

Unveiling the Contemporary Relevance of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Teachings to Counter Islamophobia and Foster Religious Tolerance

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Abstract

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In the contemporary landscape, the urgent need to address misconceptions surrounding Islam has become increasingly apparent, exacerbated by the pervasive influence of Islamophobia. This research article aims to tackle this issue by exploring the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and highlighting their contemporary relevance. The distorted portrayal of Islam, often influenced by prejudiced views, contributes to harmful stereotypes and perpetuates misunderstanding. The root cause of these misconceptions is identified as ignorance, coupled with preconceived biases against Islam. By delving into the teachings that emphasize good behavior, religious tolerance, and inclusivity, this research seeks to bridge the gap between misconceptions and reality. Understanding and applying the Prophet's teachings serve as the foundation for fostering dialogue between diverse religions, contributing to the development of a more tolerant and harmonious society that appreciates the diversity of religious beliefs. This study aims to contribute to the establishment of a pluralistic society in the present age, fostering an environment of mutual understanding and respect.

Introduction

Dialogue is an essential requirement in a pluralistic society. Today, in every country around the world, there are believers and followers of more than one religion. Many regions and countries are experiencing a rapid decline in the population of local religions, while the numbers of followers of foreign religions are increasing. In most European countries, the proportion of the Muslim population is rapidly rising. For Muslims living in such a diverse society, an important question arises: What will be their attitude and the nature of their relations with fellow countrymen and non-Muslims? Moreover, the world has effectively become a global village, witnessing increased interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims. This extends beyond cultural exchanges to include customs, marriage rituals, and ways of living. Pressing issues, such as Muslim and non-Muslim students studying together in educational institutions, and Muslims and non-Muslims working side by side in matters of food and drink, along with the distinction between halal and haram, require careful

consideration of the challenges faced by a pluralistic society. This article aims to explore the nature of family and social relations with non-Muslims within the context of biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)."

The literal meaning of the word Islam is peace and security, which extends its benefits to all creatures in the universe, including humans, animals, and birds. The philosophy of peace in Islam did not arise as a response to temporary necessities or accidents. Rather, at the time of man's creation, even before the angels feared the corruption of man on earth, Allah Almighty established guiding principles in the Qur'an and Sunnah. It was for the purpose of teaching and preaching these principles that the Prophet was sent as a mercy to all the worlds. Islam provides fundamental commands and laws, establishing a system of conduct through which man can attain lasting peace and a stable land. This system was not confined to mere writings; the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Rashidun Caliphs served as practical models. It was manifested in the form of a state where even the feeding of a goat on the banks of the Euphrates River was considered the responsibility of the state. Islam advocates peace equally for Muslims and non-Muslims, strongly condemning sedition and corruption in several places in the Holy Quran. The divine statement is:

1- "وَلَا تَعْتَوُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ"

"Do not exceed the bounds of monotheism and justice when causing trouble on the earth. In Surah Al-Baqarah

"وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ"

And Fitnah is worse than killing.

Allah emphasizes that fitnah (mischief) is a more serious offense than murder."

Family relations with non-Muslims

Islamic law guarantees the safety of all citizens without discrimination, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. The honor and dignity of non-Muslims, along with the provision of security, satisfaction, and peace, are as crucial in an Islamic state as they are for Muslims. It is the duty of the Islamic government to ensure that non-Muslims living within its territory, for whom the government has accepted responsibility, are not subject to any harm or infringement upon their lives, property, Honor, dignity, and religious freedom. The government must fulfill this responsibility by safeguarding non-Muslims in every possible way. These individuals are considered Mu'ahideen,³ and despite practicing a religion different from that of the government, they should never face oppression due to religious

differences. The principles of justice and fairness in Islam should be extended to all of God's creatures, ensuring that no one is deprived of their rights. Islam has established "Sila Rahmi"⁴ as one of the rules and regulations to strengthen the roots of the family and ensure the sustainability of its structure. Islam emerged as a symbol of mercy and compassion for all human beings and social classes. Consequently, it has interacted with non-Muslim nations and their subjects with exemplary mercy, equality, compassion, and tolerance. "Sila Rahmi" is an essential social value, consistently emphasized in all Shariats, and mandated for all nations. After embracing monotheism, as advocated by the children of Yaqub (peace be upon him), and demonstrating benevolence towards their parents, a commitment to mercy was established among relatives.

