

“All human beings are from Adam and Eve: an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab any superiority over an Arab, and a White person has no superiority over a Black person, nor a Black person any superiority over a White person, except by piety and righteous deeds.”

-PROPHET MUHAMMAD ﷺ

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The Spirits of Black Folk

SAGES THROUGH THE AGES

SELECTIONS FROM

The Excellence of Black People

رفع شأن الحبشان
Raf'ū Sha'n Al-Ḥubshān

BY

Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī

TRANSLATION AND NOTES BY

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DEDICATION



*To Our Righteous Ancestors,
Grandma Lorenza “Didi” Mitchell,
the late Mitch Mitchell,
the late Dr. Tony Adewale Mendes,
Mother Rose Espiaze Mendes,
my children: Maryam Mendes, Halimah Mendes,
Aminah Mendes, Muhammad–Husayn Mendes,
Fatimah Mendes, Rahmah Mendes,
Mubammad–Isa Mendes, and Khadijah Mendes,
their descendants, and all beings who love Faith, Truth,
Peace, Freedom, and Justice.*

-ADEYINKA MENDES

*To Our Righteous Ancestors,
my father, may Allah have mercy on him,
and my dear and beloved mother,
all those who have struggled to bring our people to Islam,
and to those that integrate Islam in our struggle,
and to our teachers whose barakah supports and enables us.*

-TALUT DAWOOD



CELEBRATE MERCY

CelebrateMercy is a non-profit organization—founded in 2010—that teaches about the life and character of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through publications, online courses, traveling retreats, campaigns, and Umrah trips. To date, our programs have shared the Prophet's ﷺ story with over 100,000 people worldwide.

In June 2020, this book was the inspiration for CelebrateMercy's first-ever *"Black Lives Around the Messenger ﷺ"* online course. Thousands registered and benefited from the course even though we lacked a published English translation of the original Arabic text. This motivated us to fundraise for a new three-year project: the publication of three English books on the Prophet's ﷺ Black Companions. The first is the translation you are holding now; the second and third books will be accessible adaptations for teenagers and young children. Funds are still needed for the second and third phase; support and learn more about this project at CelebrateMercy.com/BL.

As you read through this book, please share your feedback via email or on social media with the hashtag #BlackSages. Consider registering for our popular online course where this book is taught by excellent teachers; we can also bring an in-person weekend course to your community. Lastly, feel free to contact us if you would like to sponsor copies of this book, or fund course scholarships, for those who cannot afford them.

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PREFACE



The intention to translate this important work, *The Excellence of Black People (Raf'u Sha'n Al-Ḥubshān)* by the renowned Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, first came to my heart in 1999 when I learned about its existence from my first teacher in the traditional Islamic sciences, Sheikh Muhammad Shareef bin Farid, during a month long Classical Arabic summer intensive in Nottinghamshire, England. The subject matter intrigued me. I was amazed that there was a book authored by one of the most respected and celebrated scholars in Muslim history that centered the noble narrative of Black people in Islam. I was eager to find a copy somewhere, somehow. As a young Muslim of African American, Nigerian, and Brazilian heritage, I was curious to learn as much as I could about the Black presence in Islam. Before that summer, I had been blessed to spend a year studying with saintly scholars in Syria and was planning to continue my studies of the traditional Islamic sciences with other living masters in Mauritania and Nigeria.

Before my journey to Mauritania, I decided to visit some friends studying with Muslim scholars in Morocco. During this

short visit, I unintentionally crossed paths with the late Sidi Mustafa Naji, a well-known manuscript dealer and bookseller in Rabat, who not only welcomed me, a complete stranger, into his beautiful traditional Moroccan home, but taught me the meaning of true hospitality. Sidi Mustafa and his wonderful family fed my body, my mind, and my soul. In addition to giving me gifts of rare Arabic manuscripts from his private collection, he surprised me with a hard copy of *Raf'u Sha'n Al-Ḥubshān* without us ever discussing the text. I could not believe my eyes. "How did he know?" I asked myself, I was now holding a book that I only came to know existed a few weeks earlier without making any effort to find it. It occurred to me that God had guided me to the text and I was responsible for translating it into English and sharing its contents with others, which I was honored to do over the next two decades in homes, mosques, high schools, universities, conferences, and retreats.

