

IMAM IBN QAYYIM  
AL-JAWZIYYAH

**THE  
WAYFARER'S  
JOURNEY  
TOWARDS  
ALLAH**

ABRIDGEMENT OF  
MADĀRIJ AL-SĀLIKĪN



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**Disclaimer: The word Allah is the Arabic word for God.**



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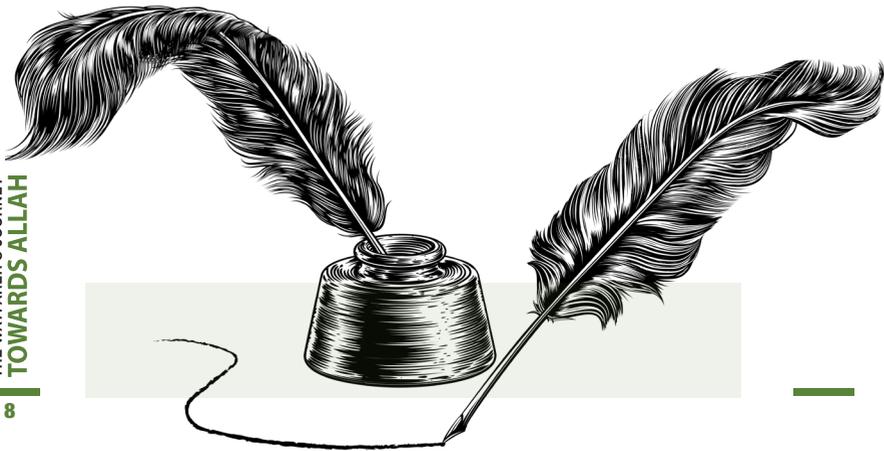
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	9
We Pray for Allah's Help and Guidance	17
The Opening Surah Covers All Major Issues	19
Al-Fātiḥah Ensures Good Health for the Heart and Body	23
The Meaning of the Fifth Verse	27
The Best of Worship	29
The Stages a Believer's Heart Moves into through <i>iyyāka na'bud</i>	33
The Stage of Alertness	35
The Stage of Thought	39
The Stage of Insight	41
The Stocktaking Stage	45
The Stage of Repentance	49
The Stage of Devotion	95
The Stage of Taking Heed	99
The Stage of Seeking Immunity	111
The Stage of Listening	113
The Stage of Fear	117
The Stage of Humility of the Heart	121
The Stage of Humbling Oneself	125
The Stage of Caring Little for Comfort	129
The Stage of Devoutness	133
The Stage of Hope	137
The Stage of Watchfulness	143
The Stage of Sincerity	145
The Stage of Steadfastness	149
The Stage of Reliance	153

The Stage of Patience	161
The Stage of Acceptance	169
The Stage of Gratitude	175
The Stage of Feeling Shame	177
The Stage of Truthfulness	181
The Stage of Preferring Others to Oneself	187
The Stage of Good Manners	191
Refining Good Manners	195
The Stage of Humility	203
The Stage of Manliness, i.e. <i>murū'ah</i>	205
The Stage of Politeness	507
The Stage of Certainty	213
The Stage of Allah's Remembrance	215
The Stage of Knowledge	219
The Stage of Tranquillity	223
The Stage of Love	225
The Stage of Taste	233
Early Enthusiasm and Later Slackening	237
The Stage of Clarity	239
The Stage of Rejoicing	245
The Stage of Secrecy	249
The Stage of Strangers	253
The Stage of Beholding	259
The Stage of Life	265
The Stage of Knowledge	279
The Stage of Allah's Oneness	283
Postscript	287



# INTRODUCTION

**All** praise is due to Allah<sup>1</sup> who has shown His servants the way they should take to go to Him. He has enabled them to undertake the journey towards Him, and He explained through His messengers (peace be upon them all) how they should travel to Him. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the last of Allah's messengers and he showed the way to Allah clearly, setting a practical example that stands out for all generations. Wherever they live, believers are able to emulate his conduct and be certain of earning Allah's pleasure.

Across the centuries, scholars wrote books encouraging Muslims to follow the Sunnah and devote time for voluntary worship. They also showed that this is not limited to formal and physical worship, but that there is much that comes under what is termed as 'the heart's action'. This refers to consciousness whereby whatever a person may be doing, his deed should be acceptable to Allah and in line with the teachings of the divine faith.

One of the best books in this field is Ibn al-Qayyim's *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, a title which may be translated as 'Steps of Wayfarers'. The Arabic title connotes something like the steps of a ladder, but they are steps along the way to a definite goal. The goal he defines as being with Allah in the life to come. Over the years the book has received much praise by scholars and general readers.

In recent years, a shorter version of the book was published, deleting the portions that are not directly related to the book's theme. Following the method of many Islamic scholars, Ibn al-Qayyim often includes a

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<sup>1</sup> **Disclaimer:** The word Allah is the Arabic word for God.

detailed discussion of a side point that occurs during his general treatment of his subject. Removing such side discussions makes the book more focused and easier for the general reader. This version is called *Taqrīb Madārij al-Sālikīn*. The word *Taqrīb* means ‘to bring something closer, to make it easier to learn or to understand’.

The present work is a translation of an abridgement of this shorter version. However, it gives a complete discussion of the theme of the original book and takes the reader along the journey in a pleasant and progressive way, using the author’s flowing style.

The book takes the form of a journey which should be undertaken by believers who want to ensure for themselves the best outcome in their future lives. Its destination is to be with Allah. In other words, it is a lifelong journey towards Allah. The book divides the journey into stages, but these are not consecutive stages. Some extend throughout the journey itself, such as the stages of repentance, patience and truthfulness. Others are completed and the traveller progresses onto another stage. Ultimately, the traveller arrives at a stage of life accompanied by the stage of Allah’s oneness, which is the last aspect addressed by the book. All in all, it is a pleasant journey that helps to produce the best in man.



## Preface

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. May He give peace and blessings to Prophet Muhammad, the last of all Allah's messengers, and his ancestors Abraham and Ishmael, as well as all other prophets.

One of the main distinctive features of Islam is its fine balance between the needs of the body and those of the soul. No discerning person can overlook this balance as it is manifest in Islamic beliefs, worship and rules covering human dealings and transactions. A true Muslim is one who combines submission to Allah's orders and acceptance of His legislation with practical implementation of His commandments and prohibitions. This fine balance has often been the criterion by which non-Muslims recognized the truth of Islam and decided to embrace it.

All Muslims realize that they undertake a journey that starts from the moment of birth and ends with meeting Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. On their journey they need to have the knowledge that serves to show them the landmarks on their way, providing guidance and warning against slips and pitfalls, so that they reach their destination in perfect safety.

Some such landmarks are aspects of spiritual deeds while others are practical and physical actions. All of them are clearly outlined in Allah's Book and the Prophet's Sunnah. Islamic scholars in different generations paid proper attention to explaining them, so that people are well aware of them, and they can move along their journey to its desired end.

Imam Abu 'Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr ibn Ayyūb of Damascus, who is better known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (691-751 AH,

1292-1350 CE) was one who wrote much on this subject. His writings were well received by scholars and general readers, as he relied on thorough research and wrote with a fine style, explaining the teachings of Islam and its message, particularly the aspects related to the spiritual side and what enables people to achieve fine purification. His books continued to be well used and studied in successive generations. They were summarized and illustrated by scholars in different ages.

A number of our colleagues have worked on an abridgement and simplification of his priceless book, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, i.e. Stages for Wayfarers. Their efforts have resulted in a good, easy to read work.

In our desire to make the book available to a wider readership, we at the Osoul Centre have produced this English version, knowing that Muslim and non-Muslim readers will find in it spiritual nourishment. It will help to purify one's soul and strengthen one's belief and search for the truth.

We pray to Allah to accept our effort and that of everyone who contributed to this work, in its summarization, revision, editing, proofreading and translation. We hope that its benefit will be widespread.

All praise be to Allah at the beginning and the end.

Osoul Centre.



مركز اوسول

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# Imam Ibn al-Qayyim

**Imam** Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb ibn Sa‘d was born in 691 AH, 29 January 1292 CE, at Zar‘, a village in the province of Ḥawrān in southern Syria, about eighty kilometres to the south of Damascus. He is best known as Ibn al-Qayyim, or Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Al-Jawziyyah is a school founded by Abu al-Maḥāsin Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Jawzī (d. 656 AH 1258 CE). He completed its building in 652 AH, and the school soon gained high renown as a number of very famous scholars were among its teachers over many generations. The author’s father was the Qayyim, or Principal of the school. The school was burnt down in 820 AH, 1417 CE, and was subsequently rebuilt by Shams al-Dīn al-Nābulṣī. It used to be at the top of the business quarter called al-Buzūriyyah in Damascus, but some of its neighbours appropriated most of its area. What was left of it was then turned into a court of law which functioned until 1327 AH 1908 CE. It was closed for some time, then was reopened as a children’s school run by Jam‘iyyat al-Is‘āf al-Khayrī, an Islamic charitable organization. The school was burnt down again during the Syrian Revolt against the French occupation in the 1920s. Subsequently, some shops were built in its place, and above these a small mosque was built.

The author moved from his village to Damascus where he studied in the al-Jawziyyah School. He was soon noted for his sharp intelligence, becoming known as Ibn al-Qayyim, or the Principal’s son. He is best known by this nickname, and all his books are published under it. He learnt from his father the discipline of inheritance. He excelled in Hadith, *Fiqh* and its fundamental principles. He paid special attention in his education to the Arabic language and became noted for his literary, flowing style.

His most important teacher was Ibn Taymiyyah, known as Shaykh al-Islam which means the ‘leading Islamic scholar’. He became his close student after Ibn Taymiyyah’s return from Egypt to Damascus in 712 AH until he died in 728. This was a period when Ibn al-Qayyim was a highly enthusiastic young scholar approaching maturity and establishing himself as a scholar of insight in his own right. He learnt much from Ibn Taymiyyah, and also learnt from him his critical outlook. He genuinely loved his teacher and supported most of his views. He discussed in great detail the questions over which Ibn Taymiyyah disagreed with the prevailing view of the four major schools of *Fiqh*, such as a divorce pronounced three times on the same occasion. He rather ruled that this counts as one divorce, whereas the four schools consider it as three divorces.

Ibn al-Qayyim closely follows Ibn Taymiyyah in establishing a general rule to evaluate any kind of views, thoughts, theories, rulings or beliefs of any person or group. The evaluation is based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah. This requires a thorough understanding of what the Qur’an and the Sunnah say concerning the subject matter of what is being evaluated. Such thorough understanding can only be achieved through an excellent knowledge of the Arabic language and the meanings of the vocabulary used in the Qur’an and the Hadith. Whatever is inconsistent with the Qur’an and the Sunnah is rejected, as it only leads to error and going astray.

Ibn al-Qayyim had many students who became distinguished scholars in their own right. Among the most famous of these were Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795 AH 1393 CE). He was a well-known author who specialized in Hadith, *Fiqh* and history. Another very famous student was Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Amr ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH 1372 CE). Ibn Kathīr is best known as the author of the highly renowned commentary on the Qur’an, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘Azīm*. His history book, *al-Bidāyah wal-Nihāyah*, is also very well-known. Also, Ibn al-Qayyim’s two sons, Ibrāhīm and ‘Abdullāh, were among his students and both achieved high ranks in scholarship.

Ibn al-Qayyim wrote many books. In total, his books amount to more than sixty, some of which ran into several volumes. Among the best known of these is *Zād ak-Ma'ād*, a five-volume book on the Prophet's life and his guidance on a great number of questions covering all aspects of life. *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn* is a four-volume work on *Fiqh*. A very interesting work is the volume he dedicated to his own son on the occasion of the approaching birth of his first child. Ibn al-Qayyim did not have the money to give his son a suitable gift on this joyful occasion. He, therefore, wrote a special book called *Tuḥfat al-Mawdūd fī Ahkām al-Mawlūd*, i.e. a gift for a loved one re: the rulings pertaining to the birth of a child. That was a scholar father's present to his son, reminding him of what was required of him as a father towards his child on its birth and early years of life.

Ibn al-Qayyim died around the 'Isha Prayer time on Thursday 23 Rajab 751 AH, 15 September 1350 CE. His funeral prayer was held on the following day in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and once more in al-Jarrāḥ Mosque near the graveyard. He was buried in al-Bāb al-Ṣaghīr graveyard in Damascus. His grave is well marked, and it is on the left hand side as one enters the graveyard. When the entrance was widened sometime during the last century, his grave was moved a couple of metres to the east. May Allah bless his soul and bestow mercy on him.





## We Pray for Allah's Help and Guidance

**All** praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. We bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah, the One who has no partners. He is the Lord and Sustainer of the universe, who sends the best of His servants as bearers of His message. We also bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's servant and messenger. He revealed to him His Book, the Qur'an, which is the clear criterion that distinguishes truth from error, provides right guidance, dispels doubts and imparts certainty.

Allah sent us the Qur'an so that we carefully recite it and reflect on its meanings. We accept all that it says as absolutely true, and we know that its stories and information are correct. We endeavour to understand its best meanings and fulfil its commands. We try our best to fully appreciate the useful information it provides, as it takes us along the way to Allah, earning His pleasure.

Man attains his best status through useful knowledge and good action, as Allah says: 'I swear by the declining day, that man is a certain loser, except for those who have faith and do righteous deeds and counsel one another to follow the truth and counsel one another to be patient in adversity'. (103 – 1-3) Therefore, it is right that man should devote every hour of his time, nay, every minute and second in an endeavour to attain the high status that ensures that he does not end as a loser. The right way to ensure this is through the Qur'an: understanding it, unearthing its gems, and endeavouring to implement it. This is the right way to give man the best results in this present life and in the life to come. It keeps man on the right path.

We will highlight this through looking at the opening surah of the Qur'an, *al-Fātiḥah*, which is described as the 'mother of the Qur'an'.

We will cite some of what this surah includes of these objectives, and its indications of the different stages along the right path, as well as the means it utilizes and the objectives it aims to serve. We will show that this surah is unique, with nothing else that can deliver the message it bears. Indeed, Allah has not revealed anything similar to it in any of His revealed books: the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms or indeed the Qur'an.

In trying to attain this goal, we seek Allah's help and on Him we rely. No power can have effect without His will.



## The Opening Surah Covers All Major Issues

**The** opening surah of the Qur'an, *al-Fātiḥah*, sums up all major issues in the most perfect way. It includes a presentation of Allah, using three of His finest names, to which all His other names and fine attributes refer. These are Allah which means Allah, al-Rabb which means the Lord and al-Raḥmān which we translate as 'the Lord of Grace' as it connotes both power and infinite mercy. The surah has Godhead, Lordship and mercy as its firm foundation. As we say *iyyāka na'bud*, i.e. 'You alone do we worship', we emphasize His Godhead, while saying *iyyāka nasta'in*, i.e. 'to You alone do we turn for help', we assert His Lordship. The sixth verse is a prayer for guidance along the straight path. This relies on Allah's mercy. Praise includes all three attributes as Allah is praised in His Godhead, Lordship and mercy. Glorifying Him brings such praise to perfection.

*Al-Fātiḥah* further confirms the resurrection and second life of all mankind, as well as requitting them for their deeds, whether good or foul. It asserts that Allah alone judges people according to His absolute justice. The fourth verse of the surah describes Allah as 'the Master of the Day of Judgement'.

The sixth verse says: *ihdina ssirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, which means 'guide us on the straight path'. This is a prayer for clarity and right guidance. Every human being stands in the greatest need for such guidance, and therefore we need to continuously pray for it. Some people may ask: since we have been guided to Islam, how come we need to pray for guidance? This is a superfluous question. What we know is very little compared with what we do not know. What we are too lazy to do or feel complacent about is equal to or greater or lesser than what we want to do. The same may be said about what we wish to do or have, but is beyond

us. What we know in whole but cannot fathom its details is beyond count. All this shows that we stand in need of complete guidance. Even a person who has all these matters under his command needs to pray for guidance so that he can stay in full command.

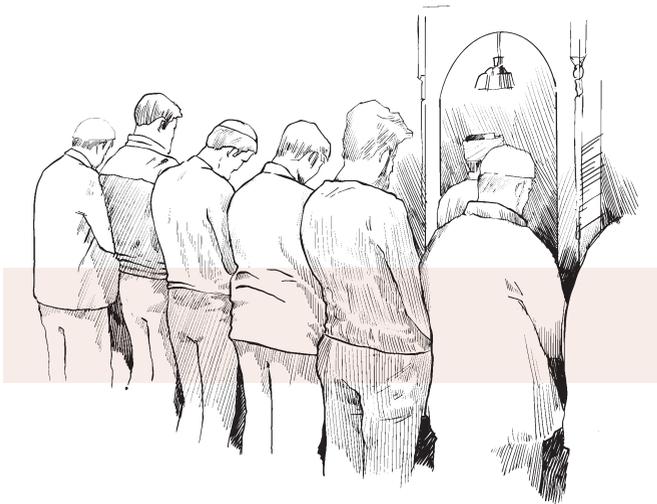
Yet there is one more need for guidance, namely guidance on the Day of Resurrection along the way to Heaven. When a person is given guidance in this present life along the straight path defined by Allah in His Book and explained by His Messenger (peace be upon him) he will be guided on the Day of Judgement along the straight path that leads to Heaven. The more diligently a person in this life follows the straight path, the steadier he will be as he walks the path erected by Allah over Hell. People's performance in this life determines their steadiness along that path. Some will travel at the speed of light; some in a wink of an eye; some at the speed of wind; some like a cantering horse; some will run; others will walk; some will crawl; others will trample along; while many will fall into Hell. What determines their speed and safe passage is how they follow the straight path in this present life, as Allah says: **'Are you now being recompensed for anything other than what you did in life'**. (27: 90)

Since a person who seeks to stick to the straight path really pursues something that most people turn away from, he will find it difficult to have a companion along his way. Yet it is in human nature for people to dislike travelling a solitary way. They prefer to have pleasant company. Therefore, Allah tells us of the company along the straight path as He says: **'All who obey Allah and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom Allah has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs and the righteous ones. How goodly a company are these!'** (4: 69) This verse identifies the right way by its travellers, and these are the ones 'upon whom Allah has bestowed His blessings'. This reassures the seeker of divine guidance and dispels his loneliness as he realizes that his own company consists of those granted Allah's blessings. He will care little for the lack of travellers alongside him. Those who abandon his way that follows the

straight path may be numerous, but they are far lower in status. Some early scholars said: ‘Stick to the path of the truth and be not upset by the lack of company. Steer away from the path of falsehood and do not admire the great numbers of those taking it to their own ruin’.

Whenever you experience a feeling of loneliness, remember the company that preceded you along your straight way and endeavour to catch up with them. Do not give thought to others, as they will not benefit you in anyway. If they call out to you to join them, turn a deaf ear. Should you pay attention to them, they will lead you astray, or at least impede your progress.





## AL-FĀTIḤAH ENSURES GOOD HEALTH FOR THE HEART AND BODY

**I**t is indeed the perfect cure for heart malady,<sup>2</sup> which is the result of one of two essential causes: wrong knowledge and a wrong objective. These lead to two very serious disorders, namely, strayness and anger. The first is the result of wrong knowledge, while anger is the result of pursuing the wrong objective. These two disorders cover all types of heart malady.

Having guidance to identify and follow the straight path is the cure of the condition of going astray. Therefore, the appeal for such guidance is the most important and necessary supplication a person must say every day and night, during every prayer. Everyone is in great and urgent need for such guidance. Nothing can adequately replace this supplication.

