

# The Primary Obligations of a Muslim

*Preliminary Remarks in the Concise Guide to Islam*

by

‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr al-Akhḍarī (10<sup>th</sup> c. Hirji / 16<sup>th</sup> c. CE)

Translated into Arabic verse by ‘Abd Allah al-Shinqīṭī (13<sup>th</sup> / 18<sup>th</sup> c.)

Edited and translated into English verse by Brendan Newlon<sup>1</sup>

*A believer's duties in summary, by ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Akhḍarī  
May God forgive and grant reprieve to him, to us, and all who believe.*

<p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ</p>	
<p>It is in the name of Allah that we commence, described with mercy and beneficence.</p>	<p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ</p>

<sup>1</sup> The original text by Akhdari is given in smaller green text across the top of each section, the verses by Shinqiti are on the right, and my translation is on the left. I have only included the portions of Shinqiti’s text which correspond to the section of Akhdari’s prologue translated here. The Arabic and English versified translations do not correspond perfectly to each other in every line, so I have occasionally separated rhyming couplets in Arabic to maintain the texts in parallel according to their meaning. For a complete translation of Akhdari’s text, see Abd al-Rahman al-Akhḍarī, *Fiqh 101: Prayer and Purification (Maliki Option)*, trans. Rami Nsour (Tayba Foundation, 2015), <https://goo.gl/vcwqqS>; For Shinqiti’s complete text in Arabic, see Abdallah ibn Ahmad al-Shinqiti, *Nazm Al-Alakhdari*, 2009, <https://goo.gl/w5bDzN>.

الحمد لله رب العالمين

Lord of all worlds and Sustainer too,  
To Him alone all praise is due.<sup>2</sup>

فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ مُرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

والصلاة والسلام على سيدنا محمد خاتم النبيين وإمام المرسلين

May salutations and eternal peace content  
the seal of all the prophets sent  
The one God's messengers all prayed behind  
The foremost chosen to guide mankind  
Our master Muhammad; may he be  
blessed with peace eternally.

ثُمَّ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ لِلْأَمِينِ  
سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ إِمَامِ  
رُسُلِنَا وَالْأَنْبِيَاءِ الْخَتَامِ

أول ما يجب على المكلف تصحيح إيمانه

At maturity the first thing you must do  
is verify that your faith is true.<sup>3</sup>

أَوَّلُ وَاجِبٍ عَلَى مَنْ كُفِّفَا  
تَصْحِيحُهُ إِيمَانَهُ وَيَعْرِفَا

ثم معرفة ما يصلح به فرض عينه

2 In Akhdari's text, these two lines appear exactly as they would also appear as verses of the Qur'an. However, they are used here as ritual phrases that are uttered whenever one commences any noble work, and are not explicitly presented as citations of the Qur'an. Shinqiti's text also begins with the *basmala* at the top of the page, but his first line paralleling Akhdari's text is a praise of God that differs from the familiar Qur'anic phrasing.

3 This entails learning systematic theology (*'aqīdah*) until one achieves a sound understanding of the beliefs agreed upon by the overwhelming historical majority of Sunni Muslims (*ahl al-sunnah w'al-jama'ah*), meaning the Ash'arī and Maturīdī theological schools. Traditionally, this would be done by studying a primer text such as *al-'Aqīdah al-Ṭahāwīyya* under the guidance of a qualified teacher. For an English translation with commentary, see Yusuf, Hamza, 2008. *The creed of Imam al-Ṭahawī*. Berkeley: Zaytuna Institute.

Then know the personal obligations you must learn correctly how to do. <sup>4</sup>	مُصْلِحَ فَرَضِ الْعَيْنِ كَالْأَحْكَامِ لِلطُّهْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَالصِّيَامِ
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كأحكام الصلاة والطهارة والصيام ويجب عليه أن يحافظ على حدود الله ويقف عند أمره ونهيه	
Like the rulings of purity and prayer and fasting. Then take utmost care with matters wherein God set limits. Do as commanded, not what He prohibits.	وَوَأَجِبْ حِفْظُ حُدُودِ الْحَيِّ بِالْوَقْفِ عِنْدَ أَمْرِهِ وَالنَّهْيِ

ويتوب إلى الله سبحانه قبل أن يسخط عليه	
And turn to Him repentantly lest He— transcendent— should be angry. <sup>5</sup>	وَأَنْ يَتُوبَ قَبْلَ سُخْطِ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ عَلَيْهِ بِالْمَلَاهِي

