

**Discover the Best in You!**

Life Coaching  
*for* MUSLIMS



Sayedda Habib



*Discover the Best in You! Life Coaching for Muslims*

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## DEDICATION



I dedicate this book to every human being  
who is striving to discover his or her true potential.

I hope that this book will be a valuable asset  
on your journey.



Do you not see how God makes comparisons?  
A good word is like a good tree whose root is firm  
and whose branches are high in the sky,  
yielding constant fruit by its Lord's leave –  
God makes such comparisons for people  
so that they may reflect.

Qur'an 14:24-25



## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am grateful to my Creator, for allowing me to live a conscious life and to serve my community through this book. I would also like to thank some very special people whose efforts have helped bring this book to life. Ms. Aina Egeberg, who helped me to clarify my vision for this book. Sheikh Mohammed Saeed Bahmanpour for his guidance in selecting the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the ahadith that have been used throughout. Kumail Abbas HV for his spontaneous and generous gifts that made my research so much easier. To my former clients who took the time to read drafts, worked on the exercises, and provided me with their invaluable feedback. And last but by no means least, to my family and friends whose support has always meant the world to me.

## Foreword

Dear fellow explorer,

*As-salamu 'alaykum*, how are you? I am curious about what prompted you to pick up this book. Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

'What do I really want to achieve in my life?'

'What skills do I want to develop in my life?'

'What areas of my life do I want to change and improve?'

'What are some of my strengths that I want to develop further?'

Perhaps you know exactly what you want, or maybe things aren't very clear right at this moment. Either way it's fine. This is your starting point. I remember when I first went for life coaching. I knew that I needed a change, but I had no clue about what kind, or how to go about it. I really didn't know how this process would help me but I was willing to give it a go. The moment I walked into my coach's office, I knew I was in the right place. She was so friendly, and the space felt really open and safe. She made me a cup of tea, and that put me right at ease. I felt like I was with someone I'd known for years.

That was a defining moment in my own life. That first session began a most wonderful journey of self-discovery. I found my life purpose, and you can too. Whether you are looking to solve a significant problem, or just to tweak things here and there, coaching will support you in achieving it.



I invite you to work with this book just as you would with a life coach. Coaching allows you to target your learning to the areas that are most relevant to your life right now. So, if you're extremely busy and could do with a few tips on time management start there, or you can begin with enhancing your communication skills. You will be learning a few coaching concepts, some of which will appear throughout most of the book. You can fill in any possible gaps by referring to the relevant chapter.

How you navigate through this book is up to you. The exercises will encourage you to think differently about the topic, solve problems, and learn new skills. Feel free to engage with them just as you would when you do them with a coach. Use a journal or notebook to work through the exercises. Tracking your progress over time is highly recommended.

So what can you expect on this journey? You will discover things you really love, and experience some challenges too. If you invest in the journey, and stick with it, I imagine that you will discover what makes you tick, uncover new strengths, set and implement inspiring goals, and learn powerful strategies to overcome hurdles, *insha'Allah*.

Keep coming back to the exercises to work on the next steps towards your development. I hope that you will find this book useful for years to come. I wish you all the best in your journey towards a happier, more fulfilling life.

Finally I would like draw your attention to the fact that the stories mentioned in this book are real but all the names have been changed to protect individual identities.

**Sayeda Habib**

London

2012



# 1. What is Life Coaching?



We create man in the finest state.

Quran 95:4

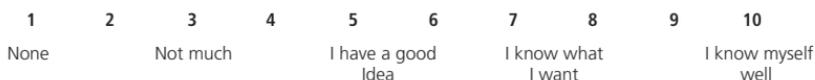


The blind person is not someone who has lost his  
eyesight, but the one who has lost his insight.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)



## *How much insight do you have about yourself?*



What prompted you to choose this number?

Were you surprised by your answer? People are often surprised by what they learn when they reflect on their experiences. Have you ever had a change of heart? Perhaps you got something you had been waiting for, and then it was a disappointment? Disappointments are not always due to unexpected events. At times, things don't turn out the way we hoped because we miss the warning signs. Perhaps we were not that clear about what we wanted to begin with.

## *Isn't action more important than insight?*

Imagine yourself running out the door in the morning. You get into your car, tearing off a hurry, and drive off. Ten minutes go by and you suddenly realize that you actually had nowhere to go. It takes a split second before you begin to panic. You feel a sense of fear because something very important is missing. You know you want to get somewhere, but where exactly is that? Now consider how critical it is to be clear about the outcome you want.