The proper fulfilment of the fifth verse of the surah, ‘You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help’, ensures recovery from wrong knowledge and wrong objective. Such proper fulfilment includes complete awareness of the meaning of the verse and its proper implementation, so as it describes a person’s condition.

There are two serious heart diseases which a person needs to promptly attend to. Otherwise, they will inevitably lead to his ruin. These are hypocrisy and conceit. The cure for hypocrisy is ‘You alone do we worship’, while ‘and to You alone do we turn for help’ provides the cure for conceit. I often heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah bless his soul) say: ‘You alone do we worship’ eliminates hypocrisy, while ‘and to You alone do we turn for help’ eliminates conceit.

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<sup>2</sup> This does not refer to cardiac illness. Nor does it refer to mental disorders, such as anxiety and obsession. It refers to any non-physical malady, i.e. what we may call ‘spiritual disorder’. – Editor’s note.

When a person is cured of both diseases through the fulfilment of this fifth verse of the surah and cured of both strayness and ignorance through the sixth verse, ‘guide us on the straight path’, he achieves full recovery. He will then enjoy good health and receive Allah’s blessings. He will be among those who enjoy Allah’s favours. He will stand apart from those who incur Allah’s wrath, i.e. the people pursuing the wrong objective, for he has learnt the truth and has chosen to go elsewhere, and he is apart from those who have gone astray because they have the wrong knowledge that blinds them to the truth.

As for *al-Fātiḥah* being a cure for physical illness, we have an authentic hadith narrated by the Prophet’s companion, Abu Sa‘īd al-Khudrī. The hadith mentions that a group of the Prophet’s companions passed by some Arabian people, but the latter were totally inhospitable and refused them even the basic hospitality that is characteristic of the Arabs generally. A short while later, the chief of those Arabian people was bitten by a snake or a scorpion. They then went to the Prophet’s companions and told them about it, asking if they had anyone who could help. They were told there was one among them, but since they were inhospitable, they would require some compensation. They agreed to give them a few sheep. One of the Prophet’s companions recited *al-Fātiḥah* several times close to the patient, and soon the man fully recovered. The Prophet’s companions took the sheep but counselled each other not to make use of them until they returned to the Prophet. When they met up with him, they told him what they had done. He said to the man: ‘How did you know that *al-Fātiḥah* is a curative supplication?’ He said to the group: ‘You may eat [of the sheep meat] and give me a share of it’.<sup>3</sup>

The hadith makes clear that the bitten man was cured through the recitation of *al-Fātiḥah* and he needed no medication. Most probably he recovered better than through the use of any medication. Yet the recipient in this case was not very receptive, because those Arabian

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3 Related by al-Bukhari, 2276, 5736 and 5749; Muslim, 2201.

people were either non-Muslim, or they were misers. Needless to say, the effect will be greater if the addressee is more receptive.

As for people's experience, there are countless cases, in all generations. I have personally experienced this, with amazing results regarding both myself and others.<sup>4</sup> This was particularly the case during my stay in Makkah. I used to experience some severe pain at times, almost making me motionless. I may be performing the *ṭawāf* or doing something else. When it happened, I used to recite *al-Fātiḥah* and wipe over the painful area, and the pain would disappear as if it were a small stone being dropped. I tried this several times. I also used to take a glass of Zamzam water, and recite *al-Fātiḥah* several times holding it close to my mouth, then drink it. It gave me greater benefit and strength than any sort of medication. Indeed, the matter is greater than that, but it depends on one's strength of faith and proper certainty. It is to Allah alone that we turn to for help.



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<sup>4</sup> When the first person pronoun is used, it refers to the author of the original book, Imam Ibn al-Qayyim, the author of *Madārij al-Sālikīn*.



## THE MEANING OF THE FIFTH VERSE

*Iyyāka naʿbud wa iyyāka nastaʿīn*

**The** essence of Allah’s creation and command, scriptures, legislation, reward and punishment is summed up in these two short sentences. They combine the essence of man’s servitude and Allah’s oneness: ‘**You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help**’. (1: 5) It is said that Allah revealed one hundred and four scriptures, then incorporated all their meanings in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur’an. He then incorporated the total meanings of these three books in the Qur’an, and incorporated the meanings of the Qur’an in *al-mufaṣṣal* [i.e. Surahs 50-114], and incorporated *al-mufaṣṣal*’s meanings in *al-Fātiḥah*. He also summed up the meanings of *al-Fātiḥah* in this fifth verse composed of two short sentences comprising four words, with one referring to Allah, *iyyāka naʿbud* i.e. ‘You alone do we worship’, and the other, *iyyāka nastaʿīn* i.e. ‘to You alone do we turn for help’ referring to His servants.

Worship combines two essential qualities: total love and total submission. To worship means to submit with humility. If you love someone without submitting to him, you do not worship him, and if you submit to someone feeling no love towards him, you do not worship him. Both qualities must be combined.

Application for help also combines two essential requirements: trust in Allah and reliance on Him. A person may trust someone but does not rely on him, perhaps because he does not need to do so. Or he may not trust someone but needs to rely on him because he has no one else. He will reluctantly rely on him despite his lack of trust. Together, trust and reliance fulfil the concept of *tawakkul*, which is the essence of turning only to Allah for help.

The fact that worship is placed ahead of seeking Allah’s help is a case of putting the end result ahead of the means leading to it. Worship is

the goal of people in this life, as they are created for it, and they need to seek Allah's help in order to do it well. Ibn Taymiyyah said: 'I reflected on which supplication is most useful and concluded that it is a prayer for Allah's help to do what earns His pleasure. I then realized that it is stated in *al-Fātiḥah*: *īyyāka na'bud wa īyyāka nasta'īn*, i.e. 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help'. (1: 5)



# The Best of Worship

**Those** people who pledge to Allah saying, ‘You alone do we worship’, follow four methods in respect of the best type of worship which brings most benefit and should be favoured. In this respect these are of four types:

- Those of the first type consider that the best and most beneficial kind of worship is the hardest and most difficult. They make this preference on the basis that such acts of worship are the least appealing to people. As such, they represent the essence of worship. Moreover, reward is given in proportion to difficulty. Such people always strive against personal desire and preference.
- The second type says that the best and most beneficial kind of worship is dedication, giving little care to worldly comforts and luxuries, paying no attention to them. In fact they dismiss all that pertains to this world and its pleasures and comforts.
- The third type say that the best worship is what brings benefit to others as well as oneself. They consider this to be superior to what benefits only oneself. They say that serving the poor, looking after people and helping them with what they need, giving them whatever help they can including financial assistance, or using their own position, status and influence for other people’s benefit is most useful and they dedicate themselves to this. Their argument is that personal worship benefits oneself alone, while the one who serves others brings benefit to them as well as oneself. The two are thus incomparable. They further cite the hadith in which the Prophet says to ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib: ‘If Allah guides to the truth one person through you, this is better for you than

the best that this world can give'.<sup>5</sup> This is their basis for preferring the kinds of worship that benefit other people.

- The fourth type maintain that the best type of worship is to seek Allah's pleasure at what is most suited and needed at the time of action. This means that:

The best act of worship during a time of jihad against the enemy is taking part in the jihad itself, even if this leads to leaving out one's regular voluntary prayers, such as night worship or voluntary fasting. Indeed, even if it leads to shortening obligatory prayers as in the case of insecurity.

The best worship when one receives a guest is to attend to one's duty towards the guest, giving this preference over regular voluntary worship. The same applies to one's duties towards one's wife and family.

The best worship at a time when a student or an ignorant person requests some education is to attend to their education.

Before the break of dawn, the best type of worship is to offer voluntary prayers, recite the Qur'an, supplication, glorification of Allah and seeking His forgiveness.

At the time when the call to prayer, i.e. *adhān*, is heard, the best worship is to respond to the phrases of the *adhān*.

At the time of the five obligatory prayers, the best worship is to endeavour to offer these prayers in the best of manners, early during each prayer's time range, and to go to a mosque to join the congregational prayer. If the mosque is some distance away, then it is all the better.

When someone is in need of help, the best type of worship is to extend such help, physically, financially or by using one's position

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5 Related by al-Bukhari, 2,942; Muslim, 2,406.

or status, so that they feel they have support. This should take precedence over one's own private worship.

The best type of worship during the time of reciting the Qur'an is to attend to it with full concentration, aiming to understand its meaning, as if the reciter is being personally addressed by Allah. A resolve to implement its commands is more binding than a resolve to fulfil an order received from the ruler of one's country.

On the day of attending at Arafat during hajj, the best worship is remembrance of Allah and glorifying Him, earnest supplication and prayer. These are preferable to fasting on that day, as it weakens the pilgrim physically.

When a Muslim friend or relative is ill or dies, the best type of worship is to visit that sick person and attend the funeral of the deceased. This should be given priority over one's own private worship.

At a time when adversity occurs, including harm caused by other people, the best type of worship is to endure the adversity with patience, and continue to mix with people rather than avoid them. A believer who socializes with people and endures their harm with patience is better than one who does not mix with them and is exposed to no harm. What is best is to join people in good things and stay away from them in what is evil. If one realizes that mixing with people will reduce or prevent the harm they cause him, such socializing is preferable to staying away from them.

At all times and in every situation, the best type of worship is to seek what pleases Allah in that particular time or situation, and to attend to what is one's duty on the present occasion.

These people of the fourth type may be called 'absolute worshippers' while the other three types are 'restricted worshippers'. When any one of the second type neglects or stops the type of worship he has chosen, he feels deficiency within himself as though he has abandoned his worship.

This because he worships Allah in one way. An absolute worshipper does not have a preference for any type of worship, favouring it above others. His objective is to seek Allah's pleasure however he may earn it. He thus moves from one form of worship and submission to another. Whenever a certain type of worship presents itself to him, he pursues it until a different one is offered him. He thus moves on all the time. When you see scholars, you find him with them; when you see people attending to acts of worship, he will be seen among them; when you see those embarked on jihad, he is one of them. Likewise, he is always with those engaged in glorifying Allah and those who give charitable donations. He is not restricted by any consideration. His action is not subject to self desire or preference. He looks for what earns Allah's pleasure best, even though he has to sacrifice his own comfort for it. This is the one who truly fulfils the meaning of '*‘iyyāka na ‘bud wa iyyāka nasta ‘īn’*', i.e. 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help'.

Such a person truly fulfils both parts of the verse. He wears whatever is available to him, and eats whatever he gets. He attends to whatever is needed at any particular time. He sits where he finds room. He is unfettered by any restriction. He remains free, attending to whatever he is called upon to do. He fulfils whatever Allah has commanded without slackness or hesitation. Whoever is right finds him to be a friend and whoever is wrong finds him uncompromising. He is like rain which gives benefit wherever it falls. He is like a date tree, which is evergreen and every part of it, including its thorns, give benefit. He is harsh against those who disobey Allah and feels angry when Allah's prohibitions are violated. Thus, he dedicates himself to Allah's service, and he is on Allah's side. He is in company with Allah, but without other people, and in company with people with no ego. When he is with Allah, he abandons people, and when he is with people, he has no personal care. What a stranger he is among people, but how happy he is with Allah's company: feeling serenity and absolute reassurance.



## THE STAGES A BELIEVER'S HEART

### MOVES INTO THROUGH IYYĀKA NA 'BUD

**I**t should be clear that these stages are not so consecutive as to suggest that a traveller covers one stage of his journey and then moves to the next. Such consecutiveness applies to physical travel; while the heart's movement is totally unrelated to this. For example, the one whose heart is moving along these stages is alert, and his alertness is always present with him. The same applies to insight, will and resolve. Likewise, is the case of repentance which is one of the first stages, but this also belongs to the last stages. It is, indeed, encouraged at every stage. In some cases, a stage covers two aspects or more, while others cover all positions. A person is not deemed to have attained such a stage unless he combines all positions.

Repentance is a stage that covers the two situations of taking account of one's deeds and having fear of the consequences; while the stage of resigned acceptance covers the two situations of perseverance and love. The stage of reliance on Allah covers the cases of assigning one's affairs to Allah, seeking His help and acceptance of whatever happens. Hope is a stage that covers the situations of apprehension and will. None of these stages can be imagined to be achieved without being combined with the situations it covers.

In relation to each position, the travellers are of two types: the righteous and *muqarrabūn*, i.e. the ones brought near to Allah. The righteous are at its lowest end while the ones near to Allah are at its highest point. This applies to all levels of faith. Within each of the two types, people's positions vary and no one knows the number of their different grades except Allah Himself.

A wayfarer along this way may attain the highest positions and

conditions very early on his journey, and this will grant him a flow of love, gratification and reassurance which is not experienced by a traveller who has reached the final stage. The wayfarer reaching the end of the journey may be in much greater need of insight, repentance and taking stock of himself than the one still at the beginning of his journey. There is simply no prescribed order as to how people travel.

Therefore, we need to explain these positions and stages on the lines followed by the early scholars. We need to use general words regarding every stage, explaining its true condition, what is needed to attain it and what prevents its attainment. We should also mention its general and particular conditions. This is the method followed by the leading scholars of olden times. They used detailed and comprehensive statements describing hearts' actions and conditions, without following any particular order and without giving a total number of positions.

Therefore, we will be well advised to mention the stages of servitude to Allah mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, giving them an unbinding, but preferable order, similar to physical travel. In this way, we will be close to treating what is understood in the same way as we treat what is physically observed. Thus, it will be better known, easier to determine and more perfectly believed in.



## THE STAGE OF ALERTNESS

**Before** a person hears the caller, he is deep in a slumber of heedlessness. His heart is fast asleep, even though his eyes are well open. The caller shouts a word of advice, pointing to the way of success. The caller shouts the call prescribed by Allah, the Lord of Grace: *ḥayy ‘ala al-falāh*, i.e. come along to achieve success.

The first step for the one who is deep in slumber is to be alert and well awake. His heart is disturbed by the shock that dispels slumber and brings him to alertness. What a beneficial shock, and how useful and effective. It is very helpful in setting him along the right way. Whoever feels this shock realizes that success is attainable. Without it, he remains lost in heedlessness. Now that he is alert, he takes the first step to start his journey going through the initial stages.

When a person moves out of heedlessness, his heart feels the light spreading around him. He begins to appreciate Allah’s inward and outward blessings. The keener he looks at these, he realizes that they are so numerous that he cannot count them or appreciate their extent. In his mind, he realizes that Allah has favoured him with these blessings. He is given them although he has not earned them, or paid any price in return. He thus realizes that he has fallen short of his duty to express his thanks and gratitude for enjoying such blessings.

Now that he realizes the great bounty he has been given and his failure to show his gratitude, he has the duty to express two important types of servitude: 1) his love of the One who has bestowed these blessings, remembering Him at all times and expressing submission to Him; and 2) blaming himself for failing to be truly grateful. He should look at his earlier failure and realize that it puts him in a perilous position,

should the Giver of those blessings demand what is due to Him. When a person becomes aware of his wrongdoing, he should resolve to make amends with learning and action. He should endeavour to wipe away the effect of his earlier negligence through seeking forgiveness and expressing regret. He should endeavour to purge his faith of the effects of his failings.

In this present life, purging one's faith is done through four things: repentance, seeking Allah's forgiveness, good deeds that wipe away bad ones and adversities befalling a person and atoning for his shortfalls. If these four cleanse and rid him of his burden, he will be one of those who die in a state of purity. The angels gather such souls and give them the happy news that they will be going to Heaven. They will be among those described in the following verses: 'As for those who say: 'Our Lord is Allah', and then steadfastly pursue the right way. For these, the angels will descend, saying: "Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of paradise which you have been promised. We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come. There you shall have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for, as a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, ever-merciful"'. (41: 30-32)

For some people the four purging factors may not suffice to make them absolutely clean. A person's repentance may not be total and sincere. His supplication for forgiveness may not be complete, associated with little regret for earlier sins. He may fail to resolve to steer away from sin. A proper and useful supplication for forgiveness must be associated with these elements. A person may hold a glass of wine, say: 'My Lord, forgive me', and the next moment takes his drink. His action belies his words. Alternatively, his good deeds and adversities are not sufficient to wipe away his earlier sins, either because these were indeed grave sins, or the purging factors are not strong enough, or both.

In this case, a second process of purging the sinner may achieve the desired result. This process takes place during the intervening period

between death and the Day of Judgement. It includes three factors: 1) The funeral prayer offered by believers as they pray for the deceased's forgiveness and plead for him. 2) The torment in the grave and what he is exposed to of pressure and rebuke. 3) Whatever his friends and relatives gift him of good deeds.

Should these three factors be insufficient for a person's relief of his burden of sin, another process of purging occurs on the Day of Judgement, as he stands in front of his Lord. This process has three factors: 1) enduring the hardship of the Day of Judgement; 2) intercession by well wishers; and 3) forgiveness by his Lord.

If these three factors do not totally purge someone, he must endure the Fire. This is a process of mercy for a grave sinner, so that he gets rid of his burden. The Fire is thus a method of purging him of his foul burden. His stay is determined by the amount of his burden and its gravity. When he gets rid of it, he regains his purity. He is then taken out of the Fire and admitted into Heaven.





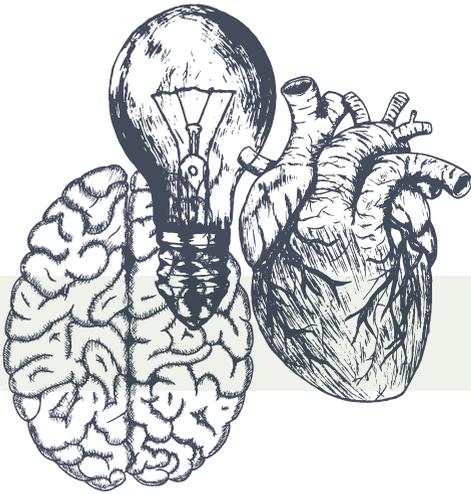
## THE STAGE OF THOUGHT

**When** a person's alertness is complete, it brings him into the stage of thought, which means that his heart is focused on what is required of him, so that he should fulfil it. There are in fact two thoughts: one is concerned with learning and knowledge and the other is concerned with action and will.

The first one, which is concerned with knowledge, is the thought that distinguishes truth from falsehood, and what is confirmed or negated. The other thought is concerned with action. It distinguishes what is beneficial from what is harmful. Another thought is based on this one, which is thinking about the way to achieve what is beneficial and taking it, and the way leading to what is harmful and turning away from it.

These are the only six types of thought which are pursued by wise people.





## THE STAGE OF INSIGHT

**If** a person's thought is right, it gives him insight, which is a source of light in one's heart enabling him to visualize what is promised or warned against, Heaven and Hell, as well as what Allah will give His servants in Heaven and the punishment His enemies will endure in Hell. He will see people as they come out of their graves, humbly responding to the true call, with the angels descending from Heaven to surround them. Allah will place His throne to administer judgement. The earth will shine bright with His light; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; all the prophets and the witnesses will be brought in; the balance will be established; Records are shown; people having complaints are brought face to face with their opponents; each one sticks to his rival. The lake and its cups are visible at a distance, with many people feeling very thirsty, but few are allowed to draw near the lake. A bridge is raised for crossing over, and people are pushed close together on it. Lights are lit so that people can see their way as they cross. Beneath it the Fire is raging. People fall in it in large numbers, while those who cross safely are much fewer. At this stage, it is as if a second eye opens in that person's eye such that he sees all this. Thus, he has a view of the life to come, revealing its marvels and asserting its permanence. He also sees that the life of this world is very short.