Everywhere I shared passages from this book, I received heartwarming feedback from people of diverse backgrounds who told me how the contents of this book had transformed their lives, opened their minds, and inspired them to know more about the noble personages mentioned in these pages. Those lectures have been particularly meaningful for Black Muslims who, like many other Muslims, believe there was no significant African presence in early Muslim history. In the summer of 2020, after an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, was murdered by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, I thought that sharing these sacred stories would bring some healing, solace,

and guidance to Black communities whose historic pain and oppression in America made it almost impossible for them and their allies to collectively breathe. With the support of Subhan Vahora and Tarek El-Messidi from CelebrateMercy, a remarkable organization that educates people throughout the world about the sublime wisdom, habits, and character of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, we designed an online course around the book that was well-attended and well-received by thousands, then made intentions and plans to publish an English translation. The text you now hold in your hands is the realization of those intentions. May God rectify this work, accept it, make it solely for His Glory and Satisfaction, and a means for deep healing, true education, and divine inspiration until Judgment Day. May He reward with goodness all of those involved in bringing it to the light of day, and forgive us for our mistakes and errors through His Beautiful Names.

ADEYINKA MUHAMMAD MENDES

The Bilal Spiritual Center for Peace and the Arts

Princeton Junction, New Jersey

20 January 2020 CE | 7 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 1442 AH



On the Hadiths Narrated Regarding Black People

Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Ḥalabī related to me in writing, on the authority of Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Maḥḍisī, saying: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sa’dī related to us by way of authorization, on the authority of Abū Ja’far al-Ṣaydalānī who said: Fāṭimah bint ‘Abdullāh related to us: Abū Bakr al-Rundah related to us: Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī related to us: Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abd al-Bāqī al-Miṣṣī narrated to us: Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān narrated to us: ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭarā’ifī narrated to us: Ubayn ibn Suḥyān al-Maḥḍisī narrated to us on the authority of Khalīfah ibn Salām, from ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ that Ibn ‘Abbās said, “The Messenger of God ﷺ said, *‘Emulate Black people, for there are three among them who are leaders of the inhabitants of Paradise*⁴⁶.”

46 The heavenly abode in the Afterlife that humans of faith in God, His Messengers, and Judgment Day, enter through His Grace. Therein they will dwell everlastingly in “*lush gardens with trees underneath which rivers flow*” containing “what no eye has ever seen, what no ear has ever heard, nor what any heart has ever conceived” in communion with God and pure beings as a divine reward for their trust in God and patient perseverance through the ease and hardship of the life here-below. (AM)

Luqmān the Wise, the Negus⁴⁷, and Bilāl the Muezzin.”⁴⁸

Al-Ṭabarānī said, “By ‘Black people’, he meant the Ethiopians.”

I (al-Suyūṭī) say: Ubayn is a weak narrator. Abū Ḥātim said about al-Ṭarā’ifi: He is truthful. Abū Zur’ah and others said about him, “There is nothing wrong with his narrations.” However, Ibn Namīr called him a liar. Ḥāfiẓ Abū al-Qāsim ibn ‘Asākīr also narrated this hadith in his *History (Tārīkh)*, in the section on the biography of Bilāl. He also narrated two supporting narrations for it in the biographies of Bilāl and Luqmān.

Muḥammad ibn Muqbil wrote to me on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Quddāmah that ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Wāhid related to him: Abū Ḥafṣ ibn Ṭabarzad related to us: Abū al-Faṭḥ ibn Abī Sahl related to us: Abū ‘Āmir al-Azdī related to us: Abū Muḥammad al-Jarrāḥī related to us. Abū al-‘Abbās ibn Maḥbūb related to us: al-Tirmidhī related to us: Aḥmad ibn Munī’ narrated to us: Zayd ibn al-Ḥibāb narrated to us: Mu‘āwiyah ibn Ṣālīḥ narrated to us: Abū Maryam al-Anṣārī narrated to us that Abū Hurayrah said, “The Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘Governance is from the Quraysh⁴⁹, the Judiciary should be from the

47 Title for the ruler of the Ethiopian Empire, one of the world geo-political super-powers during the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. (AM)

48 Al-Ṭabarānī narrated it in *Al-Kabīr* (11482) with a weak chain of narrators, but it was authenticated by some Hadith scholars based on the statement of al-Awzā’ī who relates with different wording what was authenticated by al-Ḥākim in *Al-Mustadrak* and by al-Suyūṭī in *Jāmi’ Al-Ṣaghīr* on the authority of Wathilah ibn al-Asqa’ that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, “*The most excellent of Black people are three: Bilal, Luqmān, and Mihja’ the freedman of the Messenger of God (God bless him with his family and give them peace).*” (TD & AM)

49 The Quraysh were a powerful merchant tribe of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century to which Prophet Muhammad ﷺ belonged. They controlled Makkah, where they were the custodian of the Kaaba. (AM)

*Anṣār*⁵⁰, and the Call to God (adhān) should be from the Ethiopians.”⁵¹

Al-Tirmidhī said, “It is most authentically attributed as a saying of Abū Hurayrah.” I (al-Suyūṭī) say: Ibn Munīʿ is an imam⁵² and a hafiz from whom Bukhārī and Muslim have narrated. Zayd and Muʿāwiyah are from the narrators of Muslim. Abū Maryam is a *Tābiʿī* who is trustworthy. Bukhārī narrated from him in *The Etiquettes of the Individual (al-Adab al-Mufrad)*.⁵³ Abū Dāwūd also narrated from him.

