibility. Al-Ashari's subsequent philosophical investigations were attempts to reconcile these competing narratives about divine and human agency, reflecting the ongoing political tensions within the Islamic community. The theological debates were never purely metaphysical; they were sophisticated political negotiations about leadership, legitimacy, and the nature of political authority in the emerging Islamic state. As David B. Burrell notes in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, these theological discussions represented more than abstract philosophical ruminations. They were profound explorations of divine creativity, human agency, and the intricate relationships between spiritual understanding and political power.[8] Women's voices were integral to these conversations, challenging the notion of a monolithic masculine theological discourse.

Al-Ashari's subsequent philosophical investigations were attempts to reconcile these competing narratives about divine and human agency, reflecting the ongoing

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[8] David B. Burrell, "Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge, England : Cambridge University Press, 2008), 141–59, 145.

political tensions within the Islamic community. The theological debates were never purely metaphysical; they were sophisticated political negotiations about leadership, legitimacy, and the nature of political authority in the emerging Islamic state. This causes Al-Ashari to question how one understands the realms of knowledge, being, reality, God, and human agency. He posits everything that is not God must be created. Actions of creation must be attributed to their Creator. He proposes conciliating divine sovereignty with human responsibility. The divine sovereignty of God over all things and human action could not be imputed to human agency or novel prehensions.[9] Divinities relate to knowing God, affirming his existence and attributes, and clarifying the attributes impossible for him and his action: his necessary attributes, impossible attributes, and permissible attributes. *Al-qudra* (power) is one that every Muslim is obligated to know, and the opposite is impossible, which means God's power cannot be limited or otherwise willed. God's actions are God's will and power, permissible for God to do or not do. "God's command when he desires a thing is only to say, 'Be!', and it is."[10]

Al-Ashari goes on to explain the meanings of these attributes that he says are not of other creatures or subject to change. There are seven: *al-Hayyah* (Ever-living), *al-'Ilm* (All-Knowing), *Al-Iradah* (The Will), *Al-Qudra* (The Power), *Al-Kalam* (The Speech), *Al-Sam'a* (The Hearing) and *Al-Basar* (The Seeing). When Al-Ashari he speaks of *Al-Qudra*, he speaks of God's power and God's capacity: "He brings them into existence

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[9] David B. Burrell, "Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 141–59, 147.

[10] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Surah Ya-Sin," *The Study Quran* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 1070–83, here 1083.

from non-existence. No one has the power or influence to create but Allah. For God hath power over all things."[11] The words 'create' or 'influence to create' suggest that perhaps by the power, will, and knowledge of God, other creatures can create. Subsequently, Al-Ashari surmises that humans and other creatures, angels, and jinn cannot create. *Laa hawla wa laa quawawata illa billah* (there is no power, no strength other than by Allah). All things happen with, though, from, in, and to God by God's will and by God's permission.

David Burrell challenges the Islamic concept of *qudra*, considered as the attribute of an all-powerful God and human agency. He argues against developments from Al-Ashari and the Mu'tazilites:

> Any created action takes place by a power created in the human person who performs the act since the causality of the creating agent is not sufficient to determine the entire reality of the act, notable the very existence. So, given the identification of acting with creating, it must be said that God alone is the agent (fa'il), determining through a created power (Qudra) the individual essence of each act in all the particulars. Yet the act belongs to another, not by God's act, so one may also say that "the act is the act of the subject in which it is a realized act." There is, of course, an unavoidable ambiguity in the use of the act here as this school (Ashari) struggles to articulate a notion of created agency." He cites another author who suggests that this is the disambiguated rendering of the human role as the performing action created by God. The Mu'tazilite concern is to remove all trace of evil from the creator as an action created by God. What sounds like double talk can be explained as an attempt to formulate the relation between creating agent and the creating agent, using the crude instrument of a created power to perform this act Qudra.[12]

Burrell is concerned with just and ethical actions as he goes on to critique *kasb*; by extension, human beings are autonomous agents and yet are hardly independent of

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[11] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Surah An-Nissa 4:126," *The Study Quran* (New York, NY: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2015), 189–269, here 248.

[12] Burrell, 146–147.

God's will and God's power. He further examines the Marturidi schools, in which he claims that, in essence, human beings are truly agents of their actions, while these are the same actions created by God and their insistence that the divine act of *tawkin*, or bringing into the existence, is eternal and to be distinguished from existing things.[13]

God exists. The world exists. God is necessary. The world is contingent. If God exists as necessary and the world is contingent, then the world requires a cause. Necessary beings cannot be in the likeness of possibilities or in the cause of necessary beings having the power to bring things into existence. Burrell is right in that daily created actions take place that appear to be from within the power and will of agency, but he is wrong when he states the actions of the causality of the creating agent are insufficient to determine the reality of the actions, or human beings are incapable of understanding divine creative agency in its integrity. God functions as necessary outside of space and time and affects space and time without changing God's necessary existence. It is God's will and within God's capacity. Power and will function together. God's power and will do not attach to every contingent; however, power and will are connected to all possibilities as a potentiality and, subsequently, divine reality. The potentiality that one can inherently realize their possibilities and the reality of that realization can be best described as fitrah, or the innate nature of returning to the original nature, submission to God.

Yasien Mohamed cites three concepts of fitrah: dual, neutral, and positive. Dual fitrah reflects being born prepared for both belief and unbelief, predisposed to either good

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[13] Burrell, 147.

or evil. Neutral fitrah is born in ignorance or innocence; humanity is in a blank state with no predisposition. Positive fitrah is innately predisposed to know God and do good from birth. It is God's active, innate love and offering of Lordship to one. Through external sources, fitrah can be corrupted. God's divine power and will cause the will and capacity that bridges the divide between God and humanity. Through other external sources, divine agents, revelation, prophethood, and guidance move one towards innate disposition.[14] Fitrah is relational not in the sense of interconnectedness or that it emphasizes God and humanity as two parts of one whole, but rather in seeing God as the necessary causation, from which it follows that the world and humanity, as contingent, are meaningful to each other, not exclusively, and yet are value-added. The existential reality then moves from merely seeing the problem to experiencing God as a healer, helper, sovereign, powerful, merciful, or many other attributes or ways of knowing God.

In Surah 2:186, God assures the Messenger (saw), "When my servant asks you about me, I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to me. So let them respond to my call and believe and trust me so that they may be guided to spiritual and intellectual excellence and the right guidance."[15] This surah, amongst others, shows the relational aspect of God's loving impact on creation.

Prayer is a supplication that rises to God and has varying degrees. The first kind of prayer is for all living organisms, which functions in line with the duties of creation. The second kind is all organisms. God meets all needs and when they suffer hardship,

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14. Yasein Mohamed, "The Interpretations of Fitrah," in *Fitrah: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London, UK: TA-HA Publishers, 1995), 35–58.

[15] Qur'an, Surah An-Nissa 4:126, 85–86, Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*.

their cry meets God's provision. The third kind of prayer is done by human beings: (1) active prayer, where one goes to a physician and is answered, and (2) verbal prayer, also answered but from the wisdom of God. That can mean that the answer is 'yes' or 'no,' or something better, or wait until Jannah (Paradise). The conditions of these answered prayers are in a state of spiritual embodiment and spiritual agency. In this construct, through agent causation, one transcends, meaning that one goes beyond the limits of human experience. God's causation is impactful to this end; humankind experiences mercy as well as answered prayer in the lived-out actions of believing servants.

The concepts of *qudra* (power) and *qadir* (the powerful) represent a keen theological exploration of divine and human agency, embodying the intricate relationship between human capability and divine empowerment. These concepts illuminate the dynamic interplay between human potential and divine grace, where human power is both enabled and circumscribed by divine creativity. In the next chapter, we will explore Aisha bint Abu Bakr (ra), the archetypal model of *qudra* and *qadir*, embodying spiritual agency that transcends the conventional limitations of her historical context. Her intellectual and political contributions demonstrate how divine empowerment manifests through human action. Surviving *al-Ifk* reveals her life as a living testament to the complex theological understanding of spiritual capability. Where agent causation allows individuals to transcend the limits of immediate human experience. Divine causation becomes transformative, revealing mercy through the lived actions of believing servants. Aisha's life exemplifies this principle—Survival, reliance on God, and spiritual wisdom demonstrate how *qudra* manifests as an active, embodied spiritual practice. The following chapter will delve deeper into Aisha's intellectual and spiritual legacy,

exploring her theological and historical interventions that illuminate the complex negotiations of power, knowledge, and spiritual agency in *al-Ifk*, the Hadith of Slander.