"وَ إِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ. وَ بِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَ الْيَتَامَىٰ وَ الْمَسْكِينِ وَ قُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا" -⁵

“And [recall] when We took the covenant from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them], "Do not worship except Allah; and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good [words]”

One of the distinguishing and prominent features of the life of the Holy Prophet(PBUH), when the initial revelation was bestowed upon him. Upon returning home, feeling a hint of apprehension, he candidly shared the situation with his life partner, Hazrat Khadijah. In response, she reassured him with words of comfort and empowerment:

"كلا والله ما يخزيك الله ابدا، إنك لتصل الرحم، وتحمل الكل، وتكسب المعدوم، وتقري الضيف، وتعين على نوائب الحق" -⁶

"By Allah! Allah will never disgrace you. You are the possessor of exemplary morals, a bestower of mercy, a bearer of the burdens of the impoverished, an earner for the destitute. Your unparalleled hospitality and unwavering commitment to truth in challenging times set you apart."

The Bible emphasizes the importance of children honoring and obeying their parents. It advises that children should not be provoked to anger but rather nurtured and guided in the ways of the Lord.⁷

It is also mentioned in the Bible that, “If you fail to love and prioritize your family, particularly your immediate family, you are rejecting your faith in God. According to scripture, this act is considered more severe than outright disbelief in God”.⁸

Islam ensures the protection of the life, property, honor, and religious freedom of non-Muslims residing in Islamic states. Moreover, it obliges the rulers to treat them equally with Muslims. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) always treated his non-Muslim relatives with mercy and taught the same to the Companions and all mankind. Asma bint Abu Bakr (RA) expressed his behavior by saying:

"My mother, who was a polytheist, came to see me. I approached the Messenger of Allah, may God bless him and grant him peace, informing him of her visit and seeking guidance on how to respond to her expectations. He advised, 'Be kind to your mother.'⁹

The Prophet used to pray to non-Muslims as well. It is narrated by Hazrat Anas that the Prophet asked a Jew for something to drink and he offered it. So the Prophet prayed to him that Allah may keep you beautiful and handsome, so his hair remained black until the time of his death¹⁰.

It was also the custom of the Holy Prophet that he used to visit non-Muslims for 'ayadat. It is narrated from Hazrat Anas that a Jewish boy who used to serve the Prophet fell ill, so the Prophet went to visit him."¹¹

This is also the view of Islamic jurists:

"ولا بأس بعبادة اليهودى والنصرانى لانه نوع برّ فى حقهم وما نهينا عن ذلك"¹²

There is nothing wrong with visiting a Jew and a Christian because it is a kind of goodness and kindness towards them, and we are not forbidden from it.

Social relations with non-Muslims

In the social system introduced by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he not only encouraged Muslims to be kind to each other but also imparted lessons on good behaviour to non-Muslims, setting an example through his own actions. The Prophet of Islam emphasized the importance of treating non-Muslims, guests, neighbours, and citizens of a Muslim state with kindness. In every case, he instructed that they be treated well, declaring it the responsibility of the government and Muslim society to protect their life, wealth, and Honor.

Syed Jalaluddin Umari writes:

The issue of human relations is the most important and critical problem in society. Its significance and fragility increase in the present age. When followers of different ideas, ideologies, beliefs, and religions live together in society, their lifestyles, cultures, and societies should be kept separate from each other. In this situation, the chances of oppression and injustice increase, and intellectual prejudices, personal and national tendencies, and social factors begin to hinder justice and the payment of rights. Controlling this is the primary need of every civilized and righteous society. Human relations are connected to ethics and law. The goal of ethics is to improve and enhance these relationships, making them better and happier. The law is in place to keep them within legitimate limits and to prevent anyone from deviating or transgressing beyond those limits. If morals and law fulfill their duties, society will be blessed with a wealth of peace and order; otherwise, the jungle will rule, rights will be trampled, and people will continue to suffer silently under the oppression of the powerful.¹³

Currently, the entire world has become a pluralistic society for various reasons. In any country where there is a majority of people belonging to one race, religion, or language, there are also individuals of other races, religions, and languages. Although they constitute a minority, they possess equal rights as stipulated by the constitution. The

unequivocal principle in today's pluralistic society is that minorities enjoy equal rights, a principle not legally denied. Islam acknowledges religious differences and envisions a society where people of diverse religions coexist.¹⁴

Islam does not compel anyone in matters of guidance.¹⁵ It grants every human being reason, thought, and a degree of freedom within which individuals must decide between disbelief, polytheism, guidance, and misguidance. This freedom of thought is bestowed because humans have been created with reason and intellect.