The insight, then, is a light Allah switches on in a person's heart, enabling him to see the truth of what His messengers have promised. He sees it all as a full reality and realizes that he will benefit by following what Allah's messengers have advocated and will come to grief if he disobeys them. This is the meaning of what some scholars said whereby insight means the full realization of benefitting or suffering by something. Others said that insight is what dispels confusion either by giving you belief or showing a reality.

There are three grades of insight and their realization means having full insight. These are 1) an insight into Allah's names and attributes; 2) and insight into commands and prohibitions; and 3) an insight into promises and warnings.

The insight into Allah's names and attributes means that one's faith is not affected by any thought that is contrary to how Allah describes Himself or how His Messenger has described Him. Indeed any such thought should be treated in the same way as doubt in Allah's existence: it should be readily dismissed as absolutely false.

The realization of this insight is that one's heart visualizes Allah, Mighty and Exalted, established on His throne; stating His commands and prohibitions; viewing all movements in the universe at all levels high and low, and by all persons and entities. A believer sees Him hearing all their sounds, watching their inner thoughts and secrets, managing all affairs throughout the universe, having all perfect attributes of majesty, free of all defects and faults, unlike anyone and anything. He is as He describes Himself in His Book, and greater than how His creation describe Him: He is alive and never dies, never overtaken by sleep. He knows all: no atom weight of anything in the heavens and earth is beyond His vision. He sees all, including the walk of a black ant, moving over a hard rock during a pitch black night. He hears all sounds, in all languages and all ways of expression. His words are perfected in truth and justice. His attributes cannot be measured against the qualities of His creation. He does not bear the slightest comparability to anyone or anything. His deeds are administered to His creation in justice, wisdom, mercy and grace. To Him belong all creation and all authority. From Him comes all favours and blessings. To Him belong all dominion. All praise and glory belong to Him. He is the First with nothing before him, the Last, the Outer and the Inner with nothing beyond Him. His names are fine as they are all praise and glorification, while His attributes are those of majesty and perfection. His deeds are all wisdom, mercy, benefit and justice. Every single thing of His creation points to Him, directing everyone with insight to Him. He has not created the heavens and the

earth in vain, nor did He abandon man to roam aimlessly. He created all so that they will believe in His oneness and worship Him alone. He bestows His grace in abundance so that people may thank Him and He gives them more of His favours. He makes Himself known to His creation in numerous ways, through all sorts of signs and evidence. He calls on them from all sides so that they will love Him, and He extends the firmest bonds with them, perfecting His grace and stating His irrefutable argument. He showers His perfect favours on them and commits Himself to extend His mercy to them. He includes in His Book that His grace runs ahead of His wrath.

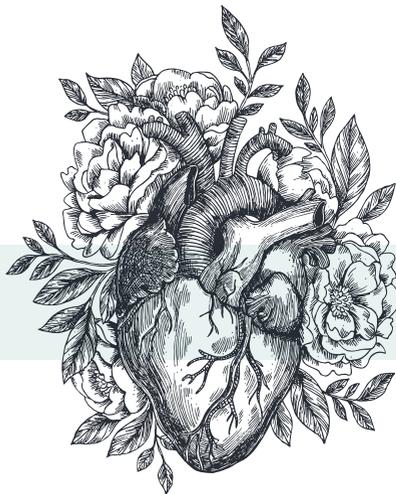
The second grade is an insight into commands and prohibitions. This precludes any attempt to give His command a twisted meaning to suit one's own desire. No doubt should be entertained to detract from the knowledge of Allah's commands and prohibitions, and no desire should be admitted to stop their implementation. Nothing should be allowed to impede making every effort to receive Allah's rulings from His text.

The third grade is an insight into promises and warnings. This means that a believer realizes that Allah stands over every soul with full knowledge of all that it does of good and evil things, in the present life of action and the life to come when recompense is due. This is, in fact, the manifestation of His Godhead, Lordship, justice and wisdom.

When a person makes full use of his insight, he will pursue his objective with a sincere will and firm intention to take the right course. With full knowledge and certainty, he gets ready for his journey, increasing his stock that he stores for the appointed Day of Judgement. He severs all ties that stop him from embarking on his journey. When he has firmly set his mind on starting his journey, his intention becomes a firm resolve, and he starts relying fully on Allah and praying for His help.

Such a resolve is defined as a firm, unshakable intention coupled with action. Hence it is described as the beginning of action towards achieving one's goal. In essence, it means mobilizing all his will to undertake the necessary action. It is of two types. The first is the resolve of one who

intends to start on his way. This is one of the early beginnings. The second is a subsequent resolve made when one has started the journey and covered a part of it. It is more specific than the first one.



## THE STOCKTAKING STAGE

**We** have so far mentioned four stages: alertness, thought, insight and resolve. In relation to the rest of all the stages, these four are like the foundation upon which a building is raised. They are the landmarks along the journey towards Allah. Such a journey cannot be undertaken without covering these four stages. They are akin to the first steps taken on a physical journey. A resident in his hometown cannot physically travel unless he first becomes alert to the need to travel. He then thinks about his journey and what it may involve of risk and may bring of benefit. He then starts looking into preparations for his journey and taking what he will need. When he has done all these, he resolves to start on his way.

A believer who embarks on his journey towards Allah, having made his resolve, moves on to the stage of stocktaking. He looks into what is due to him and what he owes. He takes what belongs to him and fulfils what is due from him, because this is a journey with no return. The evidence indicating this stage is the Qur’anic verse that says: ‘Believers, have fear of Allah. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow’. (59: 18)

One of the essential actions in this stage is to look into what comes from Allah and what one does for oneself. This comparison will show the great difference. One will then know that the only two possibilities is either Allah’s mercy and forgiveness or absolute ruin.

This comparison will show the great difference between Allah, the Lord of all, and man. One will see the human soul and its real characteristics, compared with the greatness of Allah’s Lordship and the fact that absolute perfection belongs to Him alone, and that He is the One who

bestows grace. Every blessing He grants is a favour and every disfavour is an act of justice. Prior to drawing this comparison, a person is totally unaware of his own reality and the Lordship of his Creator. The comparison shows him that his own soul is the source of every flaw and evil and that essentially it ignorantly embarks on wrongdoing. It is only through Allah's blessing and grace that it is purged of evil and gains purity. Without His guidance, man will never be guided, and without His direction, man will not attain any good thing.

Stocktaking relies primarily on self doubt. To think well or highly of oneself precludes proper examination and leads to confusion. In such a situation, a person may see what is negative as positive and consider defects as perfect matters. When a person is well satisfied with his worship and good deeds, this is indicative of thinking highly of himself, and it betrays his ignorance of his duties as a servant of Allah. He does not know what is due to Allah and how He should be addressed.

The sum of all this is that when a person is ignorant of his own self, characteristics, defects and the flaws in his deeds, and ignorant of his Lord and what is due to Him and how He should be treated, this will lead that person to be well satisfied with his worship, thinking that it earns him great reward. This leads to high self-esteem and conceit, as well as other ills that may be worse than major sins such as adultery, drinking alcohol and desertion of the battlefield, etc. Thinking highly of one's worship is indicative of stupidity and weak-mindedness.

People of firm resolve and good insight pray most for forgiveness immediately after doing some good thing, such as a voluntary prayer or fasting. They realize that despite what they do, they remain short of fulfilling their duties. They do not do their worship as fits with Allah's majesty and greatness. Indeed, had it not been ordered, such a person would not have done it, and he would not offer it to his Master.

Allah has ordered the pilgrims who offer the hajj and attend to His worship at the Ka'bah to pray for forgiveness when they have completed their attendance at Arafat, which is the best and most sacred position.

He says: ‘When you surge downward from ‘Arafāt, remember Allah at al-Mash‘ar al-Ḥarām. Remember Him who has given you guidance. Before this you were certainly in error. Surge onward from the place where all other pilgrims surge and pray to Allah to forgive you. He is much-forgiving, ever-merciful’. (2: 198-199) He also says of His devoted servants: ‘They pray for forgiveness at the time of dawn’. (3: 17) Al-Ḥasan says of such people: ‘They continue to pray until the time of dawn, then they sit down and pray for forgiveness’.

Shaykh Abu Yazīd sums up the case well as he says: ‘Whoever is truly cognizant of his own servitude to Allah looks at his own deeds as hypocritical, his conditions as mere claims and his speech as false’.

The greater you think of what is due of you, you will think less of the value you offer to attain it. When you become fully aware of the reality of Lordship and servitude, and the better knowledge you have of Allah and of yourself, you realize that what you have to offer is unworthy of the Supreme Lord. Were you to offer all that mankind and the jinn do, you will still fear the result. Indeed, it is only accepted and rewarded by Allah’s generosity and the favours He bestows on you.

You should know that berating your brother for having committed a sin is a greater sin than what he has committed, and it is a worse type of disobedience of Allah. It betrays an attitude of boasting about one’s own worship, self-praise and a claim of being free of sin. It suggests that you are pleased that it was your brother, not yourself, who perpetrated that sin. Yet your brother may genuinely regret his sinful deed, expressing humility and blaming himself. As such, he is free of false claim, conceit and pride. He stands in front of Allah, bending his head, unable to stare ahead, genuinely sorry. This may be better for him than the good deeds you add to your own credit, feeling proud of them and thinking of them as a favour you do to Allah and His creation. Of these two, the regretful sinner is closer to receiving Allah’s mercy, while the boaster is closer to Allah’s dislike. A sin that causes a person to stand humbly before Allah is better in His sight than an act of worship one considers as a favour

done for Allah. It is better for a person to wake up feeling regret for what he has done than feeling proud of having spent time in night worship. No good action is presented to Allah when it is coupled with pride and conceit. To laugh as one acknowledges one's sin is better than to weep when pressing a favour. Sinners' sighs are better received by Allah than the poems of praise recited by those who are proud. It may be that the sin committed by one person cures him of a fatal characteristic ruining someone else while he is completely unaware.



## THE STAGE OF REPENTANCE

**When** a person has gone through the stocktaking stage, he will look ahead to the repentance stage. His earlier stocktaking has made him well aware of what belongs to him and what he owes. He should now approach the repentance stage eagerly as he needs this for life.

Indeed the repentance stage is first among all stages, found also in the middle and at the end. A person undertaking this journey remains in this stage until death. If he moves to another stage, he takes the repentance stage with him there.

Repentance is needed by a person at the beginning and at the end. It is essential for him at the end, but he also needs it at the beginning. Allah says: ‘**Believers, turn all of you to Allah in repentance, so that you may achieve success**’. (24: 31) This verse occurs in a surah revealed in Madinah, and Allah addresses it to the people of faith, the best of His creation, to turn to Him in repentance. These are the ones who have already accepted the faith, showed determined perseverance, migrated for Allah’s sake and gone through jihad. Allah makes their success dependant on their repentance, with success being the result of repentance, which is its cause. The verse uses the word ‘may’ to offer hope, meaning that if you turn to Allah in repentance, you hope to achieve success, because success can only be hoped for by the repentant; (may Allah include us among them).

Allah also says: ‘**Those who do not repent are indeed wrongdoers**’. (49: 11) People are thus divided into two groups: repentants and wrongdoers. There is no third class. Thus a person who does not turn to Allah in repentance is a wrongdoer. Indeed, he is the worst wrongdoer, as he is ignorant of Allah, what is due to Him, his own faults and wrong deeds. In

an authentic hadith the Prophet encourages repentance, saying: ‘People, turn to Allah in repentance. By Allah, I turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day’.<sup>6</sup>

Repentance means that a person turns back to Allah, deserting the path of those who incur His wrath and those who have gone astray. This does not occur except through Allah’s guidance along the straight path. Such guidance occurs only through Allah’s help and through belief in Allah’s oneness. Thus, we see that the opening surah, *al-Fātiḥah*, comprises it most perfectly. Thus, a person who gives this surah its dues of knowledge, understanding and experience will know that he cannot recite it as a true servant of Allah without sincere repentance. Indeed, proper and complete guidance along the straight path cannot occur alongside ignorance of sins, nor with persistence in committing them. Ignorance of sins is contrary to knowledge of guidance, while persistent sinning is contrary to seeking such guidance. Repentance only occurs when a person is aware of his sin, acknowledges it and seeks to remove its consequences. A person commits a sin only when he discards the garment of Allah’s protection. When such a person realizes that he has discarded it, he feels the risk he is taking and realizes the perilous situation he has put himself into. This is indeed the reality of being left to one’s own devices. A person commits a sin only when Allah withdraws His protection, leaving a person to himself. Had He extended His protection to you, sin would not have come near you.

Those who have true knowledge of Allah are all agreed that letting down means that Allah leaves a person to his own devices, while proper guidance means that Allah does not leave a person without help. When He leaves a person to himself, letting him commit a sin, He does so on the basis of His wisdom.

A believer never enjoys the full pleasure of his sinful action, and he is never fully delighted with it. Indeed, he only commits it with an element

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<sup>6</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 6,307; Muslim, 2,702.

of sadness in his heart, but the force of desire shuts his feeling out to that element of sadness. Therefore, when a sinner's heart is devoid of that sad element and experiences clear pleasure with what he is doing, he should question himself as to whether he is truly a believer. He should weep because his heart seems dead. Had his heart been alive, he would have experienced a feeling of grief at having committed a sin, and his heart would have felt that grief. Since he had no such feeling, it signals that his heart is dead.

The majority of people are not aware of this point. It is a symptom of something very serious indeed, leading to absolute ruin, unless one tries to remedy the situation through three things: the fear to persist with the sin with no real repentance before death; feeling sorry for what one has missed through disobedience of Allah; and a firm resolve to make amends.

True repentance means regret of what one has done in the past, desisting from it at present and resolving not to commit it again in future. All three are combined at the time when repentance is declared. At that point the repentant regrets his sin, stops doing it and resolves not to repeat it. Thus, the sinner reverts to being a servant of Allah, which is the purpose of his creation. Going back to this position is what makes repentance real. Hence these three elements are the conditions of true repentance.

Proper and accepted repentance has clear signs. One such sign is that the repentant becomes a better person than he was before committing his sin. Another sign is that he remains in fear, never certain of safety until he hears the angels who come to gather his soul giving him the good tidings: **'Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of paradise which you have been promised'**. (41: 30) Yet another sign is that he feels his heart torn to pieces in his fear and regret. This is proportionate to whether his sin is minor or major. This is how Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah explains the Qur'anic verse that says: **'The structure which they have built will continue to be a source of disquiet in their**

hearts, until their hearts are torn to pieces'. (9: 110) He said: 'These are torn to pieces through repentance'.

Undoubtedly, a genuine and strong fear of grave punishment leads to the breaking of one's heart. This is the meaning of the heart being 'torn to pieces', and it is the proper manifestation of repentance. A truly repentant sinner feels his heart torn in regret at what he has done and in fear of its consequences. A sinner's heart which is not torn to pieces in regret in this life will be so torn when everything becomes a reality. He will then see the reward granted to Allah's obedient servants and the punishment meted out to the disobedient. Tearing hearts is bound to happen, either in this present life or in the life to come.

Another element of true repentance is a feeling of humility unlike anything else. It is experienced only by a sinner's heart. It is not the result of hunger, training or pure love. It is beyond all this. It is a complete breaking of the heart in front of one's Lord, engulfing a person from all sides and leaving him in total humility before his Lord. He is like a runaway offender slave who has been chased, captured and brought back. He stands in front of his master realizing that he has no escape, and is liable to grave and unavoidable punishment. He is fully aware that his life, happiness and safety can only be secured through pleasing his master, who is fully aware of all his misdeeds. He loves his master and feels a great need for his kindness. He knows his own total weakness and humility, contrasted to his master's power and high status. All this produces a genuine feeling of submission and humility, which is of great benefit to man. It heals its injury and draws him closer to his Lord. Nothing is dearer to his Lord than this feeling of submission and humility on the part of His servant. He likes to see him humbling himself before Him and fully surrendering himself to Him. He can say nothing better than something along the following lines:

My Lord, I appeal to You by Your glory and my humility that You bestow mercy on me. I pray to You by Your might and my weakness, by the fact that You have no need of me while I am in

dire need of You. Here is my sinful forelock in Your hand. Apart from me, Your servants are numerous, but I have no Master other than You. I have no refuge or saviour from You other than Yourself. I humbly appeal to You with fear and hope, like one who bows his head before You, with tears in my eyes and humility in my heart to accept my repentance and bestow mercy on me.

A supplication on these lines is indicative of acceptable repentance. A person who does not experience such feelings should question his repentance and try to amend it. True and acceptable repentance is very hard in reality, although it is easy to claim verbally. A genuine person will always find true and pure repentance very hard.

Most people who steer away from physical major sins and abominations actually commit similar, greater or lesser sins, without ever imagining that these are sins to repent of. They look with contempt at those who commit major sins, stressing their own good deeds, holding these as favours they are doing. In effect, they feel that they deserve to be honoured by other people for their own good deeds. Such a feeling is clear to everyone except themselves. Its result displeases Allah far more than the physical major sins committed by the others. It places them further from Allah than the other sinners. Yet they are unaware of their position. Therefore, if Allah causes any of them to commit some sin, or may be a major sin, to shatter his conceit, teach him a lesson to put him in his place so that he feels his own humility and purge him of his boasting of his good deeds, this is in fact an aspect of Allah's mercy. Likewise, when Allah enables the one who commits major sins to turn to Him in genuine repentance, and with an open heart, He is bestowing His mercy on him. Otherwise, both types of people are in great danger.

## **REFLECTIONS OF A PERSON OF INSIGHT WHEN HE COMMITS A SIN**

When a man of insight commits a sin, he may look at five things. One of these is that he looks at Allah's promises and warnings. This will

give him a feeling of fear that will lead him to repentance. Another is that he looks at what Allah has bidden and forbidden. This makes him acknowledge that he has been at fault and admit his sin. The third is that he looks at the fact that Allah has enabled him to commit it, leaving it up to him to commit it. Had He willed, He would have stopped him from doing it. This will give him new types of knowledge of Allah, His names, attributes, wisdom, grace, forgiveness, forbearance and generosity. Such knowledge will urge him to bring his submission to Allah in line with these attributes which cannot be achieved without what they entail. He will know that Allah's creation and command are entwined with His promises and warnings, as well as with His names and attributes. He will realize that this is the effect Allah's names and attributes have on life and that each one of His names and attributes will definitely produce its effect and results.

Thus, the person with insight will find himself beholding blossoming gardens of knowledge and faith, and secrets of divine will and wisdom that are beyond expression in human language. Some of these is that Allah, limitless He is in His glory, is Mighty and determines what He wills. In His complete sublimity, He has determined His servant's action, turning his heart and will as He wishes. He stands in between His servant and his heart, making him willing and intending whatever Allah, Mighty and Wise, wants him to do. This is an aspect of perfect might, and no one is able to do that other than Allah. The ultimate a human being can do to you is limited to your body. The ability to make you willing and intending what He wills you to do belongs only to Allah Almighty.

When man realizes that Allah's might is limitless, feels it at heart and sees it at work, he should give full attention to that instead of sinking into the humility of disobedience. That is far better and more beneficial for him because he will be with Allah instead of being on his own.