However, the hadith has a supporting narration also narrated by Abū Hurayrah (may God be pleased with him) and attributed to the Prophet ﷺ:

Our Sheikh, Imam Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Shumunnī related to me: ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Alī related to us: Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Urḍī related to us: Zaynab bint Makkī related to us: Abū Muḥammad al-Umawī narrated to us, with a high chain of narration, and informed us on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm: al-Fakhr ibn al-Bukhārī related to us, saying: Ḥanbal ibn ‘Abdullāh related to us: Abū al-Qāsim al-Shay-

50 Anṣār is Arabic for “The Helpers”, a term of respect and endearment given by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the Muslims of the Aws and Khazraj tribes who invited him to migrate to Medina and pledged their lives to protect him and the Makkan Emigrants with him from the attacks of the Quraysh. (AM)

51 Al-Tirmidhī narrated it in his *Sunan* (3936). (TD)

52 A title given to a scholar who is leading authority in their field. (AM)

53 A treasured anthology of 1329 hadiths on moral intelligence compiled by Imam Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl Bukhārī. Available in English as *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad With Full Commentary: A Perfect Code of Manners and Morality*, translated by Adil Salahi. (AM)

bānī related to us: Abū ‘Alī al-Tamīmī related to us: Abū Bakr al-Qaṭīrī related to us: ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Imām Aḥmad related to us: My father narrated to us: al-Ḥakam ibn Nāfi’ narrated to us: Ismā’īl ibn ‘Ayyāsh narrated to us on the authority of Ḍamḍam ibn Zur‘ah from Shurayḥ from Kathīr ibn Murrah from ‘Utbah ibn ‘Abd that the Prophet ﷺ said, “*The caliphate⁵⁴ is from the Quraysh, the Judiciary is from the Anṣār, and the Invitation to God⁵⁵ is from the Ethiopians.*”⁵⁶

All the narrators of this hadith are trustworthy. In addition, the narrations of Ismā’īl ibn ‘Ayyāsh from the people of Greater Syria (al-Shām), of which this hadith is one, is accepted. The meaning of the “Invitation to God” is the *adhān*.

Sheikh Abū Ishāq al-Shirāzī mentioned the hadith of Abū Hurayrah as a proof of the preference for the muezzin to be from among the Ethiopians. Al-Nawawī agreed with this in his *Commentary on the Authentic Collection of Muslim (Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)*.

If you were to ask, “Why have you separated this hadith, considering its indication that the Imam should be from the Quraysh as obligatory, and considering its indication that the

54 The caliphate was the political-religious polity of the Muslim community and the lands and people under its governance in the centuries following the death of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (632 CE). It was ruled by a caliph (Arabic: *khalīfah*, “successor”) who held temporal (and sometimes a degree of spiritual) authority. (AM)

55 Invitation here refers to the *adhān* (“to listen”), which is the ritual calling of all beings to God announced in Arabic by a muezzin five times per day, typically at mosques or in homes. This call also serves as a general statement of shared faith and devotion for Muslims while summoning them to the mosque for their daily prayers. (AM)

56 Imam Aḥmad narrated it in his *Musnad* (vol. 185, p. 4). (TD)

muezzin should be from the Ethiopians as Sunnah⁵⁷? Why have you not made all that it entails either obligatory or recommended?” I would answer that al-Taḳī al-Fāsī mentioned in *The History of Makkah (Tārīkh Makkah)* that some of the jurists of Yemen were divided into twelve groups on this issue. He did not mention anything from them. However, some matters have become apparent to me regarding those groups. The best of them is that the Prophet ﷺ appointed a non-Ethiopian to perform the *adhān*. That is evidence that this hadith constitutes only a recommendation in that regard. However, the caliph stands in the stead of the Messenger of God ﷺ in administering the affairs of the Muslims. So, it is necessary that he is from among his close relatives.⁵⁸

I recited to our Sheikh Imam Taḳī al-Dīn al-Shumunnī on the authority of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Haythamī: Abū Ṭalḥah al-Ḥarāwī related to me from Ḥāfiẓ Abū Muḥammad al-Dimyāṭī: Abū al-Ḥajjāj ibn Khalīl related to us: Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī al-Rajā’ related to us, and I narrate with a shorter chain of transmission by two narrators from al-Ṣalāḥ ibn Abī ‘Umar from al-Ḥasan al-Maḳdisī from Abū al-Mukārīm ibn al-Labbān who both