The conversion of a person's religion is influenced by their environment; otherwise, every child is born with a natural disposition. This concept is elucidated in the hadith of the Prophet. It is narrated from Abu Hurairah (RA) that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, 'Every child is born with a natural disposition, and then their parents make them a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.'¹⁶

Justification of gifts for non-Muslims

according to Islamic teachings, a gift can be accepted from a non-Muslim, as the Prophet received gifts from certain non-Muslim rulers, such as the Muqaqs of Egypt and other leaders. Muslims are also encouraged to give gifts to non-Muslims or polytheists. If the recipient is a relative or neighbor, it is specifically permitted to do so. Islam emphasizes the importance of maintaining social relations with non-Muslims, fostering an attitude of love, sympathy, and cooperation with them. Likewise, regarding the acceptance of gifts from non-Muslims during festivals, there is nothing wrong with it. Rather, it should be accepted with the intention of promoting benevolence and goodwill, providing an opportunity to share the message of Islam in a positive manner.

Allah Says in Qur'an

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُقْسِطِينَ-¹⁷

“Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.”

The exchange of gifts and presents holds significant importance in social life; it fosters friendship, diminishes mutual distance, and alleviates signs of pain and sorrow from the hearts. Elaborating on this concept, the Prophet said:

تهادوا تحابوا.¹⁸

“Exchange your gifts, because mutual love will increase.”

There is proof in the hadiths of giving gifts to non-Muslims and accepting their gifts. Both receiving and giving gifts from non-Muslims are permissible and the proof of this is found in the life of the Prophet himself. In a hadith there is:

On the way to Egypt, the Christian ruler of a region, Yohanna Ibn Adba, sent a white mule and a cloak as a gift to the Prophet, and the Prophet wrote to him that he should remain as the ruler of his people because he Payment of jizya has been approved.¹⁹ In another narration Anas (RA) said that the Aqeedar (Christians) of Dumah (a place near Tabuk) had sent a gift to the Prophet (PBUH).²⁰

In the same way, the king of Egypt, Muqoqs, took the blessed letter sent by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he sealed it in an ivory box and kept it for the protection of his maidservant. And Muqoqs sent off the Messenger of Hazrat Hatib(RA) with great honor and respect, and sent valuable gifts for the Prophet, including Hazrat Mariya and Hazrat Sirin, and a mule called "Duldul" and many valuable clothes. From the womb of Hazrat Maria(RA), the son of Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) was born. Hazrat Sirin (RA) was given by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to his companion and poet Rasul Hasan bin Thabit (RA). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to ride on a mule called "Duldul" and was riding on it in the Battle of Hawazin.²¹

Promoting Acts of Kindness towards Non-Muslim Neighbors

Islam emphasizes high morals and exemplary character among its followers. The Shari'ah does not endorse the use of immoral or inappropriate language, nor does it sanction narrow-minded behavior in any matter. Consequently, Muslims are expected to embody the teachings and instructions of Islam regarding mutual ethics. This ethical framework, however, extends beyond the Muslim community to encompass non-Muslims as well. In Islam, considerable significance is placed on the treatment of neighbors, with teachings emphasizing good behavior and manners towards them. The principles of good conduct and moral uprightness are universal, promoting harmony and respect not only within the Muslim community but also fostering positive interactions with individuals of other faiths.

All such rulings regarding neighbors include both Muslims and non-Muslims, that is, just as the Muslim neighbor will be protected from harm and included in happiness, In the same way, the non-Muslim neighbor also has the right to provide him with peace and to treat him with good behavior.

Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar (RA) once slaughtered a goat, instructed the slave to deliver the meat to the neighbor first, a person said! He is a Jew, he said, "He is a Jew, so what happened?" He quoted the Messenger of Allah(PBUH), saying that

ما زال جبريل يوصيني بالجار، حتى ظننت أنه سيورثه.²²

Gabriel bequeathed me so much and continuously that I began to think that he would make the neighbors share in the inheritance.

Regarding this hadith, Allama Rasheed Raza Masri writes,

هذا دليل على أن ابن عمر فهم من الوصايا المطلقة في الجار انها تشمل المسلم وغير المسلم ونا ببيك بفهمه وعلمه.²³

This is the proof that Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar RA has given absolute emphasis in relation to good behavior towards the neighborhood, it is clear that they include both

Muslims and non-Muslims, the knowledge of Abdullah bin Umar and understanding should be enough for you.