CHAPTER 4.

UMM AL-UMMA AISHA BINT ABU BAKR AL-SIDDIQAH

Umm al-Umma Aisha (d. 678), the third wife of Prophet Muhammad, was one of the most influential historical figures of the seventh century and one such believing servant. She is considered the most beloved wife of the Prophet and daughter of his beloved companion Abu Bakr al-Siddiqui, from whom she received the name 'al-Siddiqah' for her truthfulness. While the designation "Umm al-Umma" (mother of the community) is given to all the Prophet's wives, she had also borne the title "mother of the believers, 'Umma al-Muminin.'" Her knowledge, decisions, and actions as *muhaddith*, *qadi*, politician, and warrior created security among women and men as she led the community in personal, public, legal, and military affairs. "She was feminized in the epithet 'Siddiqah,' given to her father, as well as to the Qur'anic Prophet Yusef."[1] Exemplified in her experiences is the performative embodiment of spiritual agency, refined through the lens of struggle. She was slandered and vilified but was ultimately found innocent. Her prophetic silence, resistance, and voice are examples of her experience of the wilderness and survival. 'Wilderness' is used in many African American contexts as the near-death situation or deeply reflective posture in which God

[1] Ashley Manjarrez Walker and Michael A. Sells, "The Wiles of Women and Performative Intertextuality: 'A'isha, the Hadith of the Slander, and the Sura of Yusuf," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 30, no. 1 (1999): 55–77, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006499x00072, xxx.

gives personal direction, from which God makes a "way out of no way."[2] Her struggle was the impetus for Surah an-Noor and the ruling on bearing false witness.

In this hadith, we also see the complexities of psychological and biological factors associated with the human response to adversity. As Lauren M. Sippel et al. define it, "Psychological correlates, but is not limited, to optimism and positive emotions, health and fitness, cognitive flexibility and the capacity to adapt to a host of different challenges; an active problem-oriented style of coping and perseverance; and strong willpower, courage, well-developed moral code of behavior, altruism, and dedication to a meaningful purpose or cause."[3] Aisha's identity is built from her resilience.

Al-Ifk, the Hadith of Slander

In al-Ifk, the "Hadith of Slander," Aisha (RA) narrates an egregious time in her life, the life of the Prophet, and the early Islamic community. She was accused of adultery with further implications in an honor-shame society, a criminal implication as

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[2] Phyllis Trible, *Eve and Miriam: From the Margins to the Center in Feminine Approaches to the Bible ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology: Society, 1966), 5-24, 9-10.*

[3] Lauren M. Sippel et al., "How Does Social Support Enhance Resilience in the Trauma-Exposed Individual?" *Ecology and Society* 20, no. 4 (2015): 1, https://doi.org/10.5751/es-07832-200410/.

adultery is a *hadd* crime.[4] Sahih al-Bukhari records this account as sound hadith and offers "a complex, embedded narration that engages issues of gender, sexuality, danger, and religious authority."[5] The reading makes no assumptions about the authenticity of the hadith and is constructed as a part of the sound canonical tradition. Aisha is presented in the text as such and is presented in like manner. The "Hadith al-Ifk" is referred to as the hadith, named for the supportive traditions. The theological implications of this inquiry relate to Surah Yusef and agency, as one's essence and capacity are impactful in ministerial settings. I outline the hadith using plot, character, thought, language, spectacle, song, and Aristotle's six elements of drama or narrative identifiers.[6] The goal is to explicate Aisha's narration and explore trauma and the role of trauma-informed encounters in acts of service.

Aisha is the narrator and protagonist in the story. The antagonist is the mother of Mistah, her cousin, and the hypocrites of the Umma. The Prophet, Abu Bakr, and Umm

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[4] *Hadd* crime (plural: *Hudud*) refers to Divinely prescribed punishments based on the Quran and Sunnah and carried out by the state. The term "hadd" literally means "limit" or "barrier" in Arabic, preventing two objects from meeting each other. It prevents people from committing crimes. Abdur Rashid Siddiqui, "Issues of Concerns Regarding Shariah," essay, in *Shariah A Divine Code of Life* (Leicestershire, United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 2018), 39–75, 52. *Zina* refers to sexual intercourse between individuals who are not married to each other. It is considered one of the major sins in Islam, and its prohibition and punishment are addressed in both the Quran and Sunnah. The Prophet categorized *zina* among the major sins. Sahih al-Bukhari is reported to have said: "Avoid the seven destructive sins: associating partners with Allah (*shirk*), magic, killing a soul which Allah has forbidden except by right, consuming usury, consuming the property of an orphan, fleeing from the battlefield, and accusing chaste believing women of adultery." 1. *Sahih Bukhari* 6857, "Book 86: Limits and Punishments Set by Allah – Chapter 44: To Accuse Chaste Women," reprinted in Sunnah.com, accessed March 18, 2025, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6857

[5] Ashley Manjarrez Walker and Michael A. Sells, "The Wiles of Women and Performative Intertextuality: 'A'isha."

[6] Aristotle, *Poetics – Aristotle* (Mumbai: Sanage Publishing House, 2023).

Ruman, her mother and father, are also antagonists, not by way of complicity but due to their inability to offer close social support during this time. Others fall into the category of witness or supporting actors, whose actions exonerate Aisha, proclaiming her innocence and the need for further investigation into the matter.

Zaynab bint Jahsh and Aisha were in a playful exchange over their status with Allah. One boasts about her marriage being validated from up on high. Aisha revealed herself as being absolved from slander when Ibn Mu'attal carried her on his ride. Zaynab asked what she said at that time, and Aisha replied, "Hasbi Allah wa ni'mal wakeel" (Allah is sufficient for me and what an excellent Disposer of affairs).[7] Aisha then narrated an account of the story. Prophet Muhammad, when going on a journey, would cast lots amongst the wives, and the one on whom the lot fell would accompany him.[8]

> Whenever Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) intended to go on a journey, he used to draw lots amongst his wives, and Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) used to take with him the one on whom lot fell. He drew lots amongst us during one of the *Ghazwat* which he fought. The lot fell on me and so I proceeded with Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) after Allah's order of veiling (the women) had been revealed. I was carried (on the back of a camel) in my howdah and carried down while still in it (when we came to a halt). So we went on till Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) had finished from that Ghazwa of his and returned. When we approached the city of Medina he announced at night that it was time for departure. So when they announced the news of departure, I got up and went away from the army camps, and after finishing from the call of nature, I came back to my riding animal. I touched my chest to find that my necklace which was made of *Zifar* beads (i.e. Yemenite beads partly black and partly white) was missing. So I returned to look for my necklace and my search for it detained me. (In the meanwhile) the people who used to carry me on my camel, came and took my howdah and put it on the back of my camel on which I used to ride, as they considered that I was in it. In those

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[7] Qur'an 3:174-175, Kandhlawi and Kandhlawi, *Ma'arif al Quran*, https://quran.com/3?startingVerse=174

[8] Sofia Rehman, "At the First Sign of Hardship the Believer's Refuge Is in Allah," in *A Treasure of A'ishah: A Guidance from the Beloved of the Beloved,* Treasury In Islamic Thought and Civilization (Leicestershire, United Kingdom: Kube Ltd, 2023), 102–9, 102-103.