وشروط التوبة الندم على ما فات والنية أن لا يعود إلى ذنب فيما بقي عليه من عمره ،	
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4 The personal obligations, or *farḍ 'ayn*, are the duties God made incumbent upon each person individually. These vary according to one's circumstances, but generally include the obligation to ritually purify oneself in order to perform prayers five times a day, and to fast during Ramadan if one is able. Upon possessing a given minimal amount of wealth for a full lunar year, paying zakat would become an obligation. As soon as one has the means to perform the Hajj pilgrimage, performing it becomes an obligation. If entering into a marriage, business, or other activity, then learning the duties associated with those circumstances would also become a personal obligation, etc.

5 God is transcendent beyond temporality and is eternally unaffected by any change, so this should be read as referring to the human experience of time and indicating the requirement to repent immediately upon recognizing the misdeed, since delaying would cause the person to enter into a circumstance that merits Allah's anger.

وَأَنْ يَتْرَكَ الْمَعْصِيَةَ فِي سَاعَتِهَا إِنْ كَانَ مُتَلَبِّسًا بِهَا

And the conditions for repentance: one is to feel remorse for what you've done,<sup>6</sup> then intending never to repeat that sin, and desisting this moment that you're in.

وَشَرَطُهَا النَّدَمُ وَالنِّيَّةُ أَنْ  
يَكْفَى وَالْإِقْلَاعُ عَنْ غَيْرِ الْحَسَنِ

وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُ أَنْ يُؤَخِّرَ التَّوْبَةَ ، وَلَا يَقُولَ حَتَّى يَهْدِيَنِي اللَّهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْ عِلَامَاتِ الشَّقَاءِ وَالْخِذْلَانِ وَطَمَسِ الْبَصِيرَةِ

Repentance does not allow delay nor is it permissible to say: "I will repent when Allah guides me." Such words are signs of misery, forsakenness, and loss of the light of understanding and insight.<sup>7</sup>

وَلَا يُؤَخَّرُ أَوْ يَقُلْ حَتَّى تَعِنُ  
هَدَايَةَ اللَّهِ لَهُ فَذَلِكَ مِنْ  
عِلَامَةِ الشَّقَاءِ وَالْخِذْلَانِ  
وَطَمَسِ قَلْبِهِ عَنِ الْإِيمَانِ

وَيَجِبُ عَلَيْهِ حِفْظُ لِسَانِهِ مِنَ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْكَلامِ الْقَبِيحِ

One must guard the tongue; don't let it say words in a lewd, vile, or shameful way.

وَالْحِفْظُ لِلِّسَانِ عَنْ صَرِيحٍ  
فُحْشٍ وَكُلِّ كَلِمٍ قَبِيحٍ

6 Remorse refers to an honest recognition that one has done wrong that inspires one to sincerely wish not to repeat the mistake. One may seem to avoid further wrongdoing by merely resolving not to repeat an action, but repentance, like an apology, only becomes a meaningful and beautiful expression when coupled with sincerity. There is no value in the empty apology of one who feels no remorse for what they have done. Similarly, repentance is an inner spiritual state that can only be achieved after experiencing remorse. It follows that knowledge of right and wrong, submission to the truth of that knowledge, and remorse for the wrong action are all necessary prerequisites to repentance. Furthermore, repentance is a prerequisite to seeking forgiveness from anyone who was wronged and then from God.

7 Instead of "loss of insight," Shinqiti's version might be translated as "loss of faith from the heart."

وأيمان الطلاق ، وانتهاز المسلم وإهانته ، وسبّه

Nor take oaths failing which divorce results.  
Leave scorning Muslims, belittling, and insults.<sup>8</sup>

وَأَيْمُنَ الطَّلَاقِ وَانْتِهَارِ  
مُسْلِمٍ أَوْ إِهَانِهِ بِعَارٍ

وتخويله في غير حق شرعي

And giving fright without a cause  
that's sanctioned under sacred laws.

مِنْ سَبِّ أَوْ تَخْوِيلِهِ لِمَنْعٍ  
جَمِيعِهَا فِي غَيْرِ حَقِّ شَرْعِي

ويجبُ عليه حفظ بصره عن النظر إلى الحرام

It's required to keep your gaze inhibited  
from looking at things that are prohibited.