Various neighbors are mentioned in Surah Al-Nisa verse 36 in Holy Qur'an, there is also a type of 'Al-Jar Al-Junab', some people have taken it to mean non-Muslim neighbors, Allama Qurtubi writes:

فالأوصية بالجار مأمور بها مندوب اليها مسلماً كان أو كافراً²⁴.

The order of good behavior towards one's neighbor, it is obligatory and preferred, whether the neighbor is a Muslim or a non-Muslim.

قال العلماء الأحاديث في إكرام الجار، جاءت مطلقة غير مقيدة حتى الكافر²⁵.

The scholars assert that the hadiths addressing the importance of respecting one's neighbor are unequivocal; there is no ambiguity in this regard, and the directive applies universally, extending even to non-believers.

Non-Muslim staying in the mosque

A mosque is a sacred place that must be kept clean, as Muslims gather there for worship. Consequently, adhering to Islamic commandments, it is essential to prevent all forms of pollution and noise, and ensure that the mosque is not entered in a state of impurity. However, despite these guidelines, there are instances of non-Muslim communities entering and residing in mosques.

An incident narrated by Hasan al-Basri sheds light on this matter: Banu Tha'qif approached the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) for the meetin, and a tent was assembled for them at the rear of the mosque. This arrangement allowed them to observe the prayers of the Muslims. Concerned by this, someone asked the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), questioning why he permitted polytheists to stay in the mosque. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Replied

إن الأرض لاتنجس ، إنما ينجس ابن آدم²⁶.

The Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) said: The earth is not impure, man is impure.

Allama Al-Khatibi asserts from this hadith with the following words

وفي هذا الحديث من العلم أن الكافر يجوز له دخول المسجد لحاجة له فيه أو للمسلم اليه²⁷.

It is understood from it, that if a disbeliever requires something in the mosque or if a Muslim needs something from it, they are permitted to enter.

Honoring the funeral rites of a non-Muslim

Muslim or non-Muslims all are human beings. Therefore, it is permissible to share in their joy and sorrow within certain limits. The thought of a funeral leads one to contemplate the afterlife and can be a jolting experience for an individual. Consequently, if a funeral procession passes by, it is appropriate for a person to stand out of respect. This holds true

even if the deceased is a non-Muslim, as the reverence for human dignity and honor bestowed by Allah Almighty is emphasized in all divine religions. Islam, in particular, mandates its adherents to uphold these sanctities.

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا.²⁸

“And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.”

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), while teaching the protection of human honor and dignity, ordered its followers to stand in respect for the funerals of non-Muslims. It is narrated in Sahih Bukhari that:

كَانَ سَهْلُ بْنُ حَنِيفٍ، وَقَيْسُ بْنُ سَعْدٍ قَاعِدَيْنِ بِالْقَادِسِيَّةِ، فَمَرُّوا عَلَيْهِمَا بِجَنَازَةٍ، فَقَامَا، فَقِيلَ لِهَمَّا إِنَّهَا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ أَيُّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الدِّمَةِ، فَقَالَا: إِنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَرَّتْ بِهِ جِنَازَةٌ فَقَامَ، فَقِيلَ لَهُ: إِنَّهَا جِنَازَةٌ يَهُودِيٍّ، فَقَالَ: «أَلَيْسَتْ نَفْسًا».²⁹

Sahl bin Hanif and Qais bin Saad were sitting somewhere in Qadisiya. In the meantime, some people passed by with a funeral procession, so these two elders stood up. Both of them were asked that the funeral is for non-Muslims. That a funeral passed by the Prophet (PBUH) in the same way. The Prophet stood up for him. Then he was asked that this was the funeral of a Jew. He said: Does not a Jew have a soul?

There is more detail in the tradition of Hazrat Jabir that:

مرت جنازة فقام لها رسول الله ﷺ وقمنا معه فقلنا يا رسول الله إنها يهودية فقال إن الموت فزع فإذا رأيتم الجنازة فقوموا³⁰.

When the funeral passed, we all stood up by following the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Later we said that it was the funeral of a Jewish woman. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that surely death is something that makes anyone panic. So whenever you see a funeral, stand up. The fact that the Holy Prophet himself stood up for the funeral of a Jew and ordered his companions to stand up is a clear sign of how much love and affection for humanity was in his heart.