> days women were light in weight for they did not get fat, and flesh did not cover their bodies in abundance as they used to eat only a little food. Those people therefore, disregarded the lightness of the howdah while lifting and carrying it; and at that time I was still a young girl. They made the camel rise and all of them left (along with it). I found my necklace after the army had gone. Then I came to their camping place to find no call maker of them, nor one who would respond to the call. So I intended to go to the place where I used to stay, thinking that they would miss me and come back to me (in my search). While I was sitting in my resting place, I was overwhelmed by sleep and slept. Safwan bin Al-Muattal As-Sulami Adh-Dhakwani was behind the army. When he reached my place in the morning, he saw the figure of a sleeping person and he recognized me on seeing me as he had seen me before the order of compulsory veiling (was prescribed). So I woke up when he recited Istirja' (i.e. "Inna li l-lahi wa inna llaihi raji'un") as soon as he recognized me. I veiled my face with my head cover at once, and by Allah, we did not speak a single word, and I did not hear him saying any word besides his Istirja'. He dismounted from his camel and made it kneel down, putting his leg on its front legs and then I got up and rode on it. Then he set out leading the camel that was carrying me till we overtook the army in the extreme heat of midday while they were at a halt (taking a rest). (Because of the event) some people brought destruction upon themselves and the one who spread the Ifk (i.e. slander) more, was `Abdullah bin Ubai Ibn Salul.[9]

Immediately upon returning, Aisha fell ill and was confined to her bed. As the community gossiped, the plot to discredit Aisha continued to fester while she was in her room and completely unaware of it. "I wasn't aware of anything about (the rumors), but I felt in my ill state, I was not getting the attentiveness from the Messenger of Allah that I would get when I was sick. He would come in and ask, 'How is she?' And then leave."

Some days later, she heard from the mother of Mistah, her cousin who was involved in spreading the rumor, that she realized what was being said. Amongst those who were spreading the slander was Hannah bint Jahsh, the sister of Zaynab bint Jahsh. 'A'isha was overcome with distress. She requested to go and stay with her parents. Her

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[9] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4141, "Book 64: Military Expeditions of the Prophet (Pbuh) al-Maghaazi – Chapter 34: The Narration of the Ifk," reprinted in Sunnah.com, accessed https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4141.

mother consoled her, brushing it off as her being the most beautiful and beloved of the cowives. Aisha responded, "Subhan Allah" (Glory be to God), astounded that people would consider her unfaithful and disparage her character. She wept all night and day, inconsolable at the treachery that she experienced from the community.[10]

According to Aisha, this slander went on for more than a month. She stated that her days passed without sleep and her tears flowed endlessly: "I thought that my liver wound burst from all my weeping."[11] She experienced grief and mourning. When the Prophet finally came and spoke to her, he expressed no confidence or support. Sofia Rehman states that he comes with the words of the passive onlooker, "If you are innocent, then Allah will absolve you, and if you are guilty, then seek Allah's forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance. Indeed, if a servant of Allah recognizes their wrongdoing and then turns to Allah (in repentance), then Allah turns towards them (in mercy)."[12] Aisha turned to her father to respond on her behalf. He lowered his gaze. Both her mother and father failed to speak up for her. Her mother responded, "I don't know what to say to the Messenger."[13]

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[10] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4141, "Book 64: Military Expeditions of the Prophet (Pbuh) al-Maghaazi – Chapter 34: The Narration of the Ifk."

[11] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4141, "Book 64: Military Expeditions of the Prophet (Pbuh) al-Maghaazi – Chapter 34: The Narration of the Ifk."

[12] Rehman, *A Treasury of 'A'isha*, 102.

[13] Rehman, *A Treasury of Aisha*, 102.

A Trauma-Informed Hermeneutic

One key aim of this research is to gain insight into Muslim female self-perception by exploring the experiences of Umm al-Muminin Aisha bint Abu Bakr al-Siddiqah, as narrated in the Hadith of Slander. My framework is a phenomenological, trauma-informed approach to the textual analysis. Trauma, from the ancient Greek word "wound," refers to trauma of the mind, a wound that is so powerful it alters a person's perception of time, self, and the world. Ron Eyerman, in Social Theory and Trauma, contends that trauma is the impact of shocking occurrences that deeply affect an individual's life. Such as inner catastrophes leave wounds and memory scars that cannot easily be erased; and which influence later behavior in unexpected and unpredictable ways. Trauma is not just an isolated personal event but something that can shape collective memory and influence behavior in unforeseen ways. In his contextualization of social theory, trauma can help explain social behaviors, collective responses to trauma, and how societies process traumatic events over time. [14]

Eyerman references Sigmund Freud's first association with trauma and hysteria in women related to deep-seated emotional trauma or sexual repression, before his latent attempt to explain its recurrence in industrial or transportation accidents. This was later modified in connection with WWI, where trauma is associated with real occurrences from a physical or emotional blow that overwhelms the senses, causing the mind and body to defend themselves. Numbness, the capacity to suspend pain, can manifest itself in amnesia or depression. Both are defense mechanisms against the pain from the

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[14] Ron Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," *Acta Sociologica* 56, no. 1 (2013): 41–53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23525660.

wound.[15] Trauma forms what he called latency, which also contributes to memory lapse and dissociation.[16]

Revisionist scholars categorize trauma into two kinds: the first, on the part of the victim, involves unwanted intrusion on memories and impacts on behavior, and memory and the possibility or impossibility of memory; and secondly, the possibility of impossibilities.[17] It is often not the trauma itself but the psychological and physical response to trauma, that can result in memory lapse or dissociation from suppressed or repressed memories. As Eyerman claims, "In such conceptualization, reading and writing trauma opens up to literature a specific kind of experience, one of which becomes available not only to the therapist but also to the theorists."[18] Trauma study offers an opportunity to delve into meanings and experiences that might otherwise remain obscured. It allows us to uncover the deeper, often hidden impacts of trauma on both the individual and the collective. As noted, "Trauma at the individual level often becomes crises at the societal level."[19] Trauma is not only a personal shock to an individual's routine and identity but also a disruptor of established collective norms. It affects both individual and collective identities in different ways—sometimes reinforcing a sense of belonging and other times isolating the individual from the larger community. This

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[15] Ron Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," *Acta Sociologica* 56, no. 1 (2013): 41–53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23525660.

[16] Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," 41–53, 42.

[17] Eyerman, 41–53, 42.

[18] Eyerman, 41–53, 42.

[19] Eyerman, 42–43

duality positions trauma as both a potential source of healing and a force that can alienate. It becomes the focal point, either driving someone away from society or centering them within it as they navigate its effects.

A phenomenological approach offers a vital framework for understanding the subjective nature of trauma. This method focuses on how individuals perceive and make sense of their traumatic experiences, including the emotional, cognitive, and physical impacts. Crucial to this approach is an understanding of the contextual factors—such as place, time, and proximity—that shape the way trauma is experienced. These factors help to illuminate how trauma disrupts the sense of self, safety, and stability, distorting one's perception of time, creating feelings of powerlessness, and significantly altering one's worldview. Phenomenology, in essence, examines trauma through the lived experience of the person, allowing us to understand how trauma is embodied and how it shapes not just the individual's psyche but their connection to the larger social world. This approach reveals how trauma, especially when collective, challenges the very fabric of community and individual identity, creating a rupture that must be addressed for true healing to take place.

Natalie Depraz's research on phenomenology and trauma explores the effects of shock as a "dynamic structure" unfolding in three micro-phases. These phases are as follows: (1) Attention-phase, characterized by open waiting and emotional polarity, swinging between relaxation-serenity and tension-anxiety; (2) the Shock rupture phase, marked by an emotional-attentional blank, where the individual experiences a disconnect or a non-experience; and (3) the Emotion phase, wherein an immediate resonance with emotional polarity, ranging from relief to unease occurs, often accompanied by

attentional modulations. Depraz further elaborates that surprise emerges from an "attentional horizon of waiting," which is emotionally colored and rooted in organic memory, creating a latent sense of presence to what is coming. The shock rupture phase is described as a blank, a non-experience, where the individual faces a complete emotional and attentional shutdown. In the final phase, the individual experiences an immediate move of inner association and bodily effects, marked by emotional resonance. This emotional valence can shift from relief to discomfort and, in some cases, move toward pathological responses, all intertwined with varying attentional modulations. This three-phase process—anticipation**,** rupture, and aftermath, unfolds within a dynamic, tridimensional framework of attention, emotion, and temporal process, shaping the trajectory of the trauma experience.[20]