To know His power in what He determines means that man becomes fully aware that he is subject to the divine power. He is in Allah's hand, and he has no protection other than Allah's. He cannot achieve anything

without Allah's help. As such, he is humble, subject to One who is mighty and worthy of all praise. It also means that man realizes that absolute perfection, praise, might and without any need whatsoever are attributes belonging to Allah alone, while man is deficient, deserves criticism, is prone to fault and injustice, and needs others. The greater his realization of his own deficiency, humility, faults and poverty, the more he is aware of Allah's might, perfection, praiseworthiness and self-sufficiency. The opposite is also true: his own sin and humility brings home to him Allah's limitless power.

Similarly, the sinner can realize Allah's beneficence as manifested in the fact that while he committed his sin in secret, Allah was fully aware of him and could have made his deed public, but He kept his secret. This is an aspect of His perfect beneficence. One of Allah's attributes is the Beneficent. Such beneficence is granted to the sinner despite the fact that Allah has absolutely no need of him, while the person himself is always in need of Allah and His favours. Realizing the favour Allah has given him by keeping his secret, a believer becomes more aware of Allah's kindness and grace. He thinks less of the disgrace of his sin and turns to Allah, which is far more important for him than deliberation on the ignominy he feels as a result of his sin. Needless to say, focusing one's thoughts about Allah is the most important objective of every human being.

The sinner can also realize Allah's forbearance as He allows him respite. Had He willed otherwise, He could have punished him instantly. One of His attributes is forbearance, and He does not take His servants to task immediately. When the sinning believer is thus well aware of Allah's forbearance, he bears this attribute in mind in his submission.

So when you express your sorrow for disobeying Allah, Allah is so generous as to accept your excuse, and you, the sinner, recognize Allah's boundless generosity. You should then busy yourself with expressing your gratitude and praising Allah. You will also feel a new aspect of your love for Allah. Your love of the One who thanks and rewards you

for your good deed, and then forgives you your disobedience rather than punishes you for it, is much greater than the love generated by thanking you for only your good deed. This is felt in practical life as one's worship replete with repentance following one's sins is of a different type.

Likewise, man can appreciate Allah's favour of forgiveness. Were Allah to take us to task for our sins, He would do so by His absolute right, and He would do it in all fairness, and yet He will still deserve our praise. However, He forgives us our sins by His grace, not because we deserve it. This again requires us to be more grateful and to love Him more and be delighted by His act and company. We should have better knowledge of His attribute, the Much-Forgiving, and include awareness of its significance in our worship to make it complete and more perfect.

Another favour is that Allah grants His servant more space to show his humility and submission in front of Him, and to express his need of His favours. There is an element of arrogance in man, pushing towards assuming lordship. Should man feel able to express it, he would say what Pharaoh said when he declared to his people, 'I am your supreme Lord'. (79: 24) He was able to say this and he did, while other people lack the ability and keep this tendency within themselves. Nothing gets rid of this tendency better than humble submission to Allah.

For Allah's fine names to have their full effects, there is clear need for their causes. His names, the All-Hearing and All-Seeing, require that there should be something to be heard and seen. Likewise, the Provider requires that there should be someone to provide for, and the Merciful requires that someone is in need of and granted mercy. Similarly, names like the Forgiver, the Most Lenient, Acceptor of repentance, Forbearing require that there should be those who are to be forgiven, shown leniency, their repentance accepted and that they be treated with forbearance. It is not possible to make these names and attributes inactive, because they are fine names and attributes of perfection and majestic power. They refer to acts of wisdom, kindness and generosity. Therefore, their

effects must be visible. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who was the one who knew Allah best, refers to this as he says: ‘By Him who holds my soul in His hand, were you not to sin, Allah would have taken you away and brought into existence others who would commit sins, and appeal for Allah’s forgiveness, and He would forgive them’.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond all this, there is the great secret which cannot be expressed in words or pointed out by signs. It is not declared publicly by the caller to faith. It is rather the secret felt by the hearts of Allah’s most devoted servants. It, thus, increases their knowledge and love of their Lord, as well as their reassurance by being near to Him and yearning to meet Him. They thus remember Him in all situations, acknowledge His kindness, generosity and fine treatment. They are more cognizant of the secret of servitude, and they better feel the reality of Godhead. This is referred to in a highly authentic hadith in which the Prophet says: ‘Allah is more delighted with His servant’s repentance when he turns to Him in repentance than anyone of you who happened to be on his mount in a barren land, and it ran away carrying his food and drink. He then lost hope of finding it. He found a tree and lay down in its shade, having despaired of finding his mount. As he was in this situation, he saw it standing by him. He held its reins, then feeling overjoyed, he said: ‘My Lord, You are my servant and I am Your Lord’. He unwittingly said this out of extreme delight”’.<sup>8</sup>

Such delight is of a nature that man should not ignore. It is only appreciated by one who has special knowledge of Allah, His fine names and superior attributes, and what is due to Him.

Human believers are the best of Allah’s creation, and the type He has chosen. He has created man so that He will perfect the blessings He grants him and will continue to bestow His favours on him. Indeed, He gives him of His bounty what is beyond man’s hope or imagination.

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7 Related by Muslim, 2,749.

8 Related by Muslim, 2,747.

Therefore, man continues to pray to Him to give him, immediately and in the future, open and subtle gifts which can only be given through the love of Allah. Such love of Allah is only achieved through obeying Him, placing Him above all else in one's heart. In return Allah loves him and prepares for him the best that the One who is wealthy, able, generous and loving may prepare for His love, to give it all to him when he comes to Him. He makes a covenant with him, stating His commands and prohibitions and informing him of what brings him closer to Him and better loved by Him, as also what incurs His wrath and renders him unworthy of His love.

The beloved One has an enemy who is the one of His creation He hates most. He has declared his enmity to Allah and tries to persuade His servants to devote their belief, obedience and worship to him, rather than to their true Lord who is the only One who deserves to be worshipped. He appropriated for himself a section of people who support him and devote their allegiance to him, rather than Allah, their true Lord.

If His beloved servant exposes himself to His wrath, committing what He dislikes, deserting Him and befriending and supporting His enemy against Him, closing the way through which He bestows His favours upon him, opening instead the way to His displeasure and punishment, he actually exposes himself to His wrath and to what is contrary to His attributes of kindness, beneficence and generosity. Thus, Allah's wrath and punishment will replace His pleasure and kindness. In other words, man's own deeds invite the opposite of what Allah loves to do and bestow of His preferable attributes of kindness and generosity. However, His loved servant who is favoured with blessings may turn out to be rebellious, denying His favours and siding with His enemies despite being in great need of Him and His help, unable to dispense with it for a moment. While that servant is oblivious of his Master, siding with His enemy and obeying and serving him, he suddenly remembers his Master and what He has bestowed on him of His favours and kindness. He realizes that he cannot do without His help, and that he will eventually return to Him and stand before Him. If he does not willingly go to Him, he is certain to be

brought before Him in the worst of conditions. He therefore pulls himself forcibly from allegiance to Allah's enemy and determinedly returns to Him. When he reaches His gate, he places his face at its threshold and drops down in full humility, weeping and praying sorrowfully that his Master will not deny him His grace. He appeals to Him passionately to accept his repentance. He submits himself to His will and surrenders to His decision. His Master knows that his regret is genuine and His wrath is replaced by His pleasure, and His hardness is overtaken by His mercy. Instead of His blame, deprivation and punishment, He grants him pardon, forbearance and generous gifts. Thus, the repentant servant recalls Allah's preferred and superior attributes. He is delighted with His servant voluntarily and willingly returning to Him, as it reopens the way to His kindness and benevolence.

This is the gist of a well-known incident that happened to one of Allah's devoted servants who was well aware of his Lord. Yet he experienced a period when he was turning away from Him. One day, as he was walking along a street, he saw a door being opened. A young boy came out weeping and appealing, but his mother was behind him, turning him out. When the boy was outside, she closed the door and went in. The boy moved a little distance and stopped to think. He realized that he had nowhere to go other than the home from which he had been expelled. No one would take him other than his mother. He felt very sad but took his way back to his home with a broken heart. He found the door locked. He lay at the door and slept. His mother later opened the door as she needed to go out, and she saw him asleep beside the door. Instinctively, she held her son, hugged and kissed him, with tears in her eyes. She said: 'Son, where will you go away from me? What home do you have other than my home? Have I not told you many times that you must not disobey me. Have I not told you not to force me to withhold my kindness and compassion? Do you not know that I only want what is good for you?' She took him in.

Reflect on the mother's words as she says to her son that through his disobedience, he forces her to withhold her natural kindness and

compassion from him. Reflect also on the Prophet's hadith that says: 'Allah is more compassionate to His servants than a mother to her child'.<sup>9</sup> How can Allah's compassion be compared to that of a mother? When His servant incurs His wrath through his disobedience, he causes Allah's compassion to be withheld. When he repents, he recalls what is more likely from Him.

This is a short explanation of why Allah is delighted with His servant's repentance more than a person who finds his mount and provisions after he has despaired of finding them in a vast barren desert. Beyond this, there is much that can hardly be expressed in words or understood by man. Thus it is when we look at Allah's delight as related to His compassion and benevolence. If we consider it as related to His Godhead and the fact that He is the only One to be worshipped, then we are looking at a much greater and splendid scene which is only witnessed by the privileged few of lovers.

Allah has created people so that they worship Him in a way that combines love, submission and obedience of Him. This is the truth with which the heavens and earth have been created, and the ultimate objective of Allah's creation and command. Its denial is falsehood, which makes creation an idle play which is far from Allah. It becomes aimless, and Allah does not leave man in such a condition. Indeed, Allah loves to be worshipped and obeyed. He would not care for people unless they love and obey Him.

Think of someone you greatly love, yet is taken captive by your enemy who stops all contacts between you and your love. Yet you know that your enemy will inflict all sorts of suffering on your loved one, exposing him to fatal situations. You have more claim to him as you have brought him up, while your enemy has nothing but enmity towards him. Your loved one is then able to escape and unexpectedly arrives at your door, expressing his love and seeking your pleasure. Imagine that he kisses

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<sup>9</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 5,999; Muslim, 2,754.

the earth where you step. How much delight will you be in having him back, drawing him close to you?

Imagine this and consider that you have not created your loved one, nor did you bestow favours on him. By contrast, it is Allah who brings His servant into existence, creating him and bestowing His favours on him. He loves to add to and perfect His favours and blessings, so that the individual will show such favours, accept them with thanks and love for the One who has given them. He obeys and worships Him, stands in opposition to and hates His enemy. Allah loves that man disobeys His enemy in the same way as He loves man to submit to, obey and worship Him. Thus the two types of love are combined: the one of obedience and worship and the one of being hostile and disobedient towards His enemy. Therefore, Allah's love is increased, and this is the essence of His delight with His servant.

We have been looking at the reflections of a person of insight after having committed a sin. We mentioned that he looks at five things, and we stated the first two in brief, but discussed the third in detail. The fourth is that he looks at the source of his offence, which is the human soul as it incites towards evil. Looking at this carefully gives him several points for deliberation. The first is that man's soul is ignorant and wrongdoing. From these two qualities emanates every evil speech and action. A person who combines these two qualities of ignorance and wrongdoing is highly unlikely to mend his ways and follow the right course. Therefore, he must exert serious effort to gain beneficial knowledge in order to shed away his ignorance, and to do good deeds to stop wrongdoing. Nevertheless, what man does not know is greater than what he knows, and his injustice is greater than his fairness.

When a person realizes that he has such a soul he should appeal to his Creator to protect him against the evil of his soul, and to inspire it with the knowledge of righteousness, and to keep it pure. He is the best to keep it pure, as He is its Creator and guardian. Man should further pray to Allah not to abandon him to the devices of his soul,

even for a twinkling of an eye, because this is sufficient to send him to ruin. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught Ḥuṣayn ibn ‘Ubayd this supplication: ‘My Lord, inspire me with guidance and protect me against the evil of my soul’.<sup>10</sup> When a person knows the truth of the nature of his soul, he realizes that it is the source of every evil, and that whatever goodness it has is a favour Allah has granted him. Allah says: ‘Were it not for Allah’s favour upon you and His grace, none of you would have ever been pure’. (24: 21)

Another point is that a person who honestly looks at his soul and has an insight about himself and what is due to Allah by right will realize that his bad deeds leave him with no good ones at all. He will thus meet Allah completely bankrupt, because when he looks into his own faults and the negative aspects of his deeds, he realizes that they are not good enough to present to Allah. In other words, his commodity is unworthy to purchase safety from Allah’s punishment, let alone gain His rich reward. If any of his deeds or situations is pure and if any point of his time is faultless, he realizes that it is all granted by Allah and a favour He has bestowed on him. It did not come from him and he is not fit to start such a pure deed. He is thus always realizing Allah’s favours and his own faults. This is one of the best and most beneficial types of knowledge a person gains. Hence, the most important supplication for forgiveness is the one taught by Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him): ‘Oh Allah, You are my Lord. There is no deity except You. You have created me and I am Your servant. I honour my covenant with You and my promise to You as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from the evil of what I have committed. I acknowledge Your Grace and I confess to my sinful actions, so forgive me. Only You forgive sinful actions’.<sup>11</sup>

This supplication for forgiveness acknowledges Allah’s Lordship, Godhead and Oneness. It also includes a person’s declaration that Allah is his Creator who knows him fully, as he gave him an existence that

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<sup>10</sup> Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,483.

<sup>11</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 6,306.

will not fulfil what is due to Allah. Hence, the supplicant admits his deficiency and that he is Allah's servant who is under His control. He cannot escape Him and has none to protect him other than Allah. He further acknowledges his commitment to his covenant with Allah, which includes His biddings and prohibitions as stated by His Messenger. This commitment is acknowledged as man is able to fulfil it, not as is due to Allah, because no human being can fulfil what is due to Him. It is merely the best that a weak human being can do. He further says that he believes in Allah's promise of reward to be given to His obedient servants and punishment to those who disobey Him. Therefore, the supplicant commits himself to honour his covenant and believes in Allah's promise. The supplication also includes seeking Allah's refuge from the effect of his failings in the fulfilment of Allah's orders and prohibitions. Unless He protects him from that evil, man is ruined. The supplicant further acknowledges the grace Allah has granted him and his own sinful actions, appealing to Allah to wipe away his sins and forgive him as He is the only One to forgive sins.

This supplication is described as the most important, the master form of seeking Allah's forgiveness, as it places man in the position of total servitude to Allah. When a man sees his own failings and the deficiency of his actions compared with Allah's favours, what can remain for him of his good deeds?

The fifth and last thing a man of insight looks at is the one who urges him to disobey Allah and paints such disobedience in attractive hues. This is the devil assigned to him. Looking at this devil is useful to man if he considers him his enemy and takes care against his evil. He will be alert to what his enemy tries of tricks of which man may be unaware. In fact his enemy will try hard to overcome him at seven different levels, some harder than others. He will not go down to a lower level until he despairs of entrapping him in the higher and harder one.

The first level is that of disbelief in Allah, religion and the eventual meeting with Allah, and disbelief in Allah's attributes and what Allah's

messengers have taught about Him. If Satan entraps man at this level, he is so happy and becomes less hostile to that person. If man manages to save himself through his insight and Allah's guidance, he continues to have the light of faith.

However, Satan will try again at the second level, which is the level of deviation from the truth. This means having a belief that is at variance with the truth stated in Allah's Book, which He revealed to His Messenger. Alternatively, he persuades him to worship in deviant ways and forms which are totally unacceptable to Allah.

The third level is that of major sins. Satan will try hard to paint these as attractive and persuade man to commit them. He will tell him that he can repent and seek forgiveness later. If a sinner remains safe by Allah's help or by a clear and final repentance, Satan will continue his attempts to entrap him.

The fourth level is that of minor sins, presenting him with many of these. Satan will then say to man: what harm do you fear since you have stayed clear of major sins? Do you not know that minor sins are wiped away by avoiding major sins and doing good deeds? Satan will continue to show man such minor sins as insignificant until he becomes persistent in doing them. In this case, the one who commits a major sin and regrets it fearing its consequences will be better off than such a persistent doer of minor sins. Such persistence is worse than the sin itself. Scholars say that no major sin remains major if it is followed by repentance and seeking forgiveness, and no minor one remains minor if one persists with it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'Beware against trifling sins'. He then gave the following example, referring to a group of people who 'stopped at some desert place. They needed wood to light a fire, but it was scarce. Everyone managed to bring a stick until they had plenty. They lit the fire and baked their bread. This is a similar case to trifling sins when they flock against someone, and he is careless of them. Eventually, they spell his ruin'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Related by Ahmad, 3,818.

The fifth level is that of permissible things which are blameless. However, Satan tries to get man to attend to these so that he has no time to add to his good deeds and store them with Allah to improve his situation in the life to come. Satan will try to get such a person to move from being preoccupied with permissible things to abandoning voluntary and recommended good deeds. The next step is to move from this one to neglect some duties. The least that Satan gains at this level is to make a person miss out on good profit and fine reward that guarantees him a high position in the life to come. Had he known the price he is paying, he would not miss out any good deed. What saves a person from the traps of this level is clear insight and fine light. Through this he will appreciate the value of good deeds and try to do more of these. He will also realize that he is like a trader selling good articles and the Buyer is Allah who is most generous and pays handsomely for what is offered. This realization will make man keen to use all his time in what gives him profit and increases his reward from Allah.

The sixth level is that of lesser voluntary types of worship. Satan tries to persuade a person to concentrate on these, showing them as an easy way to earn rich reward, so that he does not attend to other types which are more valuable and earn greater reward. Satan resorts to this tactic only when he despairs of getting a person away from doing good deeds. He now wants him to earn as little reward as possible. Hence, he tempts him to focus on lesser good deeds. He will, thus, be preoccupied with things that are loved by Allah, instead of doing what Allah loves far better and for which He rewards much more richly.

What sort of people stand at this level of Satan's scheming? They are only a scattered minority. As for the majority of people, Satan wins them at the other levels.

People's actions and speech vary in quality and rank. We have already mentioned the hadith in which the Prophet says: 'The master supplication for forgiveness is that Allah's servant says: Oh Allah, You are my Lord. There is no deity except You. You have created

me and I am Your servant. I honour my covenant with You and my promise to You as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from the evil of what I have committed. I acknowledge Your Grace and I confess to my sinful actions, so forgive me. Only You forgive sinful actions'.<sup>13</sup> In another hadith the Prophet says: 'Jihad is the topmost point of this matter [of Islam]'.<sup>14</sup> Only the people of insight and sincerity who are endowed with knowledge are able to pass the test at this level. They are the ones whose journies are successful, as they attach the right value to each action and speech, and give people whatever is rightly due to them.

If a person gets through this level safely, there will remain only one more level his enemy, Satan, can try. Were anyone to be spared this difficulty, the prophets and Allah's messengers would have been spared it, as they were the most honoured of Allah's servants.

The seventh and last level is the one at which Satan sends his servants against the believer to inflict on him all sorts of harm, physical, verbal and spiritual. This sort of war is conducted according to the believer's rank of goodness. The higher his rank the severer is the harm and the more of Satan's army are mobilized against him. The believer has no way of escaping this level. The more he is diligent in following the right path and advocating Allah's message, his enemy mobilizes more of his forces against him and tries to inflict more harm on him. Allah's servant is actually in a battlefield at this level. He is engaged in a war against his enemy for Allah's sake and with Allah's help. As such, his servitude to Allah is that of the elite of believers. It is called 'contention servitude', and it is only identified by people with perfect insight. Allah does not love anything better than His servant's contention against His enemy and his foiling of his schemes.