Do you know someone who has struggled to figure out what they want? Ask them what that's like and they will tell you that it's not a pleasant



feeling. Having an outcome in mind before taking action saves valuable energy. Imagine using your mind like the GPS of a car. You put your destination in, plan the route, and you're off and running. Indeed, there is much that is yet to be understood about the mind, but what we do know is that that it can be compared with our physical muscles in one fundamental way.

The mind's ability to think strengthens with use, or may diminish if neglected. To develop an insight into something requires that we pay conscious mental attention to the subject, ask ourselves useful questions and then reflect on them. Asking questions gives the mind the opportunity to look for answers. Knowing which questions are useful and how to ask them requires training and practise. The answers to some of these useful questions hold the key to unlocking your potential. You then achieve this by implementing what you have learned. We are capable of fulfilling our potential when we balance our actions with productive thought.

### ***So are you ready to begin discovering the best in you?***

I hope that you said a resounding yes. Perhaps you are thinking about how you do that. Maybe you have tried before and it didn't work. On the other hand you may be wondering if it is even possible. Well it is possible, and coaching is an avenue to help you do it. You can use the tools available to you to learn to work through things in a methodical way. Your discovery is only limited by your imagination. So let's begin by exploring what coaching is, its history and principles so you have some background knowledge.

### ***What is coaching?***

Have you ever had a conversation that inspired you Perhaps you were listened to empathetically, but were not given any advice. Maybe you were given the space to design your own solution about how to move forward, and you did that successfully. That, in essence, is a coaching conversation.



Coaching is a profession in its own right. It is a method of consultation that supports clients to create change in their lives. You may be familiar with other methods in the same vein such as mentoring, psychotherapy and counselling. Coaching is *not* these, and we will explore the differences a bit later in the chapter. Let's define coaching first.



**Coaching is a process of collaboration and partnership where the coach supports the client to realize their individual potential and produce the results they want to achieve in their personal and professional lives.**



Coaching is aimed at assisting clients to unlock their potential and become more resourceful in a variety of ways.

The partnership has a few ground rules:

- Coach and client work as a team
- The client sets the agenda
- It is focused on learning and finding solutions
- It is *not* a replacement for medical treatment

### ***Can Muslims use coaching?***

Muslims have valid concerns as the ideologies of some complementary therapies may contradict Islamic principles and therefore be unsuitable. Let me give you an example. Mark has been teaching meditation for several years. He told me that on occasion he would get enquiries from Muslims to come on his courses, but the minute that they found out that they would be given a mantra that uses 'Om' they would back out of attending the course. Mark always thought that meditation is of value to anyone, regardless of religious beliefs, so he was open to finding a way around it. I suggested that perhaps a verse from the Quran could be used to replace the mantra for those students who really wanted to learn meditation but within a context of Islam. This then became a useful alternative, and since then he has taught a few Muslims students how to meditate in this way.

I wonder if you have thought about having coaching before but didn't take it on because you felt the methods used are un-Islamic. If you were considering working with a non-Muslim coach, then that may require that you explain some of the Islamic dos and don'ts. The process of coaching itself, however, can be easily applied to Muslims because the client provides the context.

Coaching assists people to learn about who they are, and what they want out of life. The client directs the session by supplying the content for the session. The client can fill in any important details that they feel the coach needs to know. For example, ask two people what their favourite time of day is and each will give you the answer that is relevant to them. A skilful coach will ask questions that are respectful and appropriate to the client according to their values and beliefs.

Muslims can utilize coaching because:

- The client provides the context and content
- It is non-judgmental
- It is a safe space for the client
- The partnership is based on trust

You, the client, will tell your coach what you want to talk about. Your coach will help you raise your awareness, set goals and explore solutions. They may offer you some training on various skills. Your coach will continue to check in to ensure that you are finding the process valuable.

Engaging a coach often motivates clients to stay on track. They have someone supporting them throughout the journey. If obstacles get in the way, they work through them to overcome the blocks. I have been adapting coaching tools for my work with Muslim clients with great success. The exercises that follow are based on the same principles. I encourage you to apply them to your life in a way that empowers you to take action and get the results you want.

You may now be curious about what to expect from a session and we will cover that a bit later on in this chapter. Let's look at the history of the profession and how it has developed so far.



## *The beginnings of coaching*

What does the word 'coach' mean in the context of self-development?