57 Sunnah literally means “path”, but in the context of Divine Law (Shariah), it refers to an act that is religiously meritorious and spiritually elevating but not mandatory. (AM)

58 There are two schools of thought on this issue: the position of Imam al-Suyūṭī was also the unanimous consensus of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as well as the majority of Sunni and Shia Muslim scholars. The other school of thought, which is held by the Khawārij, Mu‘tazilites, and a minority of Sunni scholars, asserts that being a descendant of the Quraysh is not a prerequisite for serving as caliph. (AM)

said: Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥaddād related to us by way of authorization: Abū Na‘īm related to us: al-Ṭabarānī related to us in *The Medium Collection (Al-Awsaṭ)*: Hāshim ibn Murthad narrated to us: Ādam narrated to us: Isrā’īl narrated to us on the authority of Jābir from ‘Abdullāh ibn Nujayy that ‘Alī (may God be pleased with him) said about His (Exalted is He) words, **{Among them (the Messengers) are those about whom We have told you, and among them are those about whom We have not told you}**⁵⁹, “God dispatched an Ethiopian bondsman as a Prophet, and he is one of those about whom Muhammad ﷺ was not told.”⁶⁰

Al-Ṭabarānī said: It has only been narrated from ‘Alī with this chain of transmission, and it is a singular narration of Ādam.

I say: He is not the only one to narrate it. Rather, it is corroborated by Muslim ibn Qutaybah on the authority of Isrā’īl. Abū Ḥātim narrated it in his *Qur’anic Commentary (Tafsīr)*⁶¹ on the authority of Isrā’īl. So, it has come to us with a shorter chain of transmission by two narrators. Qays corroborates Isrā’īl with a narration from Jābir.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim also narrated it with his own chain with the following wording: “He dispatched a Prophet from the Ethiopians, and he is one of those whose stories were not told to Muhammad ﷺ.”

59 Surah *Ghāfir*, The One Who Forgives, 40: 78. (TD)

60 Al-Ṭabarānī narrated it in *Al-Awsaṭ* (9319). (TD)

61 The work is most commonly referred to as *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim* but its full title is *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm Musnad an Rasūlillāh wa Al-Ṣaḥābah wa Al-Tābi‘īn*. (AM)

He also narrated it in [the Qur'anic Commentary of] the Chapter of the Constellations.⁶² He said: My father narrated to us: Ibrāhīm ibn Sa'īd al-Jawharī narrated to me: Abū Aḥmad narrated to us: Sharīk narrated to us on the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Nujayy that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said, "The Prophet of the Companions of the Trench⁶³ was an Ethiopian."

Al-Nasā'ī declared 'Abdullāh ibn Nujayy to be trustworthy. However, Bukhārī said that there is some disagreement regarding him. Jābir, who is al-Ju'fī, is a weak narrator.

Aḥmad, the Imam, related to me by way of my recitation to him: Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Abī al-Majd related to us: Wazīrah related to us: Abū 'Abdullāh al-Zubaydī related to us: Abū al-Waqt related to us: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dāwūdī related to us: Abū Muḥammad al-Sarakhsī related to us: Abū 'Abdullāh al-Firabrī related to us: al-Bukhārī narrated to us: Yaḥyā ibn Abī Bukayr informed us al-Layth informed us from 'Uqayl from Ibn Shihāb from 'Urwah that 'Ā'ishah said, "I saw the Prophet ﷺ shielding me with his garment while I was looking at the Ethiopians. They were celebrating⁶⁴ in the mosque. So, 'Umar rebuked them. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Leave them. O Banū Arfadah! Celebrate, [for] you are safe."⁶⁵

62 Surah *al-Burūj*, The Constellations, 85. (AM)

63 Known in Arabic as *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd*, these were a community led by a tyrannical king who burned a group of Christians alive in a trench for no crime other than their faith. Their archetypal story is alluded to in the 85th surah of the Qur'an: The Constellations (*al-Burūj*). (AM)

64 The Ethiopians were celebrating by demonstrating a choreographed military exercise. (AM)

65 It was narrated by Bukhārī (944). (TD)

Al-Zarkashī said, “[Arfadah] is the ancestor of the Ethiopians.” The author of *The Authentic Selection (Mukhtār Al-Ṣiḥāḥ)*⁶⁶ stated that Abū ‘Amr said, “Banū Arfadah are a tribe among the Ethiopians who perform war dances.”