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13 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,306.

14 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,616; Ibn Mājah, 3,973.

## RULINGS CONCERNING REPENTANCE

We will briefly mention some rulings concerning repentance which are widely needed. It is not proper for a believer to be unaware of these.

Turning promptly to Allah in repentance of having committed a sin is obligatory. It is not permissible to delay such repentance, otherwise, the person concerned commits another act of disobedience by delaying his repentance. When a person repents of a sin after having delayed his repentance, he needs further repentance which is hardly ever remembered by people. This is to repent having delayed his initial due repentance. Most people think that once they have repented the committed sin, they have done all that is required of them. Yet a sinner needs to repent having delayed his repentance. Nothing redeems this neglected requirement except a general repentance of all sins, including those of which the person is unaware. Normally, the sins a person is unaware of are more than those he knows to have committed. He is accountable for these if he knows them, and his negligence of both knowledge and action is an act of disobedience, making his sin graver.

Another ruling concerns the status of the repentant. When a sinner has repented his sin, is he back at the same grade he was at before committing the sin or not? Scholars hold different views on this point.

I listened to Ibn Taymiyyah speaking about this difference of views. He said:

The correct view is that some repentants do not go back to the grade which they had before they were demoted by their sins. Others go back to the same grade, while others still go to a higher grade, attaining a better status than they had before their sins. This was the case of Prophet David. He attained a higher grade after his sin.

This depends on the situation of the repentant after he has declared his repentance and his resolve to always be in obedience, his care to remain free of sin and his diligence in doing what is right. If he

rises to a higher level in these than he was before he committed his sin, he attains a higher grade than he had before his sin and he becomes a better person. If he returns to the same level at which he was earlier, he regains his former status. If he slackens, he will be at a lower grade than before he committed his sin.

An example illustrating these cases cites a person who intends to go to the mosque to join the congregational prayer in the first row. He is heading there paying attention to nothing on his way, but a man pulls him from behind, stopping him. The man wanted to delay or prevent him from joining the prayer. He has two alternatives: he either speaks to this man and gets involved with him until he misses out on the prayer, or he frees himself from this man and proceeds so as not to miss the prayer. The first scenario is akin to the one who does not repent his sin. In the second scenario, the man has three possibilities: 1) He moves on at speed in order to make up for the delay. He may regain it all or may even do better. 2) He moves on at the same speed as before. 3) He feels somewhat complacent as a result of the enforced stop. He thus misses out on being in the first row, or misses the congregational prayer and praying in the early part of the time range of that prayer. Thus is the case of the repentant sinner.

This is further clarified by an important question: Who is better: one who is obedient and has not committed a sin or someone who has genuinely repented of a sin he has committed? Scholars hold different views. Some of them consider that the one who has not committed a sin is better than the one pledging sincere and genuine repentance. They pose several arguments including:

- While the sinner is engaged in his sin, the other moves several steps ahead, thus attaining a higher grade. When the sinner repents, he aims to move on to catch up with his friend who has not committed a sin, while the latter is moving forward. How can the sinner catch up with him?
- The one who has not committed a sin is like a person in an orchard

around which he has erected a firm fence through which the enemy cannot penetrate. The fruits, flowers, greenery and scenery in the orchard continue to grow and blossom. The sinner is one who has made a hole in his fence, enabling thieves and enemies to get through. They played havoc there, breaking branches, damaging its fences, picking its fruits, lit a fire there and spoilt its water source. How long will it take to put it back to its original condition?

Other scholars say that the repentant sinner gains a better situation than the one who did not commit a sin, although the latter may have more good deeds to his credit. They pose the following arguments in support:

- Repentance itself is an act of worship Allah loves much. In the Qur'an, He says: '**Allah loves those who turn to Him in repentance**'. (2: 222) Had repentance not been one of the things Allah loves most, He would not have tested the best of His servants with sin.
- Repentance is an act of worship that involves standing humbly before Allah, with full submission and worry, as well as admission of fault and appeal to Allah for forgiveness. This is more pleasing to Allah than many clear acts of obedience, even though the latter may be greater and more plentiful than repentance. Humility before Allah and heartfelt appeal to Him are the essence of worship.
- The humility of one who repents having committed a sin is more genuine than other people. They all express the humility of being Allah's loving servants and their great need of His favours and their genuine love of Allah, but the sinner has the advantage of feeling his heart to be broken by his sin. An old Israelite statement mentions that someone asks: 'My Lord, where do I find you?' Allah answers: 'With those whose hearts are broken for My sake'. Hence, a worshipper is nearest to his Lord during his prostration in prayer, because this is a position of humility before his Lord.

In a sacred hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) quotes Allah, Blessed and Exalted: 'On the Day of Resurrection, Allah, Mighty and Exalted, will say: "Son of Adam, I fell ill and you did not visit Me". He will say: "My Lord, how should I visit You when You are the Lord

of all the worlds?” He will say: “Did you not know that My servant, so-and-so, fell ill and you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him you would have found Me with him? Son of Adam, I asked you for food and you did not feed Me”. He will say: “My Lord, how could I feed You when You are the Lord of all the worlds?” Allah will say: “Did you not know that My servant, so-and-so, asked you for food and you gave him none? Did you not know that had you fed him you would certainly have found that with Me? Son of Adam, I asked you to give Me something to drink and you gave me none”. He will say: “My Lord, how can I give You something to drink when You are the Lord of all the worlds?” Allah will say: “My servant, so-and-so, asked you to give him something to drink but you gave him none. Had you given him something to drink you would have surely found that with Me”<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that in the case of visiting a sick person, Allah says: ‘Had you visited him you would have found Me with him’, while in the cases of feeding the hungry and giving a drink to one who is thirsty, He says: ‘you would have surely found that with Me’. There is a subtle difference here. When a person is ill, he feels broken hearted because of his illness. If he is a good believer, with a broken heart, Allah is with him.

This makes clear that Allah’s grace and generosity are extended when a person stands in humility before his Lord. A repentant sinner shows this to be genuine. This is clarified by the following argument:

- A sin may be more useful to a person than many acts of worship, if the sin is followed by genuine repentance. This is the meaning of what an early scholar said: ‘A person may commit a sin and it causes his admission into Heaven, or he may do some voluntary act of worship and it leads him to Hell’. He was asked how could this be? He said: ‘The sin he has committed remains in front of him whenever he stands up, sits down or walks. Every time he remembers it, he regrets having done it, declares his repentance and prays for Allah’s forgiveness.

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<sup>15</sup> Related by Muslim, 2,569.

This will ensure his safety. On the other hand, the one who does a voluntary act of worship keeps his act in front of him, remembering it whenever he stands up, sits down or walks, and admires himself for having done it. It becomes a source of conceit, and as such it spells his ruin. Thus the sin a person commits may lead to good deeds and feelings, such as fear of Allah, being ashamed of what he has done, standing humbly before Allah, with tears in his eyes'. Every type of these is better for Allah's servant than a voluntary act of worship that makes him arrogant, contemptuous of people. Undoubtedly, the repentant sinner is better in Allah's sight and closer to safety than the one who admires his own good deed, feeling proud of it and pressing it as a favour. Even if he verbally says the reverse of such feelings, Allah knows what he actually feels. Such a person may dislike other people if they do not honour him for his deed. Were he to closely examine his feelings, he would find that all this applies to him.

If Allah wants this person to be saved, He lets him commit a sin which breaks him, so that he comes to know his status. He thus spares His servants the harm this person may cause them. He makes him bend his head down so that he is purged of conceit and pride, and of holding his good deed as a favour he does to Allah and His servants. Thus, the sin he commits and the bringing about of this result is better for him than many voluntary good deeds. It is like a bitter medicine a sick person takes to cure his illness. It is like a statement that Allah might have said to Adam when he disobeyed and caused his expulsion from Heaven: 'Adam, I let you commit your sin because I like to show my grace and benevolence to those who disobey me'. This is what the Prophet refers to as he says: 'By Him who holds my soul in His hand, were you not to sin, Allah would have taken you away and brought into existence others who would commit sins, and appeal for Allah's forgiveness, and He would forgive them'.<sup>16</sup>

Adam, were I to make you and your offspring sinless, to whom would I extend My forbearance, pardon and forgiveness? What repentance

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16 Related by Muslim, 2,749.

would I accept? Adam, do not panic because I commanded you to leave Heaven. I have created you to dwell in it, but I want you to go down to a life of striving, where you may sow the seeds of righteousness, and irrigate them with your tears. When the seeds bring out their shoots, and these become firm and strong, you may reap the fruits. Adam, a sin that makes you stand humbly before Me is preferable to Me than an act of worship you hold out to Me. Adam, the sighs of sinners are more appealing to Us than glorifications by those who are arrogant.

‘Son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. Son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds in the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. Son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as the earth’.<sup>17</sup>

## THE MEANING OF SINCERE REPENTANCE

Allah says: ‘Believers! Turn to Allah in sincere repentance. It may well be that your Lord will efface your bad deeds and admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, on a day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet or those who believed with him’. (66: 8) Thus, to ensure safety from the evil of sinful action, i.e. wiping them away and the removal of what man dislikes, and also admittance into Heaven, which is what man loves, is dependent on a repentance described in Arabic as *naṣūḥ*, i.e. sincere. Early scholars describe it in different ways, but they all stress the same meaning. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Ubay ibn Ka‘b said: ‘Sincere repentance means that a person repents having committed a sin and refrains from going back to it, in the same way as milk cannot be put back in the udder’. Muhammad ibn Ka‘b said: ‘It has four components:

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<sup>17</sup> Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,540.

a verbal supplication for forgiveness, physical refrain from committing sin, a resolve not to repeat it, and deserting bad company’.

In my view, sincerity in repentance includes three things: 1) It should cover all sinful actions without exception. 2) A firm resolve to honour it, so that a person is fully committed to it, without hesitation, tardiness or waiting for anything. 3) It should be free of any element that may detract from its being genuine. It should be undertaken merely for fearing Allah and His punishment and hoping for His reward. It must not be for any worldly outcome such as maintaining one’s honourable position or social status, or protecting oneself or one’s power or wealth, or inviting people’s praise or avoiding their criticism, or sparing oneself people’s harm, or for having had all one has desired through his sin, or for being unable to continue with his sin, or for any other reason that detracts from its being undertaken for Allah’s sake only.

Sinners have three major rivers in which they may bathe to purge themselves from sin in this present life. If bathing in these rivers does not completely purge them, they will be purged on the Day of Judgement in the river of Hell. These three are the river of sincere repentance, the river of plentiful good deeds that totally remove the burden of sin, and the river of great adversities that are patiently endured. When Allah wishes well for a servant of his, He will let him dip into one of these three rivers. He will then be in a good condition on the Day of Judgement, well purged of sin. He will not need to be dipped into the fourth river.

A person’s repentance is winged by two turnings by Allah towards him in mercy, one before that person’s repentance and one after it. The first turn by Allah in mercy is one of permission and inspiration to encourage the sinner to repent. As he does so, Allah turns to him again in mercy with acceptance of his repentance and reward for it. Allah says: ‘Allah has assuredly turned in His mercy to the Prophet, the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār, who followed him in the hour of hardship, when the hearts of a group of them had almost faltered. Then again He turned to them in mercy; for He is compassionate towards them, ever-merciful’. (9: 117)

Thus, there are turns by man and Allah. Man turns to Allah in repentance, going back to Him after he has moved away, and Allah turns in two ways: one is a turn of permission and guidance, and the other is one of acceptance.

Repentance has a beginning and an end. Its beginning is man's return to Allah's straight path which He has set up for His servants and ordered them to travel along, because it ensures that they earn His pleasure. He says: 'Know that this is the way leading to Me, a straight path. Follow it, then, and do not follow other ways, for they cause you to deviate from His way'. (6: 153) Its end is going back to Him on the Day of Judgement and walking along His path that leads to Heaven. Whoever returns to Allah through repentance in this present life will return to Him in the life to come to get His reward.

## MAJOR AND MINOR SINS

Sins are divided into two types: minor and major, according to the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the unanimity of scholars. Allah says: 'If you avoid the most serious of what you are forbidden, We will erase your bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory'. (4: 31)

A *qudsī*, or sacred hadith quotes Allah as saying: 'Son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as the earth'.<sup>18</sup> This must not be understood as meaning that all sins are minor except associating partners with Allah. What it means is that all sins, however great, may be forgiven except the association of partners with Allah. However, it must be realized that mental, or heart actions are closely associated with physical actions. Without such realization, what the Prophet meant will not be understood, but will remain subject to confusion.

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18 Related by Muslim in similar wording, 2,687.

It is important to know that total negation of *shirk*, i.e. the association of partners with Allah, is never the case of one who persists in committing sin. It is not possible for one who frequently commits a major sin or persists in the commitment of a minor sin to believe, totally and completely, in Allah's oneness, so as to be totally and completely free of associating partners with Allah. No attention should be given to the argument of a pedantic whose heart is harder than stone when he says: What precludes this? Why is it impossible?

Be aware that persistence in sin leads a person to fear others than Allah, and to love, place his hopes in, stand humbly before and rely on others than Allah. All this may place him deep into *shirk*, or the association of partners with Allah. This is determined by what a person knows of himself, if he has a thinking mind. The disgrace of sin will be felt at heart, leading the sinner to fear others than Allah, and this is *shirk*. He will love others than Allah and seek their help in getting what he wants to have. Thus, his action will not be for Allah or with Allah's help, and this is the meaning of *shirk*.

This leads to the fact that a person who does not associate any partners with Allah is a full believer in Allah's absolute oneness which is manifested by complete love and submission to Allah, fearing Him and placing one's hopes in Him. It is impossible that such a person meets Allah persisting in sins nearly as great as the earth, and without genuine repentance.

It should be noted that the commitment of a major sin may be coupled with a good measure of humility, fear of Allah, and feeling that it is very serious, so as to lower it into becoming minor. By contrast, the commitment of a minor sin may be coupled with impudence, carelessness, complacency and absence of fear of Allah so as to raise it to the level of major sins, and indeed to the gravest of these. This is something that refers to the heart and feeling, which is added to the sinful action itself. Man knows this of himself and of others.

Finally, it should be remembered that the one who truly loves Allah

and does genuine good deeds is kindly treated: he is granted more forbearance and greater forgiveness.

## **'NO DEITY OTHER THAN ALLAH': ITS IMPORTANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT**

The phrase, 'there is no deity other than Allah' is a great statement, and it is much needed by everyone. It radiates light which dispels the clouds caused by sin. However, the strength of its light and how much of the clouds it dispels varies widely, according to the extent of light people receive in their hearts. Some people find the light of this statement shining in their hearts like the sun. For some, it is like a radiant star; for others, like a flaring torch. Some others have it like a light bulb and others like a faint lantern. On the Day of Judgement, the believers will have their light in proportion to how this statement influences them in this life in their knowledge, action and general conduct and situation. Allah says: **'On the Day when you see all believers, men and women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right'**. (57: 12)

The greater and stronger the light of this statement, the more it burns out of doubts and desires. It may attain a strength that burns every single doubt and desire. This is the case of a true believer, who knows the meaning of Allah's oneness and who does not associate any partner with Him. Whatever sin, doubt or desire comes near this light will be burnt out. Thus, the horizon of such a believer is well-guarded. A thief who tries to steal some of his good deeds can only snatch something when a believer is heedless, which is a condition that inevitably occurs to humans. When the believer is back in full alertness, he realizes what was taken away. He either gets it back or receives what is better and more through his diligence and fresh good deeds. This is his constant attitude towards thieves, whether human or jinn. He is totally unlike the one who leaves his cupboard unlocked and goes away.

Belief in Allah's oneness is not the mere acknowledgement that Allah

is the only Creator and the Lord of all the worlds. The worshippers of idols in Arabia used to acknowledge this, but at the same time they associated partners with Him. Belief in Allah's oneness includes love of Allah, submission to Him, total obedience, sincere worship and seeking His pleasure in everything one says, does, gives, withholds, loves and dislikes, in a way that places a barrier between a person and the causes that tempt him to disobey Allah and commit a sin. Whoever knows this realizes the meaning of the Prophet's hadiths: 'Allah has forbidden the Fire to burn anyone who says: There is no deity other than Allah, seeking Allah's pleasure'.<sup>19</sup> 'No one who testifies that there is no deity other than Allah and that I am Allah's Messenger will enter the Fire or be touched by it.'<sup>20</sup>

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has not made this result dependent on the mere pronouncement of this statement. This is contrary to what is essentially known of the Islamic faith. Hypocrites say it with their tongues, but they remain in the lowest depth of the Fire, well below those who deny it outright. This is confirmed in the Qur'an. What is needed is that a person should say it by heart and tongue. Saying it by heart includes knowledge of this fact and believing in it. This means that the one who says it should know what it negates and what it confirms. He should also know the essential meaning of the Godhead that belongs to none other than Allah, and cannot apply to anyone else. When all this is well settled in one's heart and mind, so that it becomes for that person an undoubted certainty, then entry into the Fire is forbidden, and the Fire is forbidden to burn that person. When the Prophet states that a particular speech will earn a specific amount of reward, he actually refers to a full and complete speech, as we have explained. For example, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever says: "Limitless is Allah in His glory and to Him all praise is due" one hundred times in a day, all his sins are wiped away, even though they may be like the foam

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19 Related by al-Bukhari, 425; Muslim, 33.

20 Related by al-Bukhari, 128; Muslim, 32.

on the sea's surface'.<sup>21</sup> Needless to say, this reward is not granted for the mere verbal utterance of these phrases.

However, the one who says it verbally, oblivious of its meaning and message, giving it little reflection, but hoping for its reward without realizing its essential meaning and its true weight, will be forgiven a measure of his sins equal to what is in his heart of its significance. Actions are not rewarded on the basis of form and number, but on what is ingrained in one's heart and mind of their essence. Two people may do exactly the same thing, or one person may do something on two different occasions, but the reward for the two actions is as widely different as the distance between heaven and earth. Two people may stand next to each other in prayer, but their prayers are widely different.

Consider the following hadith: 'On the Day of Judgement, Allah will select a man from my community and place him before all creation. He will spread before him ninety-nine records [of sinful actions], each of which is as long as the eyes can see. He will then ask him: "Do you deny any of these? Have my recording angels been unfair to you?" He will say: "No, my Lord". Allah will ask him: "Do you have any excuse?" He will say: "No, my Lord". Allah will say: "This is untrue. You have a good deed kept with us. You shall suffer no injustice today". A card will then be produced in which is written: "I bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah; and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's servant and Messenger". Allah will say to the man: "Attend the process of weighing". He will say: "My Lord, what will this card weigh against all these records?" Allah will say: "You shall suffer no injustice". The card will be placed on one scale and the records on the other. The records will be of very little weight while the card will be heavy. Nothing will be heavier in weight against Allah's name'.<sup>22</sup>

The hadith clearly states that one card outweighed ninety-nine records

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21 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,405; Muslim, 2,691.

22 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,639; Ibn Mājah, 4,300.

of sins and the perpetrator is not punished because of the card. It is well-known that every believer in Allah's oneness has a similar card. Yet many of them will enter Hell because of their sins. However, the secret element that gives that man's card its preponderant weight does not apply to others who have similar cards. His card was weighty, while theirs are not.

For a clearer understanding, consider a person whom you know loves you dearly and one who is oblivious of you, paying attention to someone else whom he loves more. Do you remember both or think of them both equally? Let these be your own two sons and their attitudes towards you so different. Do they have the same position in your heart?