Conclusion

In the contemporary era, the significance of this topic has grown exponentially, particularly due to the pervasive influence of Islamophobia. Certain individuals, influenced by prejudiced views, depict Islam as advocating violence, portraying it as a faith that mandates beheadings and the compulsory killing of non-believers, devoid of any tolerance. This distorted portrayal not only misrepresents the essence of Islam but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes. Moreover, discussions surrounding the Islamic state or the governance system of Islam often devolve into emotional reactions rather than thoughtful consideration and dialogue. In today's society, there exists a tendency to reject Islamic thoughts and ideas

outright, dismissing them as incompatible with the political and social demands of the modern era. Unfortunately, this skewed perspective negatively impacts a specific segment of the population, fueling further misunderstanding and hostility.

The root cause of these misconceptions lies in ignorance – ignorance of Islamic teachings coupled with preconceived biases against Islam. This research article seeks to address and rectify these misunderstandings by delving into the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The teachings presented here emphasize the Prophet's endorsement of good behavior and religious tolerance, not only among fellow Muslims but explicitly extended to non-Muslims. Understanding the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and their contemporary application is crucial. It serves as the foundation for fostering dialogue between diverse religions, paving the way for a pluralistic society in the present age. By shedding light on the true essence of Islam, this research aims to bridge the gap between misconceptions and reality, fostering an environment of mutual understanding and respect. In doing so, it contributes to the development of a more tolerant and harmonious society that appreciates the diversity of religious beliefs.

Suggestions

- Develop educational programs that focus on disseminating accurate information about Islamic teachings, with a specific emphasis on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
- Launch media literacy campaigns to raise awareness about the impact of biased portrayals of Islam in the media.
- Facilitate and promote interfaith dialogue platforms where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds can engage in open conversations about their beliefs.
- Organize events that bring together scholars, religious leaders, and community members to foster mutual understanding and dispel misconceptions.
- Establish community engagement programs that encourage positive interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims.
- Encourage the publication of articles and books that highlight the positive aspects of Islam and its contributions to tolerance and coexistence.
- Foster collaborations with religious institutions of various faiths to promote understanding and tolerance.
- Advocate for policies that promote religious freedom and combat discrimination based on religious beliefs.
- Encourage scholars and researchers to participate in discussions on the contemporary relevance of Prophet Muhammad's teachings in fostering tolerance and harmony.

References

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2 Al-Baqarah 2-191

³ Mu‘āhid or Dhimmī refers to non-Muslims living in an Islamic state, whether they are Ahl al-Kitab or non-Ahl al-Kitab, they are called "Dhimmī". The word literally means "protected". The Islamic law stipulates that if there is any oppression against non-Muslims (Dhimmi) by Muslims, it is necessary for the Muslims to defend against it, just as it is necessary to repel the oppression of Muslims themselves.

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Musawwaraan 'An Tab'aat Dar al-Sa'adah 'Aam 1331 H. Vol. 1. P 85

⁴ Building strong and positive relationships with close relatives, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. Sila” is derived from the Arabic word “iṣāl” which is linked to “Al-Ihsan” which is a type of kindness, meaning the act of doing good and showing benevolence. "Rahm" means kinship or relationship.

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⁶ Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 4. P. 1894

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¹⁴ Al-Hud 11: 118

¹⁵ Al-Baqara 2 : 256

¹⁶ Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 1. P. 465

¹⁷ Al-Mumtahina 60: 8

¹⁸ Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 5. P. 594

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²⁰ Al-Bukhārī, Kitābu al-Hibati wa Fadliha wa at-Tahride 'alayha, Babu Qabooli al-Hadiyyati min al-Mushrikīn. Hadith 2616

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²³ Rashid Rida, Tafsir al-Manar, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-Arabi, Vol. 5. P. 92

²⁴ Al-Qurṭubī , Abū ‘ Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr al-Anṣārī, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, Vol. 5, P. 481

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Zawaid Musannaf Abd al-Razzaq ala al-Kutub al-Sitta - Min Awal al-Musannaf Ila Nihayat Kitab al-Manasik, Vol.1, P. 96

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²⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Janā'iz, Babu man qama li-janazati Yahudiyyin, Hadith 1313

³⁰ Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Janā'iz, Bab al-Qiyam li-l-Janazah, Hadith 2222