Umm al-Faḍl bint Muḥammad al-Maḥdisī related to me by way of my reciting it to her: Abū Ishāq al-Tanūkhī related to us: Abū al-‘Abbās al-Ṣāliḥī related to us: ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar related to us: Abū al-Waqt related to us: al-Dāwūdī related to us: al-Sarakhsī related to us: Abū Ishāq ibn Khuzaym related to us: ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd related to us: ‘Abd al-Razzāq related to us: Mu‘ammar related to us on the authority of Thābit al-Bunānī that Anas ibn Mālik said, “When the Messenger of God ﷺ arrived in Madinah, the Ethiopians celebrated his arrival by performing choreographed military exercises with their spears, expressing happiness at that.”⁶⁷

This hadith is authentic. It was narrated by Abū Dāwūd and Aḥmad from ‘Abd al-Razzāq. So, our narration corroborates theirs with a shorter chain.

With the same chain of transmission, Imam Aḥmad said: ‘Abd al-Ṣamad narrated to us: Ḥammād narrated to us from Thābit that Anas said, “The Ethiopians were giving glad tidings in front of the Messenger of God ﷺ, saying, ‘Muhammad is a righteous servant!’ The Messenger of God ﷺ asked, ‘What are they saying?’ He was told, ‘Muhammad is a righteous servant.’”⁶⁸

66 A Classical Arabic dictionary compiled by Imam Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Rāzī. (AM)

67 Abū Dāwūd narrated it in his *Sunan* (4923). (TD)

68 Imam Aḥmad also narrated in his *Musnad* (12649). (TD)

I was informed on the authority of al-Ṣalāḥ ibn Abī ‘Umar from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sa’dī from Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī: Abū al-Fatḥ ibn ‘Abd al-Bāqī informed us: Ja‘far ibn Aḥmad al-Sirāj related to us: ‘Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad al-Marwarrūdī narrated to us: My father narrated to us: Naṣr ibn al-Qāsim narrated to us: Luwayn narrated to us: Abū ‘Awānah narrated to us from Abū Bishr that the Prophet ﷺ passed by the Ethiopians while they were celebrating and saying:

*O guest who comes by night,
If you had passed by the ‘Abd al-Dār family,
If you had passed by them wanting to convince them,
They would have dissuaded your effort and capacity.*

With the previous chain of transmission to al-Ṭabarānī: Aḥmad narrated to us: Muḥammad ibn ‘Ammār al-Mawṣilī narrated to us, ‘Afīf ibn Sālīm narrated to us from Ayyūb ibn ‘Utbah from ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ from Ibn ‘Umar that a man⁶⁹ from the Ethiopians came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “O Messenger of God! You have been given the advantage over us⁷⁰ with your

69 According to al-Suyūṭī, Muslim historians identified this man as al-Aswad al-Ḥabashī, literally “the Black Ethiopian man,” which indicates that his actual name may have been unknown to them. (AM)

70 Although Ethiopia was still a great empire at this time in history, after the failed invasion of Makkah in 570 CE, Ethiopians were enslaved, assaulted, and disparaged in Arabian society. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ worked to repair the relationship between Ethiopians and Arabs through his personal commitment to peace and justice (see *Tanwīr Al-Ghabash fī Faḍl Al-Sūdān wa Al-Ḥabash*). (AM)

skin color and with Prophethood.⁷¹ If I were to have faith as you have faith and act as you act, do you believe that I will be with you in Paradise?” The Messenger of God ﷺ responded, “Yes.”⁷² [Then the Prophet ﷺ said, “*By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, certainly, the radiant light of a Black person will be seen in Para-*

71 In *Tanwīr Al-Ghabash* by Ibn al-Jawzī, it is narrated that he said, “...You have been given the advantage over us with your form, skin color, and with Prophethood...” Muslim theologians assert that the Prophets and Messengers are the most beautiful of beings, inwardly and outwardly. Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal related in his *Musnad* (3365) the following description that the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ gave of the skin color of Prophet Moses ﷺ: “*Moses was jet-black skinned (ashama ādam).*” Imam Muslim relates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (239 and 243) that Ibn ‘Abbās said that the Messenger of God ﷺ described the appearance of Prophet Moses ﷺ as follows: “*As for Moses, he was a man of dark brown color (ādam) and tightly coiled (or kinky) hair (ja’d).*” (Hadith 243). Prophet Moses ﷺ is one of the greatest of the Prophets who possessed firm resolve (*ūlu al-‘azm*). He was seen in the sixth Heaven by Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ on the night of his heavenly ascension and has the distinction of being the most frequently mentioned Prophet in the Qur’an. Being a Prophet, he is among the most handsome and beautiful of people with his God-given Black African features. In addition, Mālik (1675), al-Bukhārī (3439), and Muslim (323 and 324) narrate a hadith in which the Messiah Jesus son of Mary (God bless them and give them peace) is also described as *ādam* (dark brown to jet black with redness) in skin color with lank (*sabṭ*) hair. He is praised for the beauty of his dark skin by Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. There is also another narration that describes Jesus ﷺ as *aḥmar* (red) in complexion with lank hair (*Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, Book 54, #462), and another describing him as *abyaḍ* (brown without blemish) with tightly coiled (*ja’d*) hair (*Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 1, #3536). Some scholars attribute the different descriptions of the hair of Jesus ﷺ to its dryness or wetness in different states. (AM)