A well-known hadith speaks of a person who killed a hundred people, and then repented. When faith took hold in his heart, nothing stopped him from heading towards the village of good people. Death overtook him on the way, but as he was in the throes of death, he was so eager to reach that village. His was genuine faith. Hence, he was, by Allah's order, attached to that village and became one of its people.

A similar case is that mentioned in another hadith which speaks of a prostitute who saw a dog which was licking stones trying to quench its thirst. She felt very compassionate towards the dog, but she had neither means nor help to give the dog a drink. Nor was there anyone to admire her action. Yet, she took the risk of going down a well, filling her shoe with water, exposing herself to immense risk, as she climbed the well, carrying her shoe with her mouth. As she came out of the well, she was so compassionate towards the dog, which is an animal people normally turn away or beat. She held her shoe and placed it before the dog to drink. Needless to say, she did not expect any reward for her action. Her action was sincere for Allah's sake, and this measure of belief in Allah's oneness wiped away her past prostitution, and Allah forgave her that. Such is the value of sincere action in Allah's measure, and this is how He rewards its doer. Yet the actor himself, or herself, is unaware of this elixir, a drop of which is sufficient to turn hundreds of ordinary actions into gold.

## TYPES OF ACTIONS TO REPENT

A person is not considered repentant unless he gets rid of sinful actions. There are twelve types of forbidden actions mentioned in Allah's Book, the Qur'an. These are: disbelief, the association of partners with Allah, hypocrisy, wrongdoing, disobedience, sin, aggression, gross indecency, evil, wrongful behaviour, attributing something to Allah in ignorance, and following a way other than His way.

All that Allah has forbidden comes under these twelve types. All that people do is covered by these types, with the exception of following Allah's messengers and implementing their guidance. A person may do most of these, or one of them, and may or may not be aware that his action is of these types. A sincere and genuine repentance means getting rid of these and taking measures to guard oneself against being guilty of them. Needless to say, one needs to know these types in order to get rid of them.

Disbelief is of two kinds: major and minor. Major disbelief is that which incurs the punishment of Hell forever, while the minor kind incurs a lesser punishment, which is short of lasting forever.

The association of partners with Allah is also of two kinds: major and minor. The major kind is to ascribe an equal to Allah. Allah does not forgive this kind except through clear repentance. The minor kind is of different forms, such as false praise of other people hoping for benefit, currying favour with others, swearing by anyone other than Allah.

Hypocrisy is a serious inner condition which a person may have in great measure without being aware of it. It is so subtle that it may go unnoticed by people and may be unfelt by the hypocrite himself. He may claim to further what is right and good when he is in effect supporting what is evil.

There are various signs by which hypocrites can be identified. These are mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and are clearly observed by

believers of insight. Hypocrisy takes hold of them, which is the worst condition a person can have. They are too lazy to implement Allah's commands with sincerity. Hence, they are described in the Qur'an as follows: 'The hypocrites seek to deceive Allah, the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering Allah but seldom'. (4: 142)

They delay offering obligatory prayers, which are best offered when they become due. They delay offering Fajr Prayer until close to sunrise, and delay 'Aṣr Prayer until close to sunset. When they offer a prayer, they are in haste. Their prayer is a physical, not spiritual exercise. They turn in their prayer like a fox realizing that defeat is its inevitable outcome. They hardly ever attend a congregational prayer. If they pray, they do so at home or in their shops. When any of them is in dispute, he goes beyond limits; when he pledges, he goes back on his pledge; when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he breaks his promise; and he is unfaithful to his trust.

Allah dislikes their acts of worship because of their ill intentions and evil hearts. Therefore, He lets them tarry and stay behind. He dislikes them to draw closer to Himself because they lean towards His enemies. He, therefore, expels them and keeps them at a distance. They turned away from His revelations and He keeps them away, leaving them in misery, rather than happiness. He gave them a fair judgement which makes it impossible for them to be successful, unless they repent. He says: 'Had they really intended to set out [with you], they would surely have made some preparations for that. But Allah was averse to their going, so He caused them to hold back; and it was said to them: "Stay behind with those who stay"'. (9: 46)

The fear of becoming an hypocrite was very genuine among the early Muslims. They knew the short and long of it as well as its details. Therefore, they questioned themselves and feared that it might creep into their hearts. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said to Ḥudhayfah: 'I ask you

by Allah: did Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) name me among them?’ Ḥudhayfah answered: ‘No, but I will never testify for the conduct of anyone else’.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Bukhari narrated that Ibn Abi Mulaykah said: ‘I met thirty of Muhammad’s companions. Everyone of them feared being liable to hypocrisy. None of them claimed that his faith was as strong as that of the Angels Gabriel and Michael’. Al-Ḥasan is reported to have said: ‘None but a hypocrite felt immune to it (i.e. hypocrisy), and none but a true believer feared it’.

The plant of hypocrisy grows by the water of two streams: lies and false guise. These streams start from two springs: poor insight and poor resolve. When these four combine, hypocrisy becomes well established. However its structure is built underneath water falls or on the edge of a crumbling precipice. When facts pour forth and consciences are tested, then what is hidden is laid bare and what is in the breasts is laid bare, then every hypocrite will realize that hypocrisy brought him nothing but a mirage. Allah says: ‘As for the unbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty traveller supposes to be water, but when he comes near to it, he finds that it is nothing. But he finds that Allah [has always been present] with him, and that He will pay him his account in full; for Allah is swift in reckoning’. (24: 39)

Their hearts are deaf to good things, while their bodies try to grab them. Indecency is widespread among them. When the truth is said to them, their hearts are hardened to it. They are attentive by heart and ear to falsehood and perjury. These are indeed the signs of hypocrisy, which everyone should guard against, lest they spell his ruin.

Two kinds of wrongdoing are mentioned in the Qur’an: a general kind mentioned on its own and one that is coupled with disobedience. Allah says: ‘Allah has caused [your] faith to be dear to you, and has given it

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23 Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān was the only companion of the Prophet to whom the Prophet named all the hypocrites in Madinah. – Editor’s note.

beauty in your hearts, and has made hateful to you unbelief, wrongdoing and disobedience of Allah. Such indeed are they who follow the right course'. (49: 7)

Sin and aggression are often mentioned together. Allah says: 'help one another in furthering righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in furthering sin and aggression'. (5: 2)

Wrongful behaviour applies mostly to what is due by right to others and trying to usurp it. Gross indecency refers to obviously repugnant behaviour, rejected by all sound minds. Evil is everything that is naturally rejected by reason and human nature. When such rejection is very strong it becomes a gross indecency.

Attributing something to Allah in ignorance is the sin most strongly forbidden and the gravest. It is indeed the origin of disbelief and associating partners with Allah. All sorts of deviant and erroneous ideas, beliefs and conduct is based on attributing something to Allah in total ignorance.

## ASPECTS OF DISOBEDIENCE

**1. Animal and carnal desire.** This is an image of ignorant people who are not different from animals except in the facts that they stand erect and speak a human language. Their main concern is the satisfaction of their desires however such satisfaction is achieved. They have an animal mentality that does not aspire to that of human beings, let alone that of angels. Their situation is too low to deserve mention. They differ according to the different animals they emulate.

Some of them have a dog's mentality. If he finds a carcass that feeds a thousand dogs, he will try to drive all dogs away from it. All he cares for is to have his fill of whatever food he can get, whether wholesome or foul, carrion or healthy. He is unashamed of any foul thing he does. Some have a donkey's mentality. The donkey is created for hard work

and feeding. The more he is fed, the more work he is given. He is the least intelligent of animals. Therefore, he is given as the example of a person to whom Allah has entrusted His scripture, but he neither learnt nor implemented it. Allah cites the dog as an example of a bad scholar entrusted with Allah's revelations but he discards them: 'He clings to the earth and succumbs to his desires. He may be compared to a dog: no matter how you drive him off, he pants on away, and if you leave him alone, he still pants on.' (7: 176-176)

Some have the mentality of an angry wild animal, always ready to be aggressive, trying to subdue people with whatever means he has at his disposal. Others have the mentality of a mouse, which is naturally evil, trying to ruin things. It is as if they glorify Allah for creating them to cause ruin. Others still have the mentality of poisonous animals like snakes and scorpions. They are the ones who are personally motivated to cause harm and kill.

Some people have the pig's mentality. A pig may pass by wholesome food but does not touch it, yet he eats foul things eagerly. Many people are like that: they listen to good advice and are shown the best behaviour, but they neither learn these nor try to implement them. Yet when they see some wrong action or hear a foul word, they love it and hold on to it. Some have a peacock's mentality. All they are keen upon is to show off and adorn themselves, but it is all superficial. Others have a camel's mentality. He is the animal with the hardest of hearts, one that never forgets a grudge.

The animal with the best mentality is the horse. It is the animal with the best manners. The same may be said about sheep.

In short, the people of this situation care only for their desire and how to satisfy it. They have no further aspirations.

**2. The aspect of Allah's wisdom** whereby He wills a person to do what He (limitless He is in His glory) dislikes and punishes. Had He so willed, He would have prevented him from doing such. It must be born

in mind that Allah is not disobeyed against His will. Indeed nothing occurs in the universe except by His will. He says: ‘**Surely all creation and all authority belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds**’. (7: 54)

Such people acknowledge that Allah has not created anything in idle play. There is great wisdom in whatever He has willed of good and bad, obedience and disobedience. One example is sufficient to illustrate this: Had it not been for the act of disobedience done by Adam, when he ate of the forbidden tree, nothing of those things which are dear to Allah would have happened. These include the trial to which He puts His creation, sending His messengers, revealing His books, producing His miracles and wonderful signs and varying them, honouring His devoted servants and humiliating His enemies, showing His justice and bounty, manifesting His might, punishment, pardon, forgiveness, forbearance, and granting victory, honour and power to those who love and worship Him and do His bidding in this life of tests and trials.

**3. Belief in Allah’s oneness.** This aspect involves a testimony that Allah is the Lord, Creator and Master of all things. Whatever He wills is certain to take place and what He does not will never come into existence. No atom can move except by His permission. All creation are subject to His will and within His grasp. Every person’s heart is in between His fingers, turning it as He wills. He sets it on the right course or lets it go astray, as He pleases.

**4. The situation of success or failure.** Scholars of insight agree that success means that Allah does not leave a person to himself, without help from Him. Failure is to withdraw His protection, leaving a person to himself. All mankind move in between these two possibilities, swinging from one to the other. Indeed a person may be in those positions within one hour. He obeys Allah, glorifies and thanks Him for His help and protection, then He disobeys Him incurring His displeasure and becoming oblivious of his Lord. This is due to Allah withholding His protection. Thus, everyone is moving between these two situations

of success and failure. When Allah grants someone success, this is a favour and an act of grace, and when he lets him fail, this is based on His justice and wisdom. He is worthy of praise for both. To Him is due all praise. He never denies a person what is due to him. He may deny him a favour or bounty, as He knows best to whom He grants His favours and bounty.

When a person finds himself in this situation and realizes its importance, he will realize that he is in need of Allah's help in every moment, indeed at every split second. He will know that his faith is not in his own hands. Were Allah to desert him for a moment, all his structure and beliefs would crumble down. He is held in position by the One who stops the heavens from falling down on earth. Hence, he will always pray to Him: 'My Lord, You are the One who turns hearts as You please. Let my heart always hold firmly to Your religion. My Lord, You are the One who sets hearts on their courses. Let my heart always remain steady in Your obedience'. His supplication will be: 'My Lord, the Ever-Living, the Creator and Master of the heavens and the earth, the One full of majesty, granting grace, there is no deity other than You. I appeal to You by Your mercy that You set right all my affairs and that you do not leave me to myself, or to anyone of Your creation, for a single moment'.

Success in this sense means that Allah wills to give His servant what will make him a good person, making him able to do what pleases Him, loving and willing to do it, preferring it to other things, and making him hate what displeases Allah. This is all He does while the person concerned is its recipient. Allah says: 'Allah has caused [your] faith to be dear to you, and has given it beauty in your hearts, and has made hateful to you unbelief, wrongdoing and disobedience of Allah. Such indeed are they who follow the right course. [All this is indeed part of] Allah's bounty and favour. Allah is all-knowing, wise'. (49: 7-8)

The following example of success and failure has been given by way of illustration: A certain king sent a messenger to the people of one of his townships, giving him a letter to deliver to its people. In his letter he

tells them that the enemy is about to attack their town, destroy it and kill its population. He sends them money, transport, provisions, equipment and guides. He advises them to leave their town immediately and come to him with the guides he sent them. They thus have all they need for their safety and journey. The king then gives special instructions to a number of his subordinates, saying to them: ‘Go to these people, naming a number of the inhabitants of that town, and bring them out of their homes and bring them here. Force them to come if they are reluctant. Let the others choose what they do’. His men went to the people he named and brought them by force to him. The rest stayed behind. The enemy attacked the town and killed most of its population or took the rest captive. The question is: was the king unjust to those people. It is true that he favoured some people with a special care which he did not extend to the rest? Was he obliged to treat the whole population in that way? Or, was he free to choose whom he gave special favour to?

**5. Allah’s names and attributes.** This is one of the most important aspects, and it is broader than the earlier ones. What we are presented here is the knowledge that the whole of existence is related to Allah’s fine names and superior attributes, in its very creation and the commands it is subject to. Indeed, the whole universe is part of the effects and operation of these names and attributes. Whatever Allah determines and decrees reflects His great wisdom and superior signs. He presents Himself to His servants through His names and attributes, causing them to love, remember, glorify, thank and worship Him through His fine names. Every one of His names invites its particular worship: its knowledge and practice. The one who is best in worship is the one who worships Allah through all His names and attributes known to mankind. Addressing his worship through one of Allah’s names should not stop him from serving Allah through His other names as well. Thus, serving Allah by His name, *al-Qadīr*, i.e. the Able, should not overshadow serving Him by his names, *al-Ḥalīm al-Raḥīm*, i.e. the Forbearer, the Ever-Merciful. Nor should serving Allah under His name, *al-Muḥī*, i.e. the Giver, stop a person serving Him under His name, *al-Māni*, i.e. the

Withholder. To serve Allah, the Forgiver, i.e. *al-'Afuwwu*, *al-Ghafūr*, does not preclude serving Him as *al-Muntaqim*, i.e. the Avenger. His attributes of friendship, beneficence, care, kindness should be served alongside His attributes of justice, might, pride and greatness, etc.

This is the practice of those who are most perfect in their journey towards Allah. It is derived from the Qur'an itself, as Allah says: '**Allah has the finest names, so appeal to Him by these**'. (7: 180) The word 'appeal to' includes request, praise and worship. Limitless is Allah in His glory, He calls upon His servants to know Him through His names and attributes, praise Him as required by these, and to worship Him as they indicate. Allah, Mighty and Exalted, loves what His names and attributes entail. As He is All-Knowing, he loves whoever is endowed with knowledge. He is generous and loves everyone who is generous. He is of perfect beauty and loves beauty. In reference to some of His attributes, we know that He loves forgiveness, righteousness, forgiveness, gratitude, perseverance, forbearance. Because He loves repentance of sin and forgiveness, He created those who are bound to commit some of what He dislikes and hates, so that they will turn to Him in repentance and He will accept it and forgive them their sins.

**6. Increase of faith.** This is one of the best scenarios and the one most witnessed by people of knowledge. The effects of good and evil deeds on hearts, bodies and properties are seen everywhere in our world. They are known to everyone of sound mind, whether believers or not, righteous or wrongdoers.

A person sees this within himself and in others. When he reflects on it, he will strengthen his faith in what Allah's messengers have said and in reward and punishment. This is an aspect of justice which we behold in this world, and the punishments visited on us in this life are indicative of what is more serious, but these are only understood by people of insight. Someone told me that when he commits a sinful action and does not follow it with repentance, he expects its adverse consequences. When such consequences occur, he hastens to declare, 'I bear witness that

there is no deity other than Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger'. This is clear evidence of genuine belief. When a truthful person tells you that when you do such-and-such, you are bound to experience such adverse consequences; and then whenever you do something of the sort, the adverse effects follow, your belief in his truthfulness will be increased. This does not apply to everyone. Most people allow their sins to mask their insight and they do not recognize the resulting evil effects.

A person's heart may have the light of faith, but the temptation of sins and acts of disobedience are very strong. He sees both these: the light of his faith and the strong temptation available. He is like one in a boat at sea when a storm wind is blowing fiercely. His boat sways this way and that way, and it may soon be broken. He finds himself on a plank of wood, with the wind still blowing. This is how a believer feels himself when he commits sins, but this is only if he is wished well. If he is wished otherwise, his heart will be faraway.

A person who has such experience will benefit by studying history and become acquainted with what happened to past communities. He will indeed benefit by what occurs to people in his own time. Sinful actions are harmful to man. If he hastens to remove its harm by suitable cures, he will do well. Otherwise, they become stronger, and they will overcome the power of faith within him. This spells his own ruin. An early scholar said: 'Sinful actions may lead to disbelief in the same way as fever may lead to death'.

When a person disobeys his Lord and experiences a reversal of his situation, noting a change in people's feelings towards him, with doors being closed before him, ways becoming difficult to traverse, and a diminution in his respect by his own family, he will try to find out the reason for all such change. When his efforts show him the true cause of all this and he realizes it is all because of his disobedience, it will strengthen his faith. If he desists from sin and embarks on mending his ways, he will experience respect in place of disgrace. He will discover

that delight, security and strength will replace his earlier sorrow, fear and weakness. His faith will be definitely strengthened as the evidence and proofs of faith will be clear to him in both conditions of disobedience and obedience. He will be one of those to whom the following Qur'anic verse refers: '**Allah will expunge the worst of their deeds and will give them their reward in accordance with the best that they did**'. (39: 35)

When a person looking at this scene studies its details and gives it its true value, he becomes a healer of hearts, knowing what ails and cures them. Thus, Allah will give him benefit and make him able to benefit others.

**7. Mercy.** When a person commits a sin, his hard attitude and anger with other sinners will be removed from his heart. He used to feel as though he wants to punish every sinner, and he may pray to Allah to destroy them. He does so in his keen feeling that Allah must not be disobeyed. He does not feel any compassion towards sinners, looking at them with contempt and speaking ill of them. When he himself falls into sin as a result by being left to himself and his own devices, he will appeal to Allah, stand before Him in humility and appeal to Him as one in great trouble. He will then feel compassion towards other sinners. He will observe what Allah requires of him, but instead of appealing against other sinners, he will pray to Allah to forgive them. What great benefit this scenario brings him!

**8. Weakness and powerlessness.** A believer sees himself totally unable to protect himself. He realizes that he has no power or strength except by Allah's help. He sees himself like a feather dropped in an open land, with the wind blowing it right and left, or as a passenger in a boat in the middle of a storm with the waves pushing it in all directions, raising and dropping it. Allah's decree is forced upon him. He is powerless, standing at the door of his Maker, or placing his face on the ground before Him. He can cause himself neither harm nor benefit, nor can he preserve or end his life. He knows that he has nothing but ignorance and unfairness and what they entail. He may perish at any moment, like a

sheep in midst of a number of wild beasts. The sheep has no protection except that of the shepherd. Should he ignore it for a moment, the beasts will tear it apart.

Such is every person's condition: he is between Allah and his enemies, the evil ones among human beings and the jinn. If Allah protects him, they have no way to harm him, but if He lets him look after himself, even for a moment, any one of them may take hold of him.