The surprise of Aisha's abandonment is layered with emotional complexity. They are returning from an exhibition with the Prophet and his soldiers, Aisha is left behind at the campsite. She expresses her surprise at being forgotten, feeling perturbed yet confident in her initial reactions that someone will return for me. This emotional state reflects what Natalie Depraz describes as the polarity between serenity and tension. Her calmness intermingled with the unease of being left behind. When the caravan leaves, no one notices that Aisha is missing. The text suggests that her weight was so light that her absence went unnoticed. Even the Prophet (pbuh), despite being the leader of the group, is not aware that she is missing, and if he is, he does not turn back to find her. She is left

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[20] Natalie Depraz, "Phenomenology of Surprise: Lévinas and Merleau-Ponty in the Light of Hans Jonas," in *Advancing Phenomenology: Essays in Honor of Lester Embree*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Philip Blosser (Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer: 2010), 223–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9286-1_14/.

alone, abandoned, and vulnerable, exposed without protection or support. One author suggested that it was winter, making her situation even more dire as she must have been cold in her isolation. Scholars agree with Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, who dates it to the Battle of Banu Mustaliq in 5AH/627CE, suggesting the time as late Spring or early Summer.[21] Aisha refers to winter when speaking of the Prophet and his revelation. Winter, spring, or summer, it is concerning, rationalizes the emotional response, and typifies the evolving perspective of women's limitations in society during that time and at present.

Laying out in the open, exposed, and vulnerable, was not considered an appropriate or safe place for a woman. In the case of Aisha, being left behind at the campsite, alone and unprotected, reflects a breach of the dignity and security women were traditionally afforded. Her abandonment, regardless of the season, is a stark reminder that a woman's place was meant to be sheltered, both physically and socially, within the protection of her husband, family, and community. The humiliation and emotional strain Aisha endured from this situation underscore the vulnerability women face when left exposed to the elements, both literally and figuratively.

Eventually, Ibn Safwan, delayed by military duties, discovers Aisha alone at the campsite. He accompanies her back to the caravan, where she arrives home, ill from the ordeal. However, her abandonment and sickness only fuel the gossip that begins to spread throughout the community. In her grief, Aisha weeps, feeling the weight of the rumors and slander. When the Prophet Muhammad approaches her, he offers words that echo the duality of hope and despair: "If you are innocent, then soon Allah will reveal your

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[21] Ibn Hajar al Asqalani, "Al-Ifk," in *Fath Al-Bari Bi Sharh Sahih al Bukhari* 7 (August 8, 2015): 2–769. This looks like an incomplete citation. Was it from an online source?

innocence."[22] His words, though comforting, also underscore the emotional rupture she experiences. The shock of being abandoned is compounded by the collective trauma that follows as the slander and rumors spread. This layered emotional experience exemplifies how trauma not only disrupts the individual's world but also sends ripples through the wider community, forcing Aisha to face both personal and collective suffering.

> 'Urwah said, "The people propagated the slander and talked about it in his (i.e. Ibn Salool) presence, and he confirmed it and listened to it, and asked about it to let it spread more … None was mentioned as members of the slanderous group besides him (Ibn Salool) except Hassaan ibn Thaabit, Mistah ibn Uthaathah, and Hamnah bint Jahsh, along with others about whom I do not know, but they were a group, as Allah said. It is said that the one who carried most of the slander was 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salool.[23]

The attentional horizon of waiting refers to the period spent anticipating results and what might happen next, characterized by either serenity or anxiety. Aisha mentions not knowing about the slander but realizing she was not receiving the same kindness from Prophet Muhammad as before. While going to the latrines with Mistah, she was informed of the rumors being spread, and Aisha noted that this knowledge aggravated her illness. Prophet Muhammad would visit her room and ask, "How is the lady?" Longing for some sense of normalcy, namely a responsive husband, she mentions that his words turned her tears into grief and despair, which signifies a profound sense of loss and hopelessness. Slander-induced grief is a complex emotional experience that arises when an individual is

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[22] Aisha bint Abu Bakr Siddaqa, "Military Expeditions of the Prophet (Pbuh) al-Maghaazi (Al-Ifk)," Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم), accessed March 18, 2025, https://sunnah.com/.

[23] Zafar Ul Hassan Al Madani"The Incident of IFK – A Story of Forgiveness and Reciprocating Evil with Goodness," Prophetmuhammad.com, accessed March 11, 2025, https://www.prophetmuhammad.com/prophet-muhammad-akhlaq/incident-of-ifk-story-of-forgiveness-and-reciprocating-evil-with-goodness_63.

subjected to false accusations or damaging gossip. The loss is associated with a loss of trust, identity, or boundaries. The person may experience shame, humiliation, or betrayal.

Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh suggest that understanding this type of narrative requires contextualization within an honor-shame culture, prevalent in Asian, African, and Middle Eastern societies.[24] External forces are influencing human behavior, leading individuals to feel shame when they violate communal expectations. Silence and shame are often adverse responses to public disgrace reflecting failure to adhere to social values. Although Aisha does not mention shame in her narrative, coupled with the understanding that adultery, a *hadd* crime in Islam, punishable by death, underscores the weight of her situation. 'Zina' (adultery), is defined as unlawful sexual intercourse outside of wedlock. Associating Aisha's silence with inner turmoil can be one way of coping with the torment of lies, haunted by potential consequences by the community. Aisha has committed no crime but feels the pain of disgrace from the Prophet and her extended family. To find protected space and to confirm the reality of the slander, she requests to go home to her mother, who confirms the whispers. Aisha states that for two nights and a day she wept, could not sleep, and was weeping even in the morning.

Bessel van der Kolk explores how trauma affects the brain and body, with a particular focus on sleep disturbances and their role in posttraumatic stress disorder.[25] He

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[24] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 325.

[25] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021).

discusses how trauma-related sleep issues, including nightmares and flashbacks, disrupt physical and emotional processing and the ability to heal.[26]

The second phase, the shock-rupture, is the disruption phase, a polarity referred to as an 'emotional blank.' [27] This polarity is characterized by opposing forces that complement each other. The person becomes silent, and shows a lack of emotional response, or a sense of emptiness, often as emotional protection. [28] When Aisha realized that neither her father nor mother would speak up on her behalf to the Prophet, she mentions experiencing inconsolable grief and patience, believing, "it is God alone whose help can be sought." Depraz calls this "a rupture-shock that has the form of blank, i.e., a non-experience," or not focusing on the objective reality of an event but deliberately setting aside the pre-existing assumptions and biases to access pure, subjective, lived experience of an individual as they perceived it.[29] While not explicitly mentioned, Aisha's assumptions are correct, as the Prophet withdraws and seeks counsel from Usama b. Zayd and Ali b. Abu Talib on whether to divorce her. Usama defended her. Ali encouraged Prophet Muhammad not to be troubled, as he had plenty of other wives.[30]

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[26] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 56.

[27] Natalie Depraz, "Trauma and Phenomenology," Eidos. *A Journal for Philosophy and Culture* 2, no. 2(4) (2018): 53–74, https://doi.org/10.26319/4716, 55.

[28] Depraz, "Trauma and Phenomenology."

[29] Depraz, 55-56.

[30] Sofia Rehman, *Gendering the Hadith Tradition: Recentering the Authority of Aisha, Mother of the Believers* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2024), 28.

CHAPTER 5.

SPIRITUAL PERFORMATIVE EMBODIMENT

Aisha narrates that after Prophet Muhammad finished speaking, her state changed from grief to despair to resolution:

> I was a young girl and had little knowledge of the Qur'an, I said, "By God, no doubt you have heard this slanderous speech so that it has been planted in your hearts and you have taken it as truth. Now, if I tell you that I am innocent, you will not believe me, but if I confess to you about it, God knows I am not innocent, you will surely believe me. By God, I know no example for myself except for that of Yusuf's father when he said, 'You yourselves have concocted something. Beautiful patience! I will seek help in God regarding what you describe (Q 12:18).'" Then I turned to the other side and lay on my bed, and God knew I was innocent and [in the assurance of that] God would prove my innocence.[1]

Depraz's attention or anticipation and shock-rupture phase or disruptive moves towards the emotional phase or the resolution. Freud, Balaev, Eyerman, Depraz, and Van der Kolk all acknowledge the possibilities of pathological cognitive dissociative conditions as well as escapism, a psychological defense mechanism that allows individuals to escape or disconnect from unbearable emotional pain. However, the emotional phase is a sudden shift in internal associations and bodily responses, ranging from discomfort to relief. This shift can span from a normal action to a pathological state. Such a reaction is grounded in dynamic three-dimensional interactions where attention, emotion, and processes evolve over three phases: anticipation, disruption, and resolution.[2]

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[1] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4141, "Book 64: Military Expeditions of the Prophet (Pbuh) al-Maghaazi – Chapter 34: The Narration of the Ifk," reprinted in Sunnah.com, accessed https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4141.

