# Sīrah: Visualizing Islam

with Chair of the Department of Islamic History
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"The Prophet's ﷺ character was the Qurʾān. In the education realm, students always say, 'oh, you know, we're visual learners.' I don't know what's a better way to visualize the dīn, than the sīrah and the sunnah."

"When we're talking about sīrah, we're talking about the Prophet's ﷺ life and the Khulafāʾ, the Ṣaḥāba. Through the unique history of the sīrah, we're able to visualize how Islam can be practiced in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. We can take lessons, very practical lessons, especially from the Makkan phase as Muslims living in a non-Muslim country.

Practically speaking, on a personal level, you can see that through the sīrah we are able to visualize how Islam can be practiced in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries."
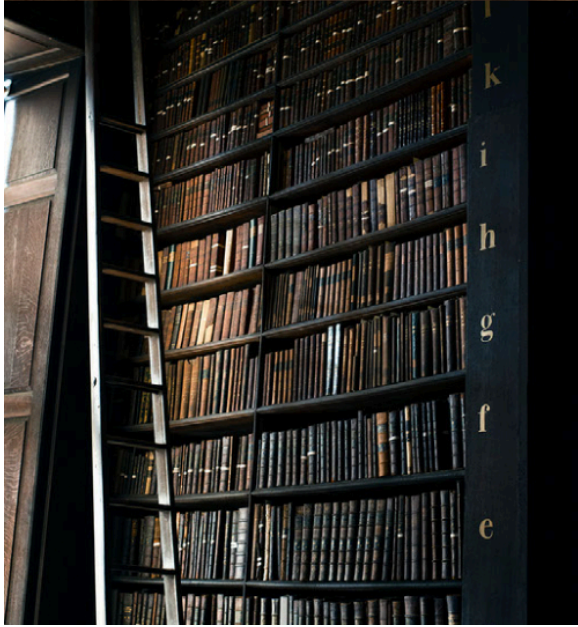
"If you look at the madāris of the past, a lot of times sīrah was just included within the Department of Hadith. There was no proper distinction. Today, based on what I've seen, the curriculums of madāris either don't teach sīrah or they'll have maybe one short course and that will be it.

Shaykh Amin wanted to separate sīrah into its own department, as we are living amidst a non-Muslim majority and we have to change things up a little bit. While it is still connected to the Department of Hadith, at Darul Qasim College it is housed under the department of Islamic History. This is so we can address both Muslim needs and non-Muslim needs in the future. Daʿwah is one of the key principles within the department."

"The bulk of class time, I want them to spend on texts that have been verified, that are closest to the generation of the Prophet ﷺ. That is the vast difference between education that we receive in the university versus waḥy based education. In waḥy-based education, we try to go as close to the Prophet ﷺ as possible."

"The courses we've been able to offer so far are based on three texts. The first one is a short treaty by Shaykh Nur al-Din 'Itr (d.2020) called al-Nafaḥāt al-ʿIṭriyya fī Sīrah Khayr al-Bariyya. It's a very small work. We study it at the end of our Shaykh al-Hind Program after students are a bit well-grounded in Arabic and their Islamic studies. So we cover that from cover to cover and then the students make a project, basically like a timeline project based off of that work and other secondary sīrah sources.

The other work that's currently being taught is book 5 from Sīrah Khatim al-Nabiyīn by Shaykh Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (d. 1999). He is known for his Qasas al-Nabiyīn. And I currently teach that in the part-time program on weeknights, but it's also part of our full time program (first year of the intermediate)."

"This year, we will start teaching al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah by Ibn Hisham. We'll be going through the Makkan phase, and then the year after in shā' Allah, we'll be going through the Madīnan phase. Ibn Hisham (d. 218) took his sīrah from the work of Ibn Ishaq (d.151), who was one of the first writers on the sīrah.

Ibn Hisham's work is a primary source on sīrah. It is an abridged and edited work of Ibn Ishaq's text which came before Ibn Hisham's. Ibn Ishaq's work still exists. I think it is about 800 pages or so."

"I do assign readings from different works of sīrah in English. The goal is for students to develop an understanding of these sources as well and how to critically engage with them. They need to know what's out there and it's not necessarily that we have time to read every single work in the classroom, but the key is that students are at least aware of them."

"With sīrah, there are many controversial issues that were not necessarily controversial during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, but they became controversial in our day and age. In the classroom, we take some of these issues and debate them. For example, the age of ʿĀisha رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهَا and when she got married to the Prophet ﷺ is taken as a topic of debate. I assign one group to argue from the side of the orientalist and the other side from the perspective of the Muslim historian."

"I can't see why an educational institution wouldn't want their students to be prepared. We always talk about real world scenarios. I don't know how much more real world it gets than studying sīrah."

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