The word 'coach' was originally used as a label for a horse-drawn carriage. A 'coach' was the most elegant way to travel in medieval Europe. Later, the word 'coach' started being used to describe various means of transportation. The word remained synonymous with elegance, ease and movement and was then adopted by sportsmen who 'coached' their players to develop their game to produce better results. Not only was the word used, a coaching philosophy began to take shape. This philosophy was then adapted into other areas of personal development. The coaching profession aims to live up to the word; coaches aim to assist their clients to develop with ease and elegance.

## *How did coaching develop?*

Coaching is not the only method to address human development. Coaching, counselling, or other complementary therapies provide structured approaches to healing or personal development. However, age-old traditions demonstrate that people have always valued their development and passed on wisdom and guidance to younger generations. The methods were different then, and perhaps less formalised, but they fulfilled their purpose equally well. In fact, the world has seen a resurrection of age-old therapies being used for healing and development – Hijama, Acupuncture, and Chinese medicine being a few of them.

Coaching is a relatively new phenomenon that began in the Western world in the 1950s. The overall philosophy of the coaching profession emerged from a mix of science, spiritual teachings, and human reflection. It marked the beginnings of the self-development movement in the Western world. People were now being encouraged to explore their own human potential. Prominent psychologists were busy developing a system of psychology that helped people explore what it means to be human. Humanistic psychology, as it is called, allowed for matters such as health, love, and life purpose to be explored.



In addition, people also began to take an interest in Eastern philosophies and spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, which encouraged them to explore divinity within themselves. This movement toward self-development emerged in the USA, where members of the public now had the opportunity to attend institutes to explore their own development with teachers who were helping to shape these new ideas.

In fact, the forefather of sports coaching was a teacher too. W. Timothy Gallwey was a tennis coach with a difference. Not only did he have an interest in sports psychology, but he also had a great interest in Eastern religious studies. Gallwey created a radical change in sports coaching that then became the roadmap for coaching in other areas. He combined his knowledge of Eastern philosophy, humanistic psychology, and sports psychology and created something new that he called 'yoga' tennis. From this emerged his philosophy on how to coach players in an even more effective way.

He noted that every player has two opponents, one external and the other internal. The second opponent may be better termed as self-doubt, fear, or distraction. Gallwey published a book called *The Inner Game of Tennis* in 1974 coaching people to overcome the inner opponent. The concept of the Inner Game gave birth to a new way of coaching that brought various disciplines together. Gallwey is considered to be the father of such coaching concepts and has since adapted the 'Inner Game' to other areas of personal development.

Gallwey's teachings caught on and various others began developing their own courses. The word 'coaching' started being used in the context of self-development. In the 1970s, people could attend coaching programs for their own development, but coaching had not yet become a skill that people could be trained in professionally. This became possible through the efforts of Thomas Leonard. He was the first to establish a college where coaching methodology was taught, and he went on to found the International Coach Federation (ICF) in 1995, which is now a leading body in coaching accreditation worldwide. What began as a small movement has spread to many Western countries and is now also being used in various Muslim countries as well.



People who worked with Thomas Leonard developed their own approaches, and took coaching to various continents around the world. Coaching is being adapted for personal and professional arenas. You will find coaches who specialize in business, executive, or life coaching. A skilled coach will adapt models in their work with clients. The basic principles of coaching are explained in the following section.

### ***The building blocks of coaching***

Coaching principles have been derived from a combination of science and spiritual teachings. We can clearly discern that coaching is about enhancing human potential when we reflect on its basic principles:

- 1. Every human being is a unique whole.*
- 2. A coach is to assist the client in raising self-awareness and exploring choice.*

Coaching principles emerged from various sources. Table 1.1 explains what coaching took from each tradition.

### ***What skills do coaches use?***

Are you wondering what coaches actually 'do'? A few skills are at the heart of good coaching. These include:

- Asking powerful questions
- Listening on multiple levels
- Being able to synthesize information
- The ability to establish trust and have a rapport with clients
- Using a variety of exercises, tools, and models at opportune moments

There may be other skills that are tailor-made for the area of the coach's expertise. Coaches will tend to create a niche in their particular area of interest.