In this scene, a person will realize that he is weak. He will no longer boast about his power and ability. He will realize that he cannot determine anything for himself. His weakness is overwhelming.

**9. Humility and submission.** In this respect, the person is aware in every part of himself, physical or hidden, that he has absolute and total need for Allah's help. His own welfare, guidance, success and happiness are all in Allah's hand. This mental realization cannot be expressed in words. It is merely realized when it happens. He will experience, at heart, a sort of submission that is unlike anything else. He will see himself like a broken cup thrown aside, with nothing in it. It is useless and discarded. No one cares to pick it up. The only way to mend it is for its maker to remould it. He will then turn to Allah appealing to His goodness. He realizes that he deserves neither much nor little from his Lord. Whatever comes to him from Him is too much and undeserved. It is only bestowed out of Allah's grace. He will look at what he does of acts of obedience of Allah and think that they are too little, far less than what is required of him. He looks at the few sins and acts of disobedience he commits and thinks that they are too much. The break which he has experienced made him realize all this.

The mending of such a broken heart is very close. Victory, mercy and sustenance are at hand for such a person. This scene is of great benefit to him. Indeed, a moment of this condition is more valuable in Allah's estimation than great loads of good deeds offered by those who think highly of their deeds, knowledge and general condition. The heart Allah loves best is the one that such a break has shattered and placed him in

total humility before his Lord. This person does not lift his head up to Him in his feeling of shame.

A scholar of insight was asked: Does the heart prostrate itself before Allah? He said: Yes. It does, but it is a prostration without lifting its head until the Day of Judgement. Such is the heart's prostration.

A heart that has not experienced such a break will not do this required prostration. When a heart offers this supreme prostration, all man's organs join it. His face is humbled before the Ever-Living, the Eternal-Master of all. His voice will be hushed and all senses and organs will show humility. Indeed, the person himself will be in total humility, looking up with his heart to his Lord and Protector as a humble person looks up to the One who is Mighty and Merciful. He will always be in such a condition of humility, appealing to his Lord for His grace and compassion. He is like an infatuated lover trying to please the one he loves, feeling that he cannot live without his beloved. Hence, he cares nothing for anything other than winning a positive response. Otherwise, he feels his own life as meaningless, devoid of all pleasure. He thinks: how can I displease the One who gives me life and without whom I will have neither success nor happiness?

The person in this scenario sees himself like one who was living with his father. He gives him the best food, drink and clothing. He keeps him in the best form and attire, helping him to rise higher on the way up to perfection. He looks after all his affairs. One day, his father sends him on an errand, but as he was on his way, an enemy took him by surprise, taking him captive and putting him in chains. He then took him to the enemy land, where he tortures and ill treats him. Time and again, he remembers his father's kindness and fine treatment. One day while he is in such miserable captivity, realizing that his enemy will eventually kill him, he looks up in the direction leading to his own land, and he sees his father close to him. He crawls towards him and places himself before his father, sending a compassionate appeal. He says: 'Father, look at me, your son, and what I am suffering'. His face is wet with

tears as he reaches his father and hugs him. The enemy is chasing him and stretches his hand to catch him. Can anyone imagine that his father will give him up to his enemy? Allah is more compassionate to His servant than any father or mother to their children. When His servant comes running back towards Him, throws himself at His door with tears in his eyes, and appeals to Him: ‘My Lord, grant me Your mercy as none will be merciful to me. I have no guardian, support, refuge or help except You and what You will grant me. Let Your compassion be extended to me, Your wretched servant who can seek help from none but You. I have no refuge and no safety other than what You grant me’.

**10. Servitude and love.** This is a situation of yearning for the meeting with Allah and the delight such a meeting will bring. It is an image that is both pleasing and reassuring. This person will have thoughts of love of Allah in place of thoughts of disobedience, and the will to draw closer to Allah and please Him in place of the desire to commit what displeases Him. His tongue and other organs will concentrate on obeying Allah rather than disobeying Him. His heart is full of the love of Allah, and his tongue is constantly repeating His praises. Man’s body and soul are devoted to His service. The break of his heart mentioned earlier has great effect in enhancing his love, and that effect is beyond expression.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah used to say: ‘Whoever wants eternal happiness should remain at the threshold of servitude’.

To sum up: Man’s humility and the break of heart he experiences allows him a way to Allah, placing him on the way of love. A gate to it will be open to him, and this gate cannot be open from any other way. There is no doubt that all types of good action and voluntary worship will open gates of love, but the gate opened through heart break, humility, awareness of one’s weakness and powerlessness, self-accusation of negligence of duty and indulgence in error is of a different type and class. The one who travels along this way feels himself a stranger among people: they are in a different plane. It is called the bird’s way. The one

lying in his bed will be ahead of travellers on their way. It is from Allah that help is to be sought.

This is all a manifestation of Allah's love and His delight with the repentance offered by His servant. He loves those who repent and is exceedingly delighted with them.

When a person looks at the favours Allah bestows on him before, during and after his sin, His forbearance and kindness, he will feel the pangs of his love of Allah and yearn to meet Him. By nature, hearts love those who are kind to them. What kindness is greater than that of Allah: His servant indulges in sin and disobedience while He extends to him His favours and kindness, shields him and protects him against his enemies. He ensures that His servant remains safe of all they scheme against him.



## THE STAGE OF DEVOTION, i.e. *INĀBAH*

**When** a person's foot is firm in the stage of repentance, he will move to the stage of devotion, which Allah commands us to attend and He praises His friend, Abraham, for attaining it. He says: 'Turn [in devotion] to your Lord'. (39: 54) 'Abraham was indeed most clement, tender-hearted, and devout.' (11: 75) Allah tells us that His reward and Paradise are stored for people who fear Him and are devoted to Him. He says: 'And paradise will be brought close to the righteous and will no longer be distant: "This is what you have been promised; this is for everyone who used to turn to Allah and to keep Him in mind, who used to stand in awe of the Lord of Grace although He is beyond the reach of human perception, and who comes before Him with a heart full of devotion. Enter paradise in peace"'. (50: 31-34)

There are two types of devotion. The first is to His Lordship. It is offered by all creation, believers and unbelievers; righteous and habitual sinners. Allah says: 'When harm touches people they call out to their Lord for help, turning to Him in devotion'. (30: 33) The other type is the one offered by Allah's best servants. It is devotion to His Godhead. Hence it is a devotion of love and servitude. This second type includes four things: loving Allah, submission to Him, going towards Him and turning away from all else. Only a person who combines all four deserves to be called *munīb*, i.e. devout. Early scholars interpreted this word along these lines. The term *inābah* connotes moving at speed, turning back to the right place and going forward. Therefore, the one who is a *munīb* means a person who is going forward at speed to please Allah, returning to Him at all times, and moving forward towards all that Allah loves.

## SIGNS OF SINCERE DEVOTION

When a person is in clear devotion to his Lord, he gets rid of the idea of the pleasure of sin, replacing it with pain to be felt whenever an act of sin is remembered. As long as the pleasure of thinking about sin remains in a person's heart, his devotion is not pure.

It may be asked: which situation is better: that of the one who thinks of the pleasure of sin and resists it, abandoning such sin out of fearing Allah, and loving Him or the one whose heart has killed the pleasure of sin? In its place there is now pain as well as feelings of security with his Lord, enjoying His love and the pleasure of remembering and glorifying Him. The answer is that the second is far better. The ultimate a person of the first situation will achieve is to endeavour to attain the status of the second person. Until then, he remains below him in status.

If it is said: how about the reward for resisting the pleasure of sin, seeking Allah's pleasure, preferring it to one's own desire and pleasure? After all, this is why mankind are considered by Sunni scholars better than angels, and they are the best of creation. By contrast, the one who has certainty is relieved of such striving. Hence, there is between them the same gap as exists between one who is healthy and another who is not. In answer, we say that a human soul has three conditions: 1) persuasion and urging the commitment of a sin; 2) blaming oneself and regretting its commitment; and 3) trusting Allah and turning to Him in full. This last condition is the best and most important one. Everyone strives to attain this state. Whatever reward he gets for his striving and perseverance is gained because he is working hard to arrive at the stage of complete trust in Allah. Thus, he is like one who travels through difficulties and hardships in order to reach home and be happy with arriving there and settling in it. The other is busy with what he has attained: he continues with all aspects of his worship, paying no attention to any distraction. The difference between the two is that the latter is busy with the goal while the former is busy with the means. Each will have his reward, but there is a wide gulf between the reward for the ultimate goal and that for means.

The conditions, servitude and strength of faith experienced by the one who has attained certainty are greater than that of the one striving against self-prompting, even though the latter may do more of good deeds. The one with certainty has a higher quality and better shape of deeds. This is Allah's bounty which He bestows on whomever He wills. Abu Bakr did not excel other companions of the Prophet through greater devotion and acts of worship. Some of them did more in the way of voluntary prayers, fasting, hajj and Qur'an recitation. Yet Abu Bakr excelled them through something else that he experienced at heart. Hence, even the best of the Prophet's companions tried to match him, but ended in failure.

Having said that, the one who strives against the temptation of the pleasure of sin and the gratification of carnal desire may find servitude to Allah harder, but this does not necessarily mean that it is better in grade. The best of all that human beings do is to believe in Allah. This is superior to jihad, yet jihad is harder.

One of the signs of this stage of devotion is to desist from looking down on people who neglect their duties, and fearing for them, while hoping that one's end will be better. Thus, one entertains the hope of receiving Allah's mercy while fearing that Allah's punishment will befall others. The proper attitude is to hope that they will receive Allah's mercy and to fear Allah's punishment for one's own errors. If a person dislikes them because he is well aware of their true condition, he should dislike himself more and should hope for Allah's mercy being granted to them more than he hopes it for himself. One early scholar said: 'You shall not attain profound knowledge until you hate other people for nothing other than Allah's cause, then you look at yourself and hate it more'.

Another sign is to look at the measure of self interest in one's good deeds, and to distinguish what is truly dedicated to Allah from the measure of self interest. Most, or even all of one's good deeds may be undertaken for oneself only, without a person being aware of the fact.

Countless defects, interests and purposes are entertained by people, and yet they ensure that good deeds are not done purely for Allah's sake and

prevent their being raised to Him. A person may do a good deed, totally unseen by any human being, yet it may not be sincerely done for Allah's sake, while a different deed is done and witnessed by many people, yet it is done purely to please Allah and for no other purpose. No one can distinguish one from the other except people of insight and those who are fully aware of hearts and the defects or ills that affect them.

There is a distance separating a person's deed and his heart. Along this distance there are barriers preventing the deed from getting to the heart. Nothing reaches the heart of it, such as love, fear, hope, carelessness about this life and eagerness for the outcome in the Hereafter, light distinguishing Allah's true servants from His enemies and truth from falsehood, or strength of purpose. Had the effect of one's good deeds reached one's heart, such a heart would have been enlightened so as to distinguish truth from falsehood, and Allah's servants from His enemies. Such enlightenment would have taken it to better situations.

Moreover, there is a distance between a person's heart and his Lord. Along this distance there are barriers preventing good deeds from being raised to Him. These barriers include conceit, self admiration, showing off, forgetting Allah's favour, etc. Were a person to try hard to identify these barriers, he would be amazed. By His grace, Allah keeps these shielded from most people. Were they to behold them, they would fall into what is worse, such as despair, lamentation, loss of strength and desire to continue to do good works.



## THE STAGE OF TAKING HEED

**A person's** heart then moves onto the stage of taking heed, which is coupled with that of devotion. Allah says: 'Only those who turn to Allah take heed'. (40: 13) This is a distinctive mark of those who are of sound mind. Allah says: 'Is, then, he who knows that what has been revealed to you by your Lord is the Truth like one who is blind? Only those who are endowed with understanding take heed'. (13: 19)

Taking heed and reflection are situations that yield a variety of aspects of knowledge and facts of faith. A person of knowledge will continue to reflect and endeavour to take heed until his heart's lock is rendered open by the will of Allah. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said that scholars continued to do this and tried to get hearts to speak until they did.

The relationship between taking heed and reflection is that of the desired thing being achieved after it has been sought after. Hence, Allah's recited verses and observed signs serve as reminders. Allah says about His revealed verses: 'Indeed, We bestowed Our guidance on Moses, and passed down the Book to the Children of Israel as a guide and a reminder to people of understanding'. (40: 53-54) And He says about his observed signs: 'How many a generation, far greater in power, have We destroyed before these [unbelievers]? They wandered through the lands seeking a place of refuge. In this there is a reminder for everyone who has an alert heart, or one who attentively listens and sees'. (50: 36-37)

People may be grouped into three classes. The first is that of a person whose heart is dead. He has no heart, and therefore, this last verse does not apply to him. The second is that of a person whose heart is alive and ready, but he does not listen to the recited verses which tell of Allah's

observed signs, either because these do not reach him, or because his heart is preoccupied with something else. Such a person does not get the reminder despite having a ready heart. The third is that of a person whose heart is alive and ready. When Allah's verses are recited, he listens and ensures that his heart is attentive, not distracted by anything else. It is the people of this third class that benefit by Allah's revealed texts and observed signs.

The people of the first class are like a blind man who cannot see. Those of the second class are like a person with open eyes but he is looking away from what is to be seen. As such, he cannot see. Those of the third class are like a person with open eyes looking intently at what is there to see. He stands at a middle distance from it, neither far nor close. He is the one who sees the truth. Limitless is Allah in His glory. He made His words a cure for hearts' ailments.

## THE MEANS TO REAP THE FRUIT OF REFLECTION

Al Harawī said: 'The fruits of reflection are gathered by three things: 1) Recognition of life's short duration. 2) Pondering on the Qur'an. 3) Avoiding mixing with people, great hopes, seeking help from anyone other than Allah, overeating and sleeping.

The first of these is the fact that this life is short. It is important that a Muslim remains always aware that life may end at any time. This is one of the most beneficial thoughts for one's heart, because it makes the person eager to use every opportunity to increase his good deeds so as to add to his record with Allah. It also motivates him to prepare for his journey to the everlasting life to come, make amends for whatever he fell short of. It helps him to care little for the pleasures of this life and to concentrate on what he may earn in the life to come. The more he reflects on the fact that this life is short, the greater is his certainty that it is on the way out, and that what remains of this life is no more than a small amount of water left in a jug, or what remains of a day when the sun is merely seen on mountain tops. He will also see that the life to

come is the permanent one. It is a waufarer approaching his destination, and its signs are all around him. In this respect, we are like people going out to meet our relatives as they return home from a journey. Both are moving towards each other, and their meeting is bound to happen soon.

When we speak about the shortness of the duration of this present life, it is sufficient to remember what Allah says: ‘But consider this: If We allow them to enjoy themselves for several years, and then the promised [punishment] befalls them – of what avail to them will be all their past enjoyment?’ (26: 205-207) ‘On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another.’ (10: 45) One day when the sun was merely visible on the mountain tops, the Prophet addressed his companions and said: ‘What is left of this life, compared with what has passed, is the same as what is left of this day of yours compared with what has gone of it’.<sup>24</sup>

Awareness of the short duration of this life depends on two things: the certainty that life on earth will come to an end, and that all living souls will die, and the certainty that there will be another life which will be permanent and everlasting. The two lives should be compared and the preferable one should be given priority.

The second element is to ponder on the Qur’an. This means looking with one’s heart’s eye at its meanings, so as to assimilate its message. It does not refer to its mere recitation without understanding its meanings. Allah says: ‘This is a blessed Book which We have revealed to you so that people may ponder over its message, and that those endowed with insight may take it to heart’. (38: 29)

Nothing is more beneficial to anyone in both the present life and the life to come than pondering on the Qur’an and thinking deeply about its meanings. This process gives a person an insight into the different aspects of what is good and what is evil, and their different ways,

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24 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,191.

means, results and fruits. It also strengthens the foundation of faith in a person's heart, consolidates its pillars and puts him in view of this world and the Hereafter. It gives him a vision of Heaven and Hell, and places before him images of past communities and what happened to them, pointing out the lesson to learn from their history. It informs him of Allah's justice and His bounty. Moreover, pondering on the meanings of the Qur'an will give a person the correct knowledge of Allah, His names, attributes and deeds, as well as what He loves and dislikes. It shows him the straight path leading to Him and what those who travel along this path expect when they arrive to meet Him. It gives him an awareness of the impediments that may obstruct his travel along the straight path. The Qur'an further informs us of the human soul and its characteristics, what keeps deeds good and what corrupts them, the two different ways of the people going to Heaven and those going to Hell, as well as their respective conditions, aspects and deeds, and the different grades of both. The Qur'an also tells us of the different groups of people and what they have in common and how they differ. In short, it provides us with the correct information about Allah, the way to Him and what we should expect when we go to Him.

By contrast, pondering on the Qur'an gives us clear information about three other things: 1) what Satan stands for; 2) the way leading to him, and 3) what those who follow him should expect of humiliation and punishment when they reach him.

There are six matters that are necessary for everyone to know, realize and visualize. They will show a person the life to come as though he is attending it, and take him away from this life as though he is not in it. They will enable him to see the truth and falsehood in everything about which people differ, enabling him to see the truth for what it is and falsehood plain as it is. They will give him a criterion and light to distinguish guidance from error. Thus his heart will have added strength, liveliness, pleasure and delight, putting him in one way and other people in a totally different way.

The meanings of the Qur'an will thus continue to motivate a person to turn to his Lord, reminding him of Allah's fine promise, as well as His stern warnings against severe punishment. They will urge him to reduce his burden in order to get ready for the meeting on the hard day that is bound to come, and guide him out of the darkness of confused views and doctrines to put him on the straight path. They will stop him from plunging into deviant and erroneous ways, and motivate him to appeal for an increase of Allah's favours by giving proper thanks. The Qur'an will also give him an insight into the limits of what is lawful and unlawful, so that he will not exceed them.

Pondering on the Qur'an and understanding its meanings will give us a firm adherence to the right faith which will serve as an immunity against swerving from the truth. It will facilitate for us overcoming hard difficulties. When we slacken and move slowly, it will encourage us to renew our efforts and catch up with believers who are ahead of us. They will be our guide, making sure that we stay on the right path when any temptation beckons, trying to lure us away. They will give us the right warning and show us the way to seek Allah's help and protection.

The above quotation from al-Harawī mentions in the third item five things to avoid. These are bound to corrupt one's heart, hence the warning against them. They are: much mixing with people, great hopes, seeking help from anyone other than Allah, overeating and sleeping.

It should be clearly understood that a believer's heart moves towards Allah and the life to come, recognizes the way of the truth, the ills that affect one's soul and action. A believer's heart discerns the impediments that obstruct its way, recognizing these through its own light, strength, health, resolution, sound hearing and sight as well as the absence of distractions. The above-mentioned five things stifle its light, mar its insight, impair its hearing, make a person dumb and considerably weaken him and his resolve. They set him on a backward trend and leave him powerless. Whoever does not feel this is one with a dead heart.

These five things prevent a person from attaining perfection, stop him from reaching the objective for which he is created, and which ensures his happiness, delight and pleasure. Indeed, man cannot taste real happiness, pleasure and delight except through knowing and loving Allah, delight at His being near and yearning to meet Him. This is his immediate heaven, while his happiness in the life to come is granted only in its Heaven. Thus, everyone has two heavens, and no one will be admitted into the second unless he has experienced the first. I heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah say: ‘There is a garden, i.e. a heaven, in this present life. Whoever does not enter it shall not be admitted into the heaven of the Hereafter’. A discerning scholar said: ‘There are times my heart goes through and I would say: if the people in Heaven are in a similar situation, then they are enjoying a good life’.