72 Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is teaching here that every blessing of God, even our various forms and skin colors, are a Divine Mercy, because such blessings help us fulfill our unique individual life missions. Also, God teaches us that every human language and complexion is a Divine Sign that should never cause us to feel inferior or superior to others. Rather they are a means to increase our knowledge and adoration of Him as well as our appreciation of those different than us. God says, ***{And among His Signs is the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, and the variety of your languages and your colors: truly in these are Signs for those who have knowledge}***’ (Surah al-Rūm, The Byzantines, 30: 22). Thus, there is no inferiority in the form or skin color of Ethiopians, nor in those of any other people. (AM)

dise for a distance of one thousand years.”⁷³ The Prophet ﷺ said, “If someone says, ‘There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illa Allāh*),’⁷⁴ he will have a covenant with God. If someone says, ‘Absolute Perfection is for God alone (*subhān Allāh*),’⁷⁵ God will record for him one hundred thousand good deeds.” A man said, “O Messenger of God! How could we ever perish after that?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “By the One in whose hand is my soul! A man will come on the Day of Standing⁷⁶ carrying so many good deeds that if it were to be placed on a mountain, it would weigh heavily on it. Then it will be compared with blessing after blessing from God. They would nearly wipe all of that out, if it were not for God’s favoring him by His mercy.” Then, the verses **{Has there not come upon the human being a period in time when he was a thing unworthy**

73 Ibn al-Jawzī adds this sentence in his narration of this hadith (*Tanwīr Al-Gh-abash*, p. 156). (AM)

74 *Lā ilāha illa Allāh* is the most excellent and most ancient invocation and declaration of Divine Oneness, meaning that all attributes of absolute beauty, power, and perfection belong to the Creator alone such that He and He alone is worthy of our worship, devotion, absolute obedience, and love. This phrase is also known as the Key to Paradise and the Pure Word. It contains multiple layers of meaning that are unveiled to those who repeat it abundantly with proper courtesy and presence of heart. It has been used throughout history by countless seekers of Absolute Truth and Ultimate Reality for the purification of their souls, refinement of their character, illumination of their intellects, and expansion of their consciousness. It is authentically narrated that among its many merits is that whoever knows it or utters it with sincere faith as their final words before death will enter Paradise by God’s grace. (AM)

75 *Subhān Allāh* is an invocation of Divine transcendence, expressing that God is above and beyond being described with the attributes of created things and that creatures cannot be described with Divine attributes. (AM)

76 That is, the Day of Resurrection in which some people will stand for up to 50,000 years awaiting their reckoning as a purification from wrongs done during their earthly lives. (AM)

of mention?} until His words **{And when you look around (at Paradise); it is there you will see unimaginable blessings and a magnificent kingdom}**⁷⁷ were revealed. The Ethiopian said, “O Messenger of God! Will my eyes see what you see in Paradise?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Yes.” And, the Ethiopian began to cry until his soul left his body. Ibn ‘Umar said, “I saw the Prophet ﷺ lowering him into his grave.”⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabarānī said, “This has only been narrated from Ibn ‘Umar with this chain of transmission. It is a singular narration of ‘Afīf.”

I recited to Abū al-Faḍl ibn Aḥmad al-Imām on the authority al-Ḥāfiẓ Abī al-Faḍl al-‘Irāqī: Muḥammad ibn Nabātah related to us on the authority of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sa‘dī: Abū Sa‘īd al-Ṣaffār related to us: Zāhir ibn Ṭāhir related to us: al-Bayhaqī related to us in *The Branches of Faith (Shu‘ab Al-Īmān)*⁷⁹: Abū al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abdān related to us: Aḥmad ibn ‘Abīd al-Ṣaffār related to us: al-Kudaymī narrated to us: Sahl ibn Ḥammād narrated to us: Mubārak ibn Faḍālah narrated to us: Thābit ibn al-Bunāni narrated to us that Anas said, “The Messenger of God ﷺ recited the verse **{Whose fuel is human beings and stones}**⁸⁰ and said, ‘It was fueled with them for one thousand years