وَالْحِفْظُ لِلْبَصْرِ عَنِ حَرَامٍ

ولا يحل له أن ينظر إلى مسلم بنظرة تؤذيه إلا أن يكون فاسقاً فيجب هجرانه

And it is not allowed to look askance  
at a Muslim with a hurtful glance—  
Except transgressors; that's another story,  
for leaving such company is obligatory.

كَنْظَرَةٍ تُؤْذِي أَخَا الْإِسْلَامِ  
وَحَيْثُ كَانَ فَاسِقًا لَنْ يُزْجَرَ

<sup>8</sup> Here, the text forbids speaking harshly to Muslims. As for the prohibition against speaking harshly to non-Muslims, this is already well known from explicit Qur'anic commands to that effect (eg. 16:125), as well as from *a fortiori* examples provided in Qur'anic passages describing the comportment of prophets toward oppressive non-Muslim figures (eg. 19:42-48, 20:44). It is also known from the exemplary etiquette with which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ interacted with non-Muslims whether in times of peace or conflict.

فَوَاجِبٌ دُونَ أَذْيٍّ أَنْ يُهْجَرَ

ويجب عليه حفظ جميع جوارحه ما استطاع

Protecting all the limbs is your responsibility,  
so guard them to the best of your ability.

وَحِفْظُهُ مَا اسْتَطَاعَ لِلْجَوَارِحِ

وَأَنْ يَحِبَّ لِلَّهِ وَيَبْغِضَ لَهُ وَيَرْضَى لَهُ وَيَغْضَبَ لَهُ وَيَأْمُرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَى عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

Let your love or hate accord with God's and make  
your pleasure and anger be for His sake.  
Command to what's commendable  
and forbid what's reprehensible.

وَأَنْ يُحِبَّ لِلَّهِ الْفَاتِحِ  
وَالْبُغْضُ وَالرِّضَى لَهُ وَيَأْمُرًا  
بِالْعُرْفِ ثُمَّ النَّهْيُ عَمَّا أَنْكَرَا

ويحرم عليه الكذب والغيبة والنميمة والكبر والعجب

And forbidden too are lying, backbiting,  
tale-bearing, vanity, self-aggrandizing,

وَتَحْرِمُ الْغَيْبَةَ ثُمَّ الْكِذْبُ  
نَمِيمَةٌ كِبْرٌ رِيَاءٌ عُجْبٌ

والرياء والسمعة والحسد والبغض

Performing deeds hoping others see,  
bragging, hating, jealousy,

وَسُمْعَةٌ وَحَسَدٌ وَالْبُغْضُ مَعُ

ورؤية الفضل على الغير والهمز واللمز والعبث والسخرية والزنا والنظر إلى الأجنبية والتلذذ بكلامها

Or to exalt oneself with prideful thinking,  
or taunting done by pointing and winking,  
Mockery and frivolity,  
fornication and adultery.  
Gazing at someone you could possibly marry,  
or enjoying their voice beyond what's necessary.<sup>9</sup>

رُؤْيَيْهِ الْفَضْلَ عَلَى الْغَيْرِ امْتَنَّعَ  
هَمْزٌ وَلَمْزٌ عَبَثٌ سُخْرِيَّةٌ  
زَنَى وَأَنْ يَنْظُرَ أَجْنَبِيَّةً

وأكل أموال الناس بغير طيب نفس

And pressing others aggressively  
until they give their wealth, but grudgingly.

وَلَذَّةٌ بِصَوْتِهَا وَالْأَكْلُ  
بِغَيْرِ طَيْبِ النَّفْسِ لَا يَحِلُّ

والأكل الشفاعة أو الدين

Or seeking after compensation  
to intercede though it's your obligation.<sup>10</sup>  
And religious work when your true concern

أَوْ بِالشَّفَاعَةِ أَوْ الدِّينِ وَأَنْ

9 The Arabic grammar appears to address men with the command to respect the privacy of women and not to objectify their appearances or voices as means of enjoyment. I have translated it using gender-neutral language because the injunction applies equally to both men and women. There is a modern trend to be suspicious of apparently gendered statements, so it should be noted that the phrasing here reflects a rhetorical custom, and does not make a point of distinction relating to gender; the “masculine” pronoun in Arabic can be used in both singular and plural forms as gender-neutral. For example, Islamic theology rejects attributing gender to God yet Muslims refer to Him with a pronoun most often used for males.