**Table 1.1: Sources of coaching**

The source	What coaching derived from it
<p><b>Humanistic Psychology</b> A branch of psychology focusing on the human desire for fulfilment and meaning in life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each person is whole and unique</li> <li>• People have choices</li> <li>• Coaches need to be empathetic and honest</li> </ul>
<p><b>Eastern spiritual traditions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real awareness comes from within</li> <li>• Self-awareness leads to change</li> <li>• Your state of being informs what you do</li> </ul>
<p><b>Constructivism</b> An epistemological idea that people create value from their own experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We each have a unique interpretation of the world</li> <li>• We participate in our experience</li> <li>• We can learn about our experiences, take actions, and create change</li> </ul>
<p><b>Linguistic studies</b> The study of all facets of language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language plays a crucial role in how we perceive our world</li> <li>• The words we use may empower or disempower us</li> </ul>
<p><b>Neuro-Linguistic programming (NLP)</b> A kind of applied psychology that studies how we think, interpret our experiences, use language, and formulate our behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides principles, tools, and exercises to facilitate mind–body awareness and create desired change</li> </ul>



Coaching has been developed using principles, tools, and skills that come from a combination of the above sources. You will be presented with ideas that come from NLP and are used in coaching throughout this book.

### ***What can I expect when I engage a coach?***

Clients often find that their coaching sessions are more relaxed and interactive than they thought they would be. A few basic things that you can expect are:

- You will set the topic for the session
- A feeling of being 'safe' and in a non-judgmental space
- The coaching process will allow you to learn more about yourself
- Everything you talk about will be kept confidential (unless specified)
- You will get results by fully engaging in the process and by completing the tasks in between sessions

Your coach will expect that:

- You are able to examine your thoughts and behaviour for yourself
- You are capable and ready to make changes
- You are not suffering from a serious psychological illness
- You are willing to take responsibility for creating change

Coaching encourages people to build on their inner resources. In time the client will become self-sufficient and can then use the process just to check in and stay on track. The client may come back to coaching to build other areas of their lives should they choose.

### ***What happens in coaching?***

The coaching process is designed to raise self-awareness and help the client achieve the results he or she wants, but it does not rely on one specific procedure in particular. A coach will use a variety of skills and tools in any given session depending on what comes up in the moment. You may be answering a lot of questions in one session, and getting up and walking around to do an exercise the next. Coaching is typically carried out over a specified period of time and the coach–client team will



assess the client's progress periodically. Now let's give you an idea of what happens at a typical first session.

### **Step One**

**The client sets the agenda:** You will probably express what you want to get out of the coaching process at the first session. Your coach will also ask you to focus in on a specific outcome for every session that follows. This way you can choose your goal and track your progress too.

Clients will come to coaching to:

- Solve a problem (health, relationship, work issue)
- Achieve a goal (new career or business, get married)
- Learn a new skill (public speaking, communication)
- All of the above

### **Step Two**

**A relationship is constructed:** Once you have chosen to go ahead with the coaching, the relationship is designed. Your coach will ask you how you wish to be supported:

Coaching support:

- Is tailor-made for the client.
- The coach and client are a team
- The relationship is based on trust

### **Step Three**

**The client explores and learns:** The coaching session is a space for exploration. A skilful coach will listen, ask questions, and use tools to raise your awareness.

- The client will explore an issue or topic
- The client will learn about their behaviour, thoughts and emotions
- New insights and avenues for action will emerge

**You, the client, will implement some behavioural changes** or carry out an action plan that was agreed to in the session. The following session will be an opportunity to track progress.



### **Step Four**

#### **Changes take place:**

- The client has solved a problem
- The client learns how to solve other problems in future
- The client produces results
- The client feels empowered to create change in the future

### ***What coaching is not***

Let's distinguish coaching from other forms of self-help so you are able to easily decide if it is right for you (see Table 1.2). This is especially important if you are deciding between coaching and another complementary therapy. The table opposite distinguishes coaching from other forms of self-help.

### ***How do I choose a coach?***

I recently met someone who went to a 'leadership' coach who worked in the same field as he did. He thought it would be useful to learn from the coach's experience. This 'coach' taught his clients by telling them what to do based on his knowledge. This is not coaching, but in fact mentoring. If a coach tells you how to do specific things, the solution is coming from them, not from you.

I invite you to look for a coach who demonstrates that he or she has dealt with his or her own issues successfully. Ask them if they have ever been coached. Remember coaches are people too, and they experience issues just like anyone else. An effective coach will be able to demonstrate that they use coaching to empower themselves, achieve their goals and live a fulfilling life. This way they can be at their personal best especially when it comes to supporting you.