77 Surah *al-Insān*, The Human Being, 76: 1-20. (TD)

78 Al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Awsaṭ* (1581). (TD)

79 *The Branches of Faith* are a precious collection of Qur’anic verses and Prophetic narrations for spiritual development compiled by Imam al-Bayhaqī. The abridgement by Imam Abū Ma‘ālī ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qazwīnī is available in English as *The Seventy-Seven Branches of Faith*, translated by ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Murād. (AM)

80 Surah *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2: 24. (AM)

until it turned red. Then it was fueled for another thousand years until it became white. Then it was fueled for another thousand years until it became black. Thus, it is pitch black and its flame is never extinguished.’ In front of the Messenger of God ﷺ, there was a Black man who began to cry. Gabriel descended, then he asked, ‘O Muhammad, who is this man crying before you?’ He responded, ‘A man from the Ethiopians.’ Then he praised his good qualities. Gabriel said, ‘God said, “By My Might and Majesty, no eye weeps in this world out of fear of Me, except that I make it laugh abundantly with Me in Paradise.”’⁸¹

Our Sheikh, Sheikh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn al-Shumunnī, related to me, by way of my reciting it to him: ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Alī related to us: Abū al-Ḥaram al-Qalānsī related to us: Mu’nisah bint Abī Bakr related to us on the authority Umm Hānī’ bint Aḥmad. And it was narrated to me and I was informed with a high chain of transmission on the authority of Abū ‘Abdullāh ibn Quddāmah on the authority of Abū al-Ḥasan ibn al-Bukhārī that Abū al-Faraj al-Muḥawwar said: Fāṭimah bint ‘Abdullāh related to us: Abū Bakr ibn Rundah related to us: al-Ṭabarānī related to us in *The Smaller Collection (Al-Mu‘jam Al-Ṣaghīr)*: ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Marwazī narrated to us: Manṣūr ibn Abī Mazāḥim narrated to us: ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Ḥafṣ al-Abbār narrated to us from Yazīd ibn Abī Ziyād from Mu‘āwiyah ibn Qurrah that Anas ibn Mālīk said, “The Messenger of God ﷺ had two freedmen⁸², an Ethiopian and a Copt.

81 Al-Bayhaqī narrated it in *Shu‘ab Al-Īmān* (778). (TD)

82 In Arabic, *mawlā* (plural *mawālī*), a tribeless person in Arabia who was either 1)

They began to abuse one another, one of them saying, ‘You Ethiopian!’ and the other saying, ‘You Copt!’ The Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘Do not say that. You are both only two men from the family of Muhammad ﷺ.’”⁸³ Al-Ṭabarānī said, “Only Yazīd narrated it from Mu‘āwiyah, and only Abū Ḥafṣ narrated it from Yazīd. It is a singular narration of Manṣūr. But its narrators are all trustworthy.” Umm al-Faḍl bint Muḥammad al-Bakrī related to me: al-‘Abbās al-Suwaydāwī related to us: Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad related to us: Abū ‘Īsā ibn ‘Allāq related to us: Hibbat Allah ibn ‘Alī related to us: Murshid ibn Yaḥyā related to us: ‘Alī ibn Rabī‘ah related to us: al-Ḥasan ibn Rashīq related to us: Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām related to us: ‘Abdullāh ibn Ṣāliḥ narrated to us: Ibrāhīm ibn Sa’d narrated from Muḥammad ibn Ishāq from Ya‘qūb ibn ‘Utbah from Mughīrah that al-Akhnas said, “An Ethiopian freedman of the Messenger of God ﷺ has passed away. Investigate who among the Ethiopian Muslims is in Makkah and give his inheritance to him.”⁸⁴

Abū al-Faḍl al-Azharī related to me by direct oral transmission: Abū Ishāq al-Tanūkhī related to us: Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Ghazzī related to us: Abū ‘Īsā ibn ‘Allāq related to us: Abū al-Qāsim al-Būṣayrī related to us by way of authorization: Abū Ja‘far ibn al-Tammār related to us: Abū al-‘Abbās Sa‘īd ibn Sa‘īd related to us: al-Ḥasan ibn Bindār related to us: Ibn Fīl relat-

an enslaved person who became a freedperson of the person who freed them from slavery, or 2) a free person who purchased freedmanship from a tribe for protection. (AM)