10 There is an obligation to intercede when one has the ability to protect others from oppression; demanding payment for such a duty might even amount to racketeering.

is how much money you will earn. <sup>11</sup>	
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وتأخير الصلاة عن أوقاتها	
And it would be a sin if you hadn't prayed, then the prayer time passed while you delayed.	يُؤَخِّرُ الصَّلَاةَ عَنِ وَقْتِ الْحَسَنِ

ولا يحل له صحبة فاسق ولا مجالسته لغير ضرورة	
Avoid wrongdoers; don't needlessly spend your time with them nor be their friend.	وَلَمْ تَجْزُ صُحْبَةً فَاسِقٍ وَلَا جِلاسُهُ دُونَ ضَرُورَةِ الْوَلَا

ولا يطلب رضا المخلوقين بسخط الخالق	
Don't seek a created thing's satisfaction while angering the Creator with your action.	وَلَا رِضَى الْخَلْقِ بِسُخْطِ الْخَالِقِ

قال الله سبحانه وتعالى ﴿ والله ورسوله أحق أن يرضوه إن كانوا مؤمنين ﴾	
A believer's greater duty is to satisfy the messenger and God Most High <sup>12</sup>	فَأَلَّهُ أَوْلَى بِالرِّضَى مِنْ فَاسِقٍ

11 It is permissible to receive payment or earn a living by performing religious services, however, the action should primarily be done for the sake of God, even if compensation is anticipated. In an alternate version of the text, the Arabic refers to making a living through debts, recalling that usury is prohibited in Islam.

12 Both the versified texts in Arabic and English avoid appearing to translate the verse of the Qur'an which was quoted in the original text and instead merely provide a statement with roughly parallel meaning. This is out of caution against seeming to attribute the author's own wording to God.



وقال عليه الصلاة والسلام : لا طاعة لمخلوق في معصية الخالق

We do not obey someone created  
opposing what the Creator legislated

وَقَالَ لَا طَاعَةَ لِمَخْلُوقٍ فِي  
مَعْصِيَةِ الْخَالِقِ خَيْرٌ مَّنْ قُفِي

ولا يحل له أن يفعل فعلاً حتى يعلم حكم الله فيه

And until you know the ruling God decreed  
about a matter, do not proceed.

وَلَا يَحِلُّ الْفِعْلُ حَتَّى يَعْلَمَا  
حُكْمَ الْإِلَهِ بِسُؤَالِ الْعُلَمَا

ويسأل العلماء ويقتدي بالمتبعين لسنة محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم الذين يدلون على طاعة الله ،

ويحذرون من اتباع الشيطان

And ask the scholars and follow those who  
follow the Prophet's way in all they do.  
Who indicate it's Allah we must obey,  
and prohibit following in Satan's way.

وَيَقْتَدِي بِالْعُلَمَاءِ الْعَامِلِينَ  
التَّابِعِي سُنَّةِ خَيْرِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ  
الْأَلَى يَدُلُّونَ عَلَى الرَّحْمَنِ  
مُحَذِّرِينَ طُرُقَ الشَّيْطَانِ

ولا يرضى لنفسه ما رضىه المفلسون الذين ضاعت أعمارهم في غير طاعة الله تعالى،

فيا حسرتهم ويا طول بكائهم يوم القيامة

Don't accept for yourself what would content  
those bankrupt ones whose lives were spent  
doing other than obeying God—for oh, what grief!  
And how they'll cry on Judgment Day without relief!

لَا تَرْضَ مَا رَضِيَ الْمُفْلِسُ  
مَنْ ضَاعَ عُمُرُهُ بِعَصْيَانٍ وَسُو  
يَا حَسْرَةَ الْعُصَاةِ فِي الْقِيَامَةِ  
مَا أَطْوَلَ الْبُكَاءَ وَالنَّدَامَةَ

نسأل الله أن يوفقنا لاتباع سنة نبينا وشفيعنا وسيدنا محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم

We ask that God grant us success  
to follow our prophet in faithfulness.  
Our beloved master who will intercede for us  
Muhammad— upon him peace and blessedness.<sup>13</sup>

نَسْأَلُهُ سُبْحَانَهُ تَوْفِيقَنَا  
لِسُنَّةِ الْهَادِي وَخَتْمًا حَسَنًا

13 Shinqiti's version could be translated as "we ask Him –transcendent– to make us successful in the *sunna*h of the guide (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) and [we ask that our lives conclude with] a beautiful ending." *Amīn*.