[2] Depraz, "Phenomenology of Surprise," 223. Full citation needed.

Resolution typically refers to how emotional experiences or psychological conflicts are processed, integrated, and ultimately resolved, particularly within the phenomenological exploration of emotions and consciousness. In the context of trauma, it involves processing and integrating traumatic memories or emotional wounds into the individual's self-concept. This process can involve making sense of traumatic experiences, acknowledging their impact, and ultimately finding ways to live with the memory of those experiences without being trapped by them. It is also related to the idea of emotional transformation. Rather than a simple return to a neutral or "normal" state, emotional resolution involves a transformation in the way emotions are understood and experienced. Emotions such as grief, anger, or fear may not disappear, but they impact the individual as they are processed and incorporated into one's broader understanding of self and life.

The pain of the slander does not go away. Aisha self-reflects on patience and assurance of God's help; she resolves to see her situation considering the Prophet Ya'qub and indirectly his brother Yusef, who faced a similar encounter and exercised patience

when falsely accused.[3] Several witnesses were questioned on her behalf, the strongest witness being Abu Ayub Ansari (as). Baira, Aisha's servant, and Zainab bint Jahash, the wife of the Prophet, all stated, "By Allah, we have never seen her wrong."[4] Her patience and Godly assurance; and the witnesses of a few righteous servants, the Prophet receives revelation that she is innocent. He stated, "A'isha! God has declared your innocence!" Aisha's mother told her to rise and go to the Prophet and she refused, responding: "By God, I will not get up and go to him or praise anyone but God Almighty" (*wa llahi l aqumu ilayyhi waa la Ahmadu illa allaha azza was jalla*), or, according to hadith and an even sharper retort: "Praise be to God. No praise to any human and no praise to you [Muhammad]" *(bi hamdi llalhi la bi ahadin wa la bi hamdika*).[5]

Returning to *qudra* and *qadir*, Aisha's actions shift the focus from slander to the survivor. She weighs the event as less than the power of God and taps into the source of

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[3] The story of Ya'qub (Jacob) and Yusef (Joseph) contains an instance of slander that was pivotal to the narrative. When Yusef was in Egypt serving in the household of al-Aziz (Potiphar, in biblical tradition), he faced a serious accusation: Al-Aziz's wife attempted to seduce Yusef, but he refused her advances. When her husband unexpectedly appeared, she falsely accused Yusef of trying to assault her. This was a clear case of slander – she deliberately made false statements to damage Yusef's reputation and save herself from embarrassment. According to the Quranic account, evidence of Yusef's innocence came when a witness suggested examining Yusef's shirt. If torn from the front, it would suggest Yusef was the aggressor; if torn from behind, it would indicate he was fleeing her advances. The shirt was torn from behind, proving Yusef's innocence. Despite this evidence, Yusef was still imprisoned for a time to protect the reputation of the household, showing how slander, even when disproven, can still cause harm to the innocent. This false accusation was one of many trials Yusef faced throughout his journey, testing his faith and character before his eventual vindication and rise to power. Seyyed Nasr, "Surah Yusef 12: 23-29," *The Study Quran* (New York, NY: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2015), 590–614, here 598-99.

[4] Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Wiles of Women," in *The Harps That Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (Yale University Press, 1987), 10–12, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bjgs.8/.

[5] Bukhhari 5.59.464. In this hadith, Aisha refers directly to both Yusuf and Ya'qub in citing the phrase 'sabrun jamil' (beautiful patience).

God's word within herself. Her actions imply that vindication is not easy and that there are godly matters where the humanity of the Prophet Muhammad is placed on notice. Emotions and recalling of the month's occurrences enabled her to go out of her way to defy her husband, father, and mother. It is *qudra* and *qadir* that empower her to prophetic resistance, acknowledging that her only vindicator is God and God alone is worthy to be praised.

Aisha's journey to spiritual embodiment and performative agency was shaped by anticipation and disruption. Through patience, active reflection, and a sense of oneness, she was able to reclaim her safety and overcome feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. She transcended the personal trauma of the event, recognizing its broader communal impact.

> Aligning with male prophets of Surah Yusef, she associates herself with the slander but also the wiliness of women (*kayd*) and seduction, a major subplot in Yusef's story. 'A'isha's story becomes intertwined with an interpretation of the role of women and insofar as they are generalized to represent all women, her evocation leads to issues of women, sexuality and authority.[6]

Aisha, however, defies the limitations of these concerns to be identified, implicitly, as a *sahaba* of God's word and explicitly as Umm al-Mu'minin (Mother of the Believers) and an inspirer of revelation, thus expanding theological presuppositions about female spiritual embodiment and resilient agency. By positioning herself as both an implicit *sahaba* (companion) of divine revelation and an explicit Umm al-Mu'minin, Aisha reconstructs the very boundaries of spiritual embodiment and theological

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[6] Jacobsen, "The Wiles of Women," 10–12, 65.

knowledge production, redefines female spiritual experience to challenge narrowly prescribed roles.

Normative feminist practices evaluate gendering under the auspices of patriarchal socialization and textural criticism of their respective sacred text interpretations. Asma Barlas, in an article entitled *The Quran and Muslim Women, Rereading Patriarchy, Rereading Liberation*, writes about a rereading of the Qur'an contextualized in 7th-century socialization that understands the difference between recognizing patriarchy and advocating patriarchy, vying for antipatriarchal interpretations. When speaking of hermeneutics, she suggests an interpretation that rediscovers what God intended, making interpretive choices such that anyone can employ the right method to ask the right question, such that while different, it can be read in similar ways.[7] Textual criticism is not the scope of this work, and yet, Aisha embodies a hermeneutical lens that epitomizes Barlas' believing women. Using scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, she claims interpretive authority through a deep intrapersonal engagement with Surah Yusuf. She asserts her right to interpret sacred text not as a passive recipient but as an active theological agent. Her hermeneutical approach transforms the text from a mere historical narrative to a rationale for perseverance that creates a living, transformative encounter. Her awareness helps expand the notions of prophetic companionship. The concept of *sahaba* has historically been largely androcentric. Aisha's embodied interpretation repositions female spiritual experience as a direct, unmediated engagement with divine

[7] Amsa Barlas, "The Quran and Muslim Women, Rereading Patriarchy and Rereading Liberation," in *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchy Interpretations of the Qu'ran* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2019), 1–31, 13-22.

revelation. Her spiritual journey creates resilience as a theological methodology and demonstrates persistence not as an unassertive endurance but as a vital hierological method of meaning-making and divine connection.

Aisha's spiritual practice represents a radical theological move that helps reclaim feminism, decolonizing it from its hegemonic construct where white, middle-class women would assert that the religious mundane of Islamic womanism is oppressive. She validates female spiritual intuition as a legitimate source of theological insight that comes from engaging traditional spaces in family and community. Her experiences help to reframe trauma as a source of divine revelation and transformation. Decentralizing male-centered heroism and refusing the praise anyone but God, she offers a hermeneutic of embodied spirituality from which we claim *Niswiyya* theology. *Niswiyya* theology interprets God-talk in a community of believers who can be viewed as survivors; however, not from the perspective of victims, women in hysteria, but ones who, with their Lord, had the will to survive.

The hermeneutical model proposed here represents a profound reimagining of theological leadership, particularly for Muslimas or *Niswiyyist* practitioners. It centers on a reconceptualization of pastoral authority—one rooted deeply in the lived human experience. When confronted with the fundamental question, "What is your pastoral authority?" the response emerges from a place of absolute empathy and self-understanding: I begin experientially with the human condition, which means I can see you, sit with you, and serve you because I can see me.