83 Al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Awsaṭ* (8210). (TD)

84 Ibrāhīm ibn Sa’d al-Zuhrī narrated it in his *Juz’* (1493). (TD)

ed to us: Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿīd al-Jawharī and Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kawfī both narrated to us, saying: Abū Usāmah related to us on the authority of Ismāʿīl ibn Abī Khālid, on the authority of his brother that Abū Kāhil ‘Abdullāh ibn Mālik said, “I saw the Messenger of God ﷺ giving a sermon upon a she-camel whose nose had been split down the middle. Its reins were being held by an Ethiopian bondsman.”⁸⁵ This hadith was narrated by Ibn Mājah on the authority of Ibn Numayr, from Wakīʿ from Ismāʿīl. With the same transmission to Ibn Fīl, ‘Uqbah ibn Mukram al-‘Ammī narrated to us: ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Īsā narrated to us: Yaḥyā al-Bakkā’ narrated to us from Ibn ‘Umar that an Ethiopian was buried in Madinah⁸⁶. The Messenger of God ﷺ said, “*He was buried in the clay from which he was originally created.*”⁸⁷ With the previous chain of narration to al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Abān narrated to me: Ghundar narrated to us from Shuʿbah that Abū al-Tayyāh heard Anas ibn Mālik say, “The Prophet ﷺ said to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, *‘Listen and obey*⁸⁸, *even if it is to*

85 Imam Aḥmad narrated it in his *Musnad* (16715) and Ibn Mājah in his *Sunan* (1285). (TD)

86 Madinah, the Spiritually Illuminated City of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was an unprecedented model for a socioeconomically successful multifaith and multiethnic community in which priority was given to the spiritual, mental, and material well-being of humans, animals, and plants, rather than profit and power. (AM)

87 Ibn Fīl narrated it in his *Juzʿ* (139). (TD)

88 In his commentary on Amīr al-Muʿminīn Muhammad Bello ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Fodio’s book, *A Letter of Healing for Spiritual & Social Diseases (Risālah li al-Amrād al-Shāfiyyah, pp. 65-66)*, Sheikh Hei Xuanfeng remarks: Muslim scholars differ regarding the meaning of the expression ‘slave’ in this hadith. The majority of scholars interpret this expression to mean a person who was once a slave but was freed, distinguished himself, and was then appointed as ruler, which was a regular occur-

*an Ethiopian bondsman*⁸⁹ *whose head resembles a raisin*⁹⁰.⁹¹ Al-Rāfiʿī said, “This is an example of exaggeration for emphasis.” Al-Khaṭṭābī said, “The meaning is someone appointed by the imam⁹², not that the imam would be an Ethiopian bondsman.”

rence in early Muslim history. Some hold the opinion that ‘slave’ refers to the general attribute of ‘servitude’ to God, thus the hadith would be rendered: ‘...even if there is placed over you an Ethiopian who is a servant [of God], that is, he is considered just and upright.’ Their evidence is that which was related by Muslim on the authority of Umm al-Ḥusayn that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ peace said: “Hear and obey even if there is placed over you a slave who compels you by the Book of God.” In addition, both Sheikh Faraj al-Ṭayyib & Sheikh Dr. ‘Abdullāh al-Ṭayyib of Sudan agreed that the Messenger ﷺ was highlighting the prejudice of some of the Arabs themselves and was in turn applying a cure by ordering them to hear and obey a person that some of them deemed beneath them in social status.

89 The majority of Sunni scholars state that this only refers to obedience to an Ethiopian bondsman who assumes limited authority over a military detachment or city by appointment of the caliph or imam, since an enslaved person cannot freely manage his own affairs let alone those of others or affairs of the government. It should also be noted that according to Divine law (Shariah), being Ethiopian does not preclude one from serving as caliph as long as one has Qurashite ancestry. (AM)

90 Referring to the beautiful, dark, and tightly coiled hair that many Black people have been gifted by God, “*Who made most beautiful all that He created, and Who began the creation of the human being from clay*” (Surah *al-Sajdah*, Prostration, 32: 7). Unfortunately, some traditional Muslim scholars, past and present, have interpreted this hadith to advance the false idea that the physical features (in this case the hair) of Black people are innately ugly. To the contrary, Muslim relates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (239 and 243) that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described the appearance of Prophet Moses as follows, “*As for Moses, he was black skinned with tightly coiled hair.*” Al-Bukhārī narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (vol. 1, #333) that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described Prophet Jesus ﷺ as “*A man of black skin, the most beautiful of Black men you could ever see.*” In classical theological texts, Prophets are regarded as the most excellent of humankind, physically and spiritually. These narrations as well as many others establish that black skin color and tightly coiled hair are attributes of beauty, just as white skin color and lanky hair are attributes of beauty that all indicate the Absolute Wisdom, Power, and Will of the Creator.

91 Al-Bukhārī (696). (TD)

92 That is, the supreme leader of the Muslim community. (AM)