**Table 1.2. The difference between coaching and other therapies**

Therapies	Coaching
<b>Psychiatry</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A branch of medicine that specialises in diagnosing and treating mental illness</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a field of medicine</li> <li>• Coaches do not diagnose illness or medicate</li> <li>• A coach will see a 'client' not a 'patient'</li> </ul>
<b>Counselling/therapy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on mental health</li> <li>• Work with trauma cases</li> <li>• Explore past events in depth</li> <li>• Do not engage with the client on a personal level</li> <li>• Work with clinical illness</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus is on growth</li> <li>• Clients are mentally sound</li> <li>• Focuses on what clients want in the present and the future</li> <li>• Focuses on awareness, behaviour, and action plans</li> <li>• Works with clients as a team</li> </ul>
<b>Mentoring</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An experienced individual imparting their wisdom and expertise about a specific field</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A coach focuses on the client's ability to learn and find solutions</li> <li>• The coach may train the client on some skills with permission and consent</li> </ul>
<b>Advice giving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tells a person what to do</li> <li>• Comes from another person's viewpoint</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A coach's aim is to empower their client to see choices where they did not see them before. The client is then able to choose his or her own direction.</li> </ul>

**What should I use coaching for?**

Coaching is a solution-focused approach that can be used in a variety of personal and professional contexts. People come to coaching because they want to create changes and achieve results in their lives. For example:



- Improving health and well-being
- Getting married
- Improving work/life balance
- Resolving family issues
- Enhancing time management
- Improving confidence
- Reducing stress

### ***Exercise: 1.1. How can I benefit from coaching?***



**Aim of the exercise:** To begin identifying things you want to change.

**Method:** Make two columns on a piece of paper before you begin.

**Step One:** Ask yourself: 'What do I want to change about my life?' or 'What do I really, really want?' List the first three things that immediately come to mind in the first column.

**Step Two:** In the next column, list all the important actions you have taken thus far towards making these changes happen.

**Step Three:** Reflect on the following questions:

1. How satisfied am I with this current situation?
2. How willing am I to now create change in my life?
3. How can I best use the coaching process to help me achieve my goals?

We will do some more work in Chapter Three on goal setting to help you identify specific goals that you want to work on. Don't worry or feel overwhelmed if you notice many things that need addressing. The exercises in this book will help you focus on your goals one at a time.



## Your role in the journey

*Just suppose that you know that you can have anything you want.  
Your part is to be clear what it is and take the required actions.  
What is that like?*

You will succeed, insha'Allah, when you do your part. Your coach will do his or her job, but your job is to follow through on your action plan to the best of your ability. There may be times when you don't get something done, but be ready to get back on track. Bring a sense of commitment and enthusiasm, and your experience of coaching will be both pleasant and rewarding, insha'Allah.

For now, I ask you to imagine that I am sitting with you, and we are having a coaching session together. Imagine that you are guiding the session. You chose the subject. You are answering the questions, raising your awareness, and creating an action plan as we go along. You are in the driving seat. With practice, it may even become second nature for you to coach yourself.

## A few tips to help you along

- Buy a journal or a notebook to do your exercises in.
- Take time to do the exercises thoroughly
- Feel free to revisit the material if you feel more work needs to be done
- Work often and be consistent
- Share your journey with people you love and trust



CASE  
STUDY

## Anisa's story

*I met Anisa in 2004, a mature student with marital problems. She was conflicted about whether to stay or leave as children, finances, and family were all major concerns for her. She felt that she just didn't see eye to eye with her husband about anything, but she loved him and didn't really want to end her marriage either.*

*I explained that coaching could help her to clarify each side of the situation and empower her to make a choice one way or the other. She said, 'This sounds like it can help me, and I really need someone to talk to so I can sort things out.' We had several conversations about coaching; she said that she wanted to begin, but kept hesitating. She wasn't ready to proceed and I knew that it wasn't up to me to convince or pressure her. One day, a year later, she called me up and said 'I really need this now, so let's get going. I want to start today if I can.' We had our first session the very same day.*

*At first, the coaching was about dealing with the emotional situation at hand; she persevered and through the coaching process, she learned to become a more effective communicator. Since she completed her coaching, she has had another baby, and started her own business. We stay in touch from time to time. She recently said, 'I can't believe I waited as long as I did. I wish I had started the coaching sooner!'*

### ***Let's summarise the main points:***

- We defined what coaching *is* and *isn't*
- We covered a basic history of coaching and its founding principles
- We explored its uses
- We explored its relevance to Muslims