Another said: ‘Poor indeed are the people who care only for this present life. They depart life without tasting the best of it’. He was asked: ‘What is the best of it?’ He answered: ‘Love of Allah, feeling close to Him, yearning to meet Him, and turning away from all else’. Everyone with a sound heart will confirm this through personal experience.

Those five things prevent a person’s heart from achieving this, impede its march and cause him sickness that must be treated. Otherwise, it may spell a person’s ruin.

Much mixing with people, which is the first of the five, leads to one’s heart becoming full of the effect of others, giving him worries, distractions, weakness and having a heavy burden of association with the wrong people and losing some benefits he is in need of, wasting his time instead of attending to his own interests. Facing all this, what will remain for him of things that lead to success in the life to come? Much mixing with people often brings about ill fortune and all sorts of problems, depriving a person of good fortune and Allah’s favours. Indeed, much of the ill that befalls people is due to the sort of people they mix with. Take the case of Abu Ṭālib, the Prophet’s uncle. His bad companions exerted so much pressure on him, preventing him from

saying the declaration that would have ensured for him everlasting happiness in the life to come. That is the declaration of belief in Allah's oneness.

This mixing with people takes the form of friendship in this life, with people helping each other with their needs. However, when the outcome is faced, it will become enmity and a cause of great sorrow, as Allah says: 'On that Day the wrongdoer will bite his two hands and say: "Would that I had followed the path shown to me by the Messenger. Oh, woe is me! Would that I had never taken so-and-so for a friend! He surely led me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me!" Satan is ever treacherous to man'. (25: 27-29) He also says: 'On that Day, friends will become enemies to one another, except for the Allah-fearing'. (43: 67)

The proper standard that ensures benefit of mixing with people is that one associates with them in what is good, such as attending congregational and Friday prayers, the Eid, learning, giving and receiving good advice, etc. One should stay away from bad and evil things, as well as permissible but unnecessary things. If a person finds himself in a situation where he has to attend people who are doing what is evil, and cannot stay away from them, he must not under any pretext agree with them. When he takes such an attitude, it is very likely that they may try to harm him, if he has no support. In this case, he should endure their harm patiently, because it will, in time, be replaced by honour and love, as also by praise by them, other believers and Allah Himself. To agree with them and do as they do will be followed by humiliation and hatred, as well as dispraise by them, other believers and Allah Himself.

Enduring their harm will ensure a better outcome in the end. If it is necessary to mix with such people in permissible but unnecessary things, a believer should try his best to change the nature of such gathering into one which includes something that earns Allah's approval and reward. He should make up his mind and take courage to carry out his resolve. He should pay no attention to the whisperings of Satan, painting his

action as hypocritical, or merely to show off and invite praise for one's knowledge, etc. He should silence such discouragement, pray for Allah's help and try to influence his companions to do what is good and beneficial.

If a believer finds himself in such a situation and cannot influence those people, he should try to skilfully remove his heart from among them, so as to be physically present, but his heart is faraway. Thus, he is at the same time near and distant, alert and asleep, looking at them but not seeing them, hearing this discourse but not understanding it. He has taken his heart away and raised it and himself far above, glorifying Allah with the angels who are around Allah's throne extolling their Lord's limitless glory.

This is a very hard task for anyone, but it will be easy when Allah has facilitated it for any of His servants. What ensures this help is that a person should be true in his intention and determination, constantly seeking Allah's help, imploring Him with humility. What helps to achieve this is one's true love of Allah, and one's constant remembrance of Allah, verbally and mentally. It is also important to avoid the other four factors that corrupt a person's heart, which we shall presently explain. This needs good preparation, added strength granted by Allah, true resolve and clear reliance on Allah.

The second corruptor of a person's heart is entertaining great hopes. This is like a sea without a shore. Upon the surface of this sea only the bankrupt in this world sail. It is said that great hopes are the capital of the bankrupt, and their commodities are the devils' promises and false images. Great hopes and false prospects will continue to lure the sailors on this sea, who will remain humble, having no true view of the facts around them. They paint for themselves images of what they hope to achieve, and consider that they should have great prospects. They follow that with imagining that they have attained their hopes and are enjoying them. Suddenly, they wake up and realize that they have nothing.

By contrast, a person with determined efforts focuses his hopes on knowledge and faith, as well as the deeds that draw him closer to his Lord. Such a person's hopes are drawn from faith and made of light, while the hopes of the other one are mere self deception and arrogance.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) praises a person whose hopes are good, and in some cases he stated that his reward is the same as that of the one who does what is good. He mentions the case of the one who looks at one who uses his wealth properly, always fearing Allah, paying his zakat and maintaining ties with his relatives. Poor as this onlooker is, he expresses his feeling saying: 'If Allah grants me wealth, I will use it in the same way as this wealthy person'. The Prophet comments: 'The two will receive the same reward'.

The third and worst corruptor of a person's heart is seeking and looking for help from anyone other than Allah. Nothing is more prejudicial to a person's interests and happiness, and nothing takes him further away from Allah than pinning one's hopes on someone else. When a person does this, Allah will leave him to the one on whom he has pinned his hopes, and He will let him down on that score. As such, he misses out on what he might have had from Allah. Thus, seeking help from different sources leads to the loss of one's hopes from Allah and missing out on any benefit he has had from others. Allah says: 'They have taken to worshipping deities other than Allah, hoping that they will give them power and glory. By no means! They will renounce their worship and turn against them'. (19: 81-82) The worst let down is that suffered by the one who sought help from others than Allah. What he gets from them is prone to be lost or finished and it is much less than what he has missed out on of his happiness, success and interests. His case is like that of a person who tries to have a cover protecting him from hot or cold weather, using a spider's web. Needless to say, a spider's web is the most clumsy refuge, as Allah describes.

Food is the fourth corruptor of man's heart. There are two types of food that corrupt hearts. The first is the food that essentially has a corrupting

effect, such as forbidden food. These are forbidden either because they undermine Allah's right or undermine people's rights. The other type is food that becomes a corruptor because of its quantity. It is overeating what is permissible, because it makes a person heavy, too lazy to engage in acts of worship that will bring him good reward. Moreover, it leads to obesity, whereby a person continues to overeat until he becomes considerably over-weight, and then he will be occupied with trying to prevent its harmful effects. Furthermore, when a person overeats, Satan will strengthen his love of food and open the ways for temptation. While fasting makes Satan's way to a person narrow and difficult to traverse, overeating opens this way up. In fact, when a person eats much, he will drink much, sleep long and lose much. A well known hadith quotes the Prophet: 'No human being may fill up a vessel worse than his tummy. It is enough for anyone to have a few bites to satisfy hunger. If he must, then one-third for his food, one-third for his drink and one-third for breathing'.<sup>25</sup>

Much sleeping is the fifth of these corruptors of man's heart. Allowing oneself many long hours of sleep will deaden one's heart, afflict one's body, waste time and make a person lazy and oblivious to important things. Some of it is greatly discouraged, and some is harmful, giving the body no benefit. The most beneficial sleep is when there is clear need for it. To sleep in the early hours of the night is better than choosing its late hours, while sleeping in the middle of the day is more useful than sleeping towards either end of it. The closer sleep is to either end of the day it will be of less benefit and greater harm, particularly sleep after 'Aṣr, or in the early hours of daylight, unless one has stayed up long during the preceding night.

What scholars consider as discouraged is to sleep during the period between the time when Fajr Prayer becomes due and sunrise. This is a period of time that brings much benefit. Those who undertake the journey towards Allah's acceptance consider that travelling during

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<sup>25</sup> Related by al-Nasā'ī, 6,737; al-Tirmidhī, 2,380; Ibn Mājah, 3,349.

this period, i.e. spending time in voluntary worship such as Allah's glorification and remembrance, reciting the Qur'an, learning, etc. is particularly beneficial. Even when they spend the whole night in voluntary worship, they do not allow themselves to slacken during this period, until sunrise. It is the beginning of the day and its key. It is the time when provisions are granted, blessing is bestowed, and the starting point of the day. Therefore, what is achieved during this period applies to the rest of the day. Hence, only a person who is in urgent need of sleep may use this period for sleep.

Generally speaking, the best and most beneficial sleep is to use the first half of the night and the last one-sixth of it for sleep. This makes approximately eight hours. Medical doctors suggest that this is the most appropriate length of time for sleep. When sleep is longer or shorter, it leads to some negative effect on a person's nature.

Another period of time when sleep is not of benefit is the very early part of the night, shortly after sunset. It is better to wait until darkness has thickened. The Prophet used to dislike sleeping during this period. As such, it is naturally and religiously discouraged.

While too long sleep leads to these adverse effects, too little sleep causes different serious harmful effects. These include bad moods, psychological disorders, dryness which impedes mental and physical activity, other illnesses which makes it difficult for a person to benefit from his heart or body. The whole of our existence is based on proper balance. Whoever observes it will receive his share of goodness.





## THE STAGE OF SEEKING IMMUNITY

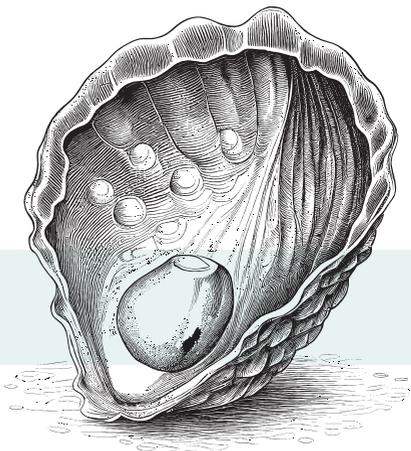
**This** stage has two aspects: Seeking immunity through Allah and ensuring this by holding onto the bond with Allah. Allah says: ‘**Hold fast, all of you together, to the bond with Allah and do not be disunited**’. (3: 103) The pivot on which all happiness in this life and in the life to come turns is holding fast to Allah and to the bond with Him. None can be safe except those who hold fast to both types of protection.

Holding fast to the bond with Allah ensures immunity from going astray and seeking immunity through Him ensures safety from ruin. A person who is on a journey towards Allah is like one travelling to his destination. He needs guidance showing him the way, and needs to remain safe on his journey. Without ensuring both of these he will not arrive at his destination. A guide ensures his immunity from going astray and keeps him along the right way. The right equipment, strength and weapon ensures his immunity from highway robbery and other risks.

Holding fast to the bond with Allah ensures the traveller has proper guidance and suitably correct directions. Seeking Allah’s immunity ensures that he has the right equipment and weapon, as well as other requirements that determine safety. Hence, all the early scholars refer to this meaning of holding fast to the bond with Allah, but they express it differently. Ibn ‘Abbās says that it means ‘the diligent fulfilment of the faith’, while Ibn Mas‘ūd says that ‘it refers to the community’.

Seeking immunity through Allah means reliance on Him, seeking His protection, appealing to Him to defend the supplicant. The result of holding fast to Allah’s immunity means the traveller is defended. Allah defends and protects the believers, ensuring that whoever seeks His protection is safe from every risk leading to ruin. Thus, He defends

his servants against doubts, desires, the designs of apparent and hidden enemies, his own evil, as well as the causes of all evil. All this is commensurate with the firmness of seeking Allah's protection. The causes of ruin threaten a person but Allah spares him its causes. He, thus, spares him one of His decrees by another and one will of His by another.



## THE STAGE OF LISTENING

**Allah** orders His servants to listen and praises those who do. He says: ‘Have fear of Allah and hearken [to Him]’. (5: 108) ‘When they listen to what has been revealed to Allah’s Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of the Truth they recognize. They say: “Our Lord, we do believe; so enrol us among those who bear witness to the truth”’. (5: 83)

Listening is the essence of understanding and the foundation upon which belief is based. However, the important thing is what is being listened to. It is regarding this that people have widely differed and many of them have erred. The essence of listening is to alert a person’s heart to the meaning of what he is hearing and to determine his attitude to it, seeking or avoiding, liking or disliking it. As such, it is like one who is summoning the hearers to their respective places.

Listeners are of different classes. Some listen according to their own mentality and preferences. They grasp of what they hear only what is consistent with their own mentality. Others listen according to their condition, belief, knowledge and mind. These are granted of what they hear what suits their own ability and strength. Others still listen only through Allah Himself, as expressed in the sacred, or *qudsī*, hadith in which the Prophet quotes Allah as saying: ‘My servant will continue to draw near to Me with voluntary works so that I shall love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees...’<sup>26</sup> This is the superior type of listening and the most correct.

What is being heard and listened to is of three types: the first is something

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26 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,502.

Allah loves and is pleased with. He orders His servants to listen to it and He praises those who do as they earn His pleasure. The second is something Allah dislikes and prohibits. He praises those who turn away from it. The third type is permissible, and Allah neither likes nor dislikes it. He neither praises nor censures those who listen to it. It is like all other permissible things.

Allah censures those who refuse to listen to the first type and describes them as farther astray than animals. When these will take their abode in Hell, they will say: ‘Had we but listened, or reasoned, we would not now be among the inhabitants of the blazing Fire’. (67: 10) What is referred to here as the matter to listen to is the Qur’an and its verses, revealed to His Messenger (peace be upon him). This is the listening which is the basis of faith. It is of three kinds: learning through the sense of hearing, listening leading to proper understanding and listening of response and acceptance. All three are mentioned in the Qur’an. Those who are in the closest position to Allah listen to the Qur’an in all three respects: learning, understanding and acceptance.

Every type of listening mentioned in the Qur’an is approved by Allah and He praises those who do so. Indeed, He orders believers to do it. In this context, we do not refer to listening to poetry, music, or to Satan’s whispering. This stage is concerned with what is best to hear and listen to: it is listening to the Qur’an and its verses, which is the word of Allah, the Lord of the universe. It is listening to the teachings and messages of Allah’s messengers.

This is the sort of listening that influences hearts and souls urging them on the way to Allah. It is a sort of a power engine that drives the listeners to aspire to the highest position and status. It is a caller urging people to adhere to the divine faith, as it is their way to Heaven. It is the call we listen to when every obligatory prayer falls due, as the caller urges us all: ‘*ḥayy ‘alal-falāḥ*, i.e Come to success’.

When you listen to such discourse, you shall not fail to have a pointer to a clear argument, a reminder of something you have learnt, a reference

to a useful lesson, or a subtle meaning of a verse. It may guide you to something useful, deter you from an error, enlighten your way, point to something of benefit, a warning against some harm. It may bring you some light, dispel some darkness, urge you to do what is right and refrain from what is evil. It may give you a clear insight, enlighten your heart, clear some doubts, clarify some proof, establish a truth and show a falsehood. It may, in short, ensure your safety.

The second type of listening is that which Allah dislikes. He praises those who turn away from it. This is listening to whatever harms a person in his heart and faith, such as listening to anything false, unless it leads to refuting it. It also includes listening to idle talk, as Allah praises those who turn away from it. He says of them: ‘*And whenever they hear frivolous talk they turn away from it*’. (28: 55)





## THE STAGE OF FEAR

**This** is one of the most important stages on the way towards Allah, and it is very useful to hearts. It is required of everyone, as Allah says: ‘It is but Satan who prompts people to fear his allies: so, have no fear of them, but fear Me if you are truly believers’. (3: 175) In His Book, the Qur’an, Allah praises those who have fear, as He says: ‘Truly, those who stand in reverent awe of their Lord, and who believe in their Lord’s revelations, and who do not associate any partners with their Lord, and who give away whatever they have to give with their hearts filled with awe, knowing that to their Lord they shall certainly return: these vie with one another in doing good works, and they are the ones who are foremost in them’. (23: 57-61)

A hadith mentions that ‘Ā’ishah asked the Prophet about one of these verses. She said: ‘Messenger of Allah, the verse that says: “Those who give away whatever they have to give with their hearts filled with awe, knowing that to their Lord they shall certainly return”: does this refer to a person who commits adultery, drinks alcohol and steals?’ He answered: ‘No. It refers to a person who fasts, prays and pays zakat, but fears that his deeds will not be accepted’.<sup>27</sup>

Al-Ḥasan said: ‘They have indeed done what is right and recommended, exerting their efforts, but they feared that they would not be accepted from them. A believer combines his good work with fear, while an hypocrite combines wrongdoing with feeling safe’. Abu al-Qāsim al-Junayd said: ‘Proper fear is to expect punishment coming with every breath’.

<sup>27</sup> Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,175.

In the Qur'an, the terms, *khawf* i.e. fear and *khashyah* i.e. awe, are often used. Both mean fear, and they are close in meaning but they are not synonyms, as the second refers to fear which is coupled with knowledge. Thus, *khashyah* is characteristic of Islamic scholars. Allah says: 'It is those who are endowed with knowledge that stand truly in awe of Allah'. (35: 28) The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'I am the most Allah-fearing among you, and I am the one who stands in most awe of Him'.<sup>28</sup>

Fear causes a movement, while awe leads to self control and staying in place. A person who sees an enemy or flood approaching may be in one of two situations. The first is a movement to run away, which is the state of fear. The other is to stay in place where the enemy or the flood cannot reach him. This is the state of being in awe.

The Arabic word *rahbah* suggests a more determined running away from what is being feared. *Wajal*, which may be rendered as 'trepidation', suggests trembling and genuine fear when remembering or seeing one whose might and punishment is feared. *Haybah* refers to fear coupled with acknowledgement of greatness and superiority. It is mostly coupled with knowledge and love. *Ijlāl* refers to the recognition of greatness which is coupled with love. Therefore, fear of Allah applies to all believers, while being in awe applies to scholars who are well aware of Allah. *Haybah* applies to those who love Allah, while *ijlāl* applies to those who are close to Allah. The degrees of fear and awe of Allah are in accordance with people's standards of knowledge. The Prophet said: 'By Allah, I am the one among you who knows Allah best and fears Him most'.<sup>29</sup>

Abu Ḥafṣ said: 'Fear is Allah's whip, with which He disciplines those who stay away from His door'. He also said: 'Fear is a lantern in one's heart: with it one sees what he has of good and evil. You run away from everyone you fear, except Allah, Mighty and Exalted. When you fear

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28 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,063; Muslim, 1,401.

29 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,101; Muslim, 2,356.

Him, you run to Him’. This means that the one who fears his Lord, runs to Him for protection. Abu Sulaymān said: ‘Whenever fear deserts a heart, that heart ends in ruin’. Ibrāhīm ibn Shaybān said: ‘When fear settles in hearts, it burns their points of desire and expels the love of this life from them’. Dhun-Nūn said: ‘People are on the right way unless they become devoid of fear. If they shed their fear, this means that they have taken the wrong way’.

Fear is not needed as and of itself. It is rather needed as a means leading to a goal. Hence, it disappears when what is feared is removed. Therefore, the people of Heaven experience neither fear nor grief. True and good fear is that which prevents a person from committing what Allah has forbidden. If it goes beyond this, it may lead to despair. Abu ‘Uthmān said: ‘True fear is to fear indulging in sin, both outwardly and in secret’. I heard Ibn Taymiyyah say: ‘The good type of fear is that which prevents you from committing what is prohibited by Allah’.

As it travels towards Allah, a believer’s heart is like a bird: love is its head, while fear and hope are its two wings. When the head and both wings are sound, the bird will fly well. If the head is cut off, the bird dies. When it is without its