CHAPTER 6.

PASTORAL THEOLOGY RECONSIDERED

Beginning with the human condition intersects traditional theological approaches, with anthropological considerations where God is the Creator, and revelation Scripture is given a priori, based on humans being "made in the image of God and God being first."[1] Christocentric theology assumes a relational God with humans as co-creators of divinely inspired truth, anthropomorphized as God-given authority towards human power and dominance. Most theologies, which often address the question of God's nature first and that of human beings second, carry an unconscious ideal image of the human as the template for a superhuman God, framed particularly in terms of their historical and cultural inheritance, including the central images of their framers. Cooper-White posits in this regard that all descriptions of God are human fabrications.[2]

Islamic theology rejects the Christological *Imago Dei*. God's divine attributes and essence derive from tawhid, the unity of God. Muslim women and men witness the maxim لا إله إلا الله, namely, "There is no god but God." Lamptey asserts God as absolute oneness in all things, which rules out legitimacy for human domination, whether via race, class, gender, religion, or other cultural attributes.[3] Islam acknowledges different beliefs

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[1] Pamela Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024), 35.

[2] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 36–37

[3] Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University, 2018), 156–57.

but a shared humanity for which we all must provide care for God's creation. "We created you male and female, nations, and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you is the most reverent…"[4] Scripture informs us that God breathed the soul that He created for Adam, gave him a wife, and taught him the names of created beings (Qur'an 15:29; 2:31; 7:189). In Islam, nothing can be created in God's image. A hadith (Bukhari 6227 and Muslim 2841) record narrated from Abu Hurayrah (PBUH), states that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Allah created Adam in His image, and he was sixty cubits tall … Everyone who enters Paradise will be in the form of Adam, but mankind grew shorter and shorter."[5]

Islamic scholarly traditions have historically concerned philosophical and theological examinations with embodiment and agency as the intricate dialectic between divine attributes. Embodiment suggests the incorporation of identity, beliefs, and behaviors. God and human beings can hold names and attributes that appear the same, but

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[4] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Surah Hujurat 13," *The Study Quran* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 1262.

[5] حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ جَعْفَرٍ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّزَّاقِ، عَنْ مَعْمَرٍ، عَنْ هَمَّامٍ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " خَلَقَ اللَّهُ آدَمَ عَلَى صُورَتِهِ، طُولُهُ سِتُّونَ ذِرَاعًا، فَلَمَّا خَلَقَهُ قَالَ اذْهَبْ فَسَلِّمْ عَلَى أُولَئِكَ النَّفَرِ مِنَ الْمَلاَئِكَةِ جُلُوسٌ، فَاسْتَمِعْ مَا يُحَيُّونَكَ، فَإِنَّهَا تَحِيَّتُكَ وَتَحِيَّةُ ذُرِّيَّتِكَ. فَقَالَ السَّلاَمُ عَلَيْكُمْ. فَقَالُوا السَّلاَمُ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ. فَزَادُوهُ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ، فَكُلُّ مَنْ يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ عَلَى صُورَةِ آدَمَ، فَلَمْ يَزَلِ الْخَلْقُ يَنْقُصُ بَعْدُ حَتَّى الآنَ ".

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Allah created Adam in His picture, sixty cubits (about 30 meters) in height. When He created him, He said (to him), "Go and greet that group of angels sitting there, and listen what they will say in reply to you, for that will be your greeting and the greeting of your offspring." Adam (went and) said, 'As-Salamu alaikum (Peace be upon you).' They replied, 'AsSalamu-'Alaika wa Rahmatullah (Peace and Allah's Mercy be on you). So they increased 'Wa Rahmatullah'. The Prophet (ﷺ) added 'So whoever will enter Paradise, will be of the shape and picture of Adam Since then the creation of Adam's (offspring) (i.e. stature of human beings is being diminished continuously) to the present time." *Sahih al-Bukhari* 6227, "Book 79: Asking Permission – Chapter 1: How the Salaam Began," reprinted in Sunnah.com, accessed March 13, 2025, https://sunnah.com/bukhari/79.

to assert *qudra* and *qadir* in humanity never equates with God the al-Mighty. Pastoral epistemologies assert a knowing of self that, with piety, mirrors the attributes that can be mirrored. Humanity can never be *wahid* or *ahad,* or "one," and it is in fitrah or returning to the natural inclination that we come to know ourselves, God consciousness. The image of God starkly juxtaposes this concept, thereby creating an interplay between pastoral epistemological and ontological reality.

How can the word 'pastoral' address the Muslima's voice, experience, and concerns? Up until this point, I have considered comparative religious expressions of shepherding to examine hegemonic uses of normative scriptural interpretations that exclude the religiously other. Islamic feminists do not directly deal with interpretations of a shepherd, and this imagery does not feature as a common language in Islamic leadership. However, female scholars address embodiment and agency, the notion of patriarchal images, and paternalistic tendencies to which we must turn to address Muslima's voice, experience, and concern. Jerusha Lamptey states that:

> While there are many Muslim scholars who passionately promote women's equality and rights, there is a widespread ambivalence toward the general norms, terminology, and approaches of feminism or feminist theology. This ambivalence, in part, arises from the concern that dominant forms of feminism and feminist theology are not expressive of and are potentially oppressive to the experience, challenges, and liberative strategies of Muslim women.[6]

In addition to ambivalence about dominant forms of feminism, womanist theology, a liberation theology that centers on the experiences of women of color and analyzes how oppressive structures shape faith, ministry, and leadership, is nonexistent. Also, pastoral epistemologies that are important for developing methodologies that

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[6] Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices*, 1–3.

inform "professional authority in spiritual care" are evolving but limited. And it is needed as it is one of the competencies required to become a Board-Certified Chaplain, and the self-awareness needed to demonstrate those competencies.[7]

Jerusha Lamptey, in dialogue with Jeanne Hill Fletcher, Shawn M. Copeland, and Delores Williams, approaches this notion of embodiment and agency from a theological anthropological framework. Lamptey engages theological anthropology, embodiment, constraint, and survival, and the egalitarian anthropology of the other, prompting considerations about autonomy, systemic injustice, and responses to injustice.[8] I have discussed how the Qur'an frames human existence, the relationality of God to humanity, and that part of our duty as outlined by the Qur'an and Sunnah is to take care of creation, to include the ailing and the less fortunate. In addition to those considerations, I also discuss agency as a possible way of asserting feminized influence in the ministry setting, along with patience as an instrument of power.

Lamptey claims that tawhid forms the foundation of equality, agency, and voice and that any attempt to associate partners alongside God is a form of *shirk* (sin). In the pursuit of equality, women must go beyond retrieving rights and constraining ideologies, shifting from symptom to structure, interrogating assumptions, and implications. Tawhid is a principle of equilibrium, cosmic harmony, the ethical imperative, and the

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[7] "Common Qualifications and Competencies for Professional Chaplains," Association of Professional Chaplains, last updated September 26, 2024, https://www.apchaplains.org/bcci-site/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2/2024/11/Rubric-Competencies-11-2024.pdf, 12.

[8] Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices*, 156.

authoritative counter-construct to discursive social practices.[9] The *Tawhidic* model emphasizes the supremacy of God in horizontal relationships with humanity. Under the guidance of tawhid, humans are created the same and charged with the human purpose of care, concern, and accountability. The human distinction is tied to tawhid, of remembrance and engaged surrender of the actualization of *khilafah* ('caliphate' or 'stewardship') and integrative concept of *taqwa*, in constant awareness of God in conversation with fitrah, our innate nature. Lamptey describes *taqwa* as the clothes of humanity; it informs how we might be more attentive to structural transformation.[10]

M. Shawn Copeland centers embodiment in the experiences of Black women.[11] Copeland says that in and through embodiment, human persons grasp and realize our essential freedom through engagement with community and other embodied selves. She sees everyone in a web of relationships, body exchanges, and body values. Copeland examines reductionist ideology of Black bodies, voices, experiences. She posits that the formerly enslaved, despite the horrors, saw ways to free their mind, body, and spirit, and that solidarity is the only way to participate in a full humanity. In the book *But She Said*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states that "relationality contests the idea of individual agency and identity."[12] She connotes the false autonomous and independent, capable of

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[9] Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices*, 156.

[10] Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices*, 156–157.

[11] Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, "Black Women, Embodiment, and Solidarity," essay, in *Divine Words Feminine Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology* (New York City, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 167–73, 163-164.

[12] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2015), 73.

reaching beyond self or condition to the reality of each person being born into a web of relationships and responsibilities, such that women's experiences reveal that relationality, sociality, and intersubjectivity precede and condition the human self; we never exist outside of this world."[13] Hill-Fletcher describes these webs as fluid and dynamic, and as shaping self-understanding, emphasizing this concept as symbolic in motherhood, not intended to be essentializing or as the first experience of relationality, but captured in the way we are constituted in relationality. [14] This mothering is symbolic in Aisha's (ra) epithet as Umm al-Mu'minin (Mother of the Believers). Her experiences showcase the web of speculation and responsibility that reveals her individual and communal identity as wife, daughter, sister, leader, mother, beloved, caregiver, chosen one, teacher, *qadi*, *muhhadith*, victim, and survivor. These identities are not without struggle, and as such as reminiscent of the experiences of women of color. The many stories of African and African American women whose identities have been degraded to stereotypical representations like the mammy, jezebel, matriarch, and 'welfare mother' function as controlling images that have been used to dehumanize Black women and justify their oppression.

Patricia Hill Collins speaks to engaging these stereotypes and images by developing counter-narratives and self-definitions.[15] Women have created spaces where they could resist controlling images and construct spaces, such as mosques, families,

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[13] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said, 73.*

[14] Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices*, 171.

[15] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

nonprofit organizations, schools, hospitals, prisons, and other modes of ministry. These are places where they are free to speak, develop knowledge, and, in an Islamic context, are expected to discuss matters of faith and interrogate theological presuppositions. Reflexivity, self-evaluation, and self-definition are crucial for resistance-based identities for embodiment and empowerment.

"Mothering is complicated by race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and culture, all illuminated in relationality." On one hand, this status is honorific in that it "underscores that relationality requires us to relinquish parts of ourselves to care for others. We care for our families at home, as well as others in the *masjid* as mothers."[16] On the other hand, this relational care demands discernment in how we allocate our attention and resources. Hill-Fletcher calls this a "calculus of concern," the making of decisions about the distribution of limited resources and negotiation of competing concerns and needs (including our own and those of others).[17] Importantly, this self-sacrifice should not be misconstrued or upheld as self-abnegation in service of dominant, god-like ideology prevalent in normative pastoral constructs.

Aisha's example illustrates this nuanced approach to care and self-preservation. When falsely accused, she upholds the value of dignified patience while refusing to capitulate to unjust demands: "If I say I am innocent, you will not believe me." [18]And yet, her actions argue against exploitative expectations of care by refusing to recognize or

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[16] Lamptey, *Divine Words, Female Voices*, 171.

[17] Lamptey, *171*.

[18] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Witnesses, Hadith 2661.

attend to communal demands that are self-limiting and undermine true relationality. In her moment of greatest trial, Aisha voices her resistance through scriptural allusion: "By God, I know no example for myself except for that of Yusuf's father when he said, 'You yourselves have concocted something." [19] Hill-Fletcher associates this undermining of relationality with original sin, another anomaly in Islamic theology; however, it is just as easily revealed in the Islamic core value of justice (*'adl*), honoring the rights of others as an individual and communal praxis of soul-tending. Aisha's response becomes the antithesis to Jacob's statement "You have concocted [something]" [20]where "concocted" signifies the fabrication of falsehood that threatens authentic relationship—when she declares: "Beautiful patience! I will seek help in God regarding what you described."[21]

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[19] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Military Expeditions, Hadith 4141.

[20] This refers to Jacob's words in Quran 12:18, where he recognizes the deception in his sons' story about Joseph.

[21] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2017), 596.

CHAPTER 7

AISHA'S RESOLVE: A LIBERATIVE MODEL OF A WOMAN'S SHEPHERDING

Al-Ifk is not the only place where one witnesses Aisha's resolve to trust God. In the care of her father Abu Bakr al-Siddiqui, when dying, and asked to complement his death with shrouds less than that of the Prophet, she accommodates.[1] As a *muhadditha*, she narrated thousands of hadith and was well-respected in the ummah for her knowledge and care for the community. This caring image comes from her vulnerability, strength, and transformation by being resilient during a traumatic experience. She exercises trust, patience, and empathy, which represents a paradigmatic exemplification of *tawakkul* (reliance on God) that illuminates the practical integration of *qudra* and *qadir* (divine power and human agency) and informs such identities as *sahaba* (companion) of God's word), inspirer of revelation, mother of the believers, and/or shepherd of God's people.

Aisha's approach to divine trust establishes theological principles that create a lived experience, providing a historical framework for contemporary chaplaincy and ministry as leadership praxis—that is, as *Niswiyya t*heology, akin to womanist theology. This approach embodies transcendence through active reflection and transformation. This transcendence represents spiritual embodiment and resilient agency that balances divine causality with human responsibility. Rather than negating human agency or attributing all causality to human actions, it emphasizes attentiveness to care and interconnected responsibilities.

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[1] Sophia Rehman, "Abu Bakr on His Deathbed," in *A Treasure of A'ishah: A Guidance from the Beloved of the Beloved* (Leicestershire, UK: Kube Ltd, 2023), 90–91.

Niswiyya theology is justified as an interpretive lens examining the struggle, resilience, and survival of American-born Muslims, namely Black women who held onto this religion when its tenets and principles were taboo in American society and unpopular and shameful even within Black communities. African American women still had to mother families, the ummah, and non-Muslims within our social sphere while scandalized, marginalized, bruised, beaten, and at times left for dead. Aisha demonstrates practicality that maintains human responsibility while acknowledging divine decree to live out her creed. Her approach to slander and accusations exemplifies this balance through patient endurance during crises (the first aspect of trust), assurance in God, constraint from presumptions and biases, and resolute trust in divine justice and vindication. Patience, assurance, constraint, and trust are essential elements in leadership practice and complement feminized identity in spiritual care.

As Aisha testifies,

> By Allah, I never thought that Allah would reveal about my case, Divine inspiration that would be recited (forever as a part of Qur'an) as I considered myself unworthy to be talked of by Allah with something of my concern, but I hoped that Allah's messenger might have a dream in which Allah would prove my innocence. But, by Allah, I would prove my innocence. But Allah's Messenger left his seat and before any of the household left, the Divine inspiration came to Allah's Messenger. So there overtook him the same hard condition which used to overtake him (when he used to be divinely inspired). The sweat was dropping from his body like pearls, though it was a wintry day, and that was because of the weighty statement that was revealed to him. When that state of Allah's messenger was over, he got up smiling and the first word he said was, "O Aisha! Allah has declared your innocence!" Allah then revealed, "Those who spread the slander are a gang among you."[2]

[2] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Military Expeditions, Hadith 4141.

Pamela Cooper-White and Michael Cooper-White assert that ministry cannot exist without theology.[3] They suggest that Christian ministry is grounded in faith and biblical theology that is relational, communal, and reflective. Practices are the embodiment of faith, and when enacted, God's will is communicated. It is the live-out expression of a practical theology. Pastoral theology is a form of practical theology. They write, from a Christian perspective, that:

> Practical theology is constructive thinking that relates directly to pastoral care and counseling, worship and preaching, education, formation, and leadership. It is God-given reason and experience. Practical theology begins from the ground up. It takes the starting point of the human condition and the current situation addressed (including individuals, families, communities, societies, nations, and the whole creation), and puts those in dialogue with scripture and historical theological reflection. It does not begin with an abstract idea or proposition about the nature of God apart from the living creation now. It frequently engages issues of justice and healing as related to theological themes for action.[4]

Cooper-White and Cooper-White go on to instruct that source and criteria, for example, as the starting point in post-Enlightenment Western Christianity's engagement with philosophy and theories of scientific reasoning in the twentieth century, are impacted by the experiences of global disasters, such as the Holocaust or the atomic bomb. Theology can be deductive, where it comes from a prior theory or proposition and then creates modes of assessment. It can also be inductive, where thinking begins with an aspect of lived reality and works its way to some form of analysis for a more generalized

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[3] Pamela Cooper-White and Michael Cooper-White, "On the Road: Practices as Theology, and Theology as Practice," Iin *Exploring Practices of Ministr*y (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 11–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9m0tjb.6/.

[4] Cooper-White and Cooper-White, "On the Road," 11–28.

theory.[5] They also suggest that the inductive approach is a more human approach to understanding the many ways that people make their experiences and often reject scientific neutrality in favor of ethical, social, and even political lived-out phenomena.[6] Cooper-White and Copper-White offer a complementary lens, although writing from a Christian context. It is Aisha's model of *tawakkul*—the *sahaba* of the Word, inspirer of revelations, mother of the believers, shepherd of God's people—offers ontological and epistemological instructive dimensions of spiritual care for women and all others who serve in the Islamic paradigm of caregiving.

As the *sahaba* of the Word, Aisha exemplifies the female spiritual caregiver who not only preserves sacred knowledge but embodies its transformative power in daily practice. Her preservation and transmission of prophetic hadith established a precedent for women as authoritative bearers of religious tradition, legitimizing the female voice in theological discourse and pastoral care contexts. In her role as inspirer of revelations, Aisha's presence and questions frequently provided the contextual framework within which divine guidance has been manifested. This historic role illuminates how the female spiritual care provider may create sacred space where revelation becomes accessible and applicable to contemporary human suffering, functioning as a conduit for divine wisdom rather than merely its interpreter. As a shepherd of God's people, Aisha's nurturing leadership within the early Muslim community provided guidance, which fostered both spiritual and intellectual development among believers. This shepherding aspect

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[5] Cooper-White and Cooper-White, "On the Road," 16.

[6] Cooper-White and Cooper-White, "On the Road," 11–28.

resonates with the profound hadith narrated by Ibn Umar where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated: “All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock. The ruler is a shepherd and is responsible for his subjects. A man is a shepherd of his family and is responsible for his flock. A woman is a shepherd of her husband’s household and is responsible for her flock.”[7]

The Qur’anic imperative for community care is unequivocal, as Allah declares in Qur’an 3:103: “And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided.” This collective responsibility is further emphasized in the verse: “The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy” (Qur’an 49:10). The ethical foundation for caregiving is established in the divine command: “And worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess” (Qur’an 4:36).

Aisha’s trust in God manifested not as passive resignation but as active engagement with difficult circumstances while maintaining ethical integrity—a model for chaplains navigating complex institutional environments while upholding theological principles. This embodiment of care reflects the ethical imperative expressed in another prophetic tradition: “None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”[8] Aisha’s integration of intellectual rigor with spiritual praxis

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[7] Sahih al-Bukhari 7138; Sahih Muslim 1829.

[8] *Hadith an-Nawawi,* “40 Hadith of An-Nawawi Hadith 13,” reprinted in Sunnah.com, accessed March 18, 2025, https://sunnah.com/nawawi40:13.

demonstrates how theological knowledge can inform practical care strategies as an essential balance for chaplains serving diverse populations. Her willingness to address difficult questions directly while maintaining ultimate trust in divine wisdom provides a framework for chaplains engaging in existential questioning and spiritual doubt without resorting to reductive theological responses. The chaplain who incorporates Aisha's model of *tawakkul* alongside the performative expressions of *sabr*, *taqwa*, *fitrah*, and *tawhid*, establishes a comprehensive approach to spiritual care that honors Al-Ashari's theological framework while engaging practical human needs. This approach recognizes divine sovereignty as the theological foundation for human responsibility rather than its negation, enabling chaplains to facilitate spiritual growth that acknowledges both divine determination and meaningful human agency in the pursuit of spiritual well-being.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Aisha's spiritual journey represents a transcendence beyond physical limitations into a force capable of transforming entire communities. The essence of her identity developed through severe trials that threatened both her personal reputation and community stability. Her decision to place her trust in God—even above her parents and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)—exemplified a form of justice through resistance that ultimately led to liberation for herself and the broader Ummah. Through her experience, God revealed principles of justice to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that were subsequently codified in the Qur'an, established in Shariah, and integrated into holistic Islamic values.

This analysis contributes to interdisciplinary conversations on religion, psychology, gender, and historical interpretation by introducing the concept of *Niswiyya* theology, which positions identity formation as a complex, adaptive mechanism within human experience. It offers an opportunity to reclaim feminist thought by deconstructing hegemonic norms that have historically excluded women of color, providing a more constructive framework for Muslim women whose spiritual shepherding encompasses all aspects of their lives. While Jerusha Lamptey has written about Muslimah feminist perspectives, incorporating both feminist and womanist thinkers, her work does not fully capture the multidimensional nature of the struggle, survival, and shepherding central to the *Niswiyya* experience. This identity contains depths that are often overlooked. In our current society, the oppression of Black women continues through labor exploitation, denial of rights typically afforded to men (particularly white men in patriarchal systems),

and persistent negative imagery originating from slavery. Similar patterns of marginalization affect Muslimas as a whole.

As someone of Somali-American heritage, I have witnessed the multifaceted discrimination experienced by Muslim women. From Somali women being denied aid in conflict zones to Black American Muslims enduring shame and degradation despite their pioneering role in establishing Islam in America. *Niswiyya's* identity is frequently questioned, as illustrated by experiences like being corrected on prayer posture by fellow worshippers while in sajdah. Restructuring feminist thought as *Niswiyya* acknowledges these complexities while challenging stereotypes of Muslim women as either passive, aggressive or potentially dangerous.

The deconstruction of traditional pastoral frameworks has created space for the emergence of women's shepherding roles, marking a pivotal shift in American spiritual leadership. *Niswiyya* theology stands at this intersection, recognizing God's presence as women integrate the shepherding of family, community, mosque activities, chaplaincy, education, and nonprofit work into a cohesive ministry approach. This model, exemplified by Aisha (AS)—*the Umm al-Umma* who mothered a community without biological children—offers an essential pathway forward for American religious communities seeking more inclusive leadership paradigms and for women to claim the embodiment and agency whereby one claims power and authority to serve God.

Aisha's *tawakkul* (trust in God) provides the foundation for *Niswiyya's* self-identity, demonstrating how women's shepherding transcends conventional boundaries through patience, assurance, and restraint. As America continues to evolve socially and spiritually, these qualities embodied by women *sahaba* (companions of God's word)

become increasingly vital to communal progress. By embracing women's shepherding approaches, which balance nurturing with spiritual guidance. American faith communities can address contemporary challenges with the holistic perspective necessary for meaningful forward movement in an increasingly complex society. Future research should explore the connection between individual and communal trauma within Islamic contexts. While both individual trauma and communal post-traumatic stress disorder have been studied extensively, the complexities of trauma within Islamic communal structures require further examination. The story of *al-Ifk* (the slander against Aisha) could provide insights into the relationship between individual trauma and communal impact from an Islamic perspective, including considerations of collective memory, restorative justice, and communal care, particularly relevant as Muslim communities face increasing challenges under current political conditions.

Finally, comparative studies of shepherding models across different faith traditions could enhance our understanding of *Niswiyya* shepherding. Ibn Khaldun's work on pastoralism, though not directly addressing pastoral roles, might offer valuable perspectives on how solidarity, unity, and mutual support strengthen communities. Conflict resolution in marriage and family is another value-added exploration of Islamic ethics. Spiritual explorations like *tazkiyah* or purification would prove invaluable, especially in the context of Sufi theology's rendering a "polishing of the heart."

As a Muslima of African and American heritage, my focus remains on supporting Muslim women and all women who have been slandered in their journey toward embodied spirituality and agency as *sahaba* of God's Word—women who achieve transcendence, practice patience in giving and receiving, remain assured of God's

presence, and trust in divine outcomes. These women understand the power of internalizing God's word and manifest the role of mother as *sahaba* of God's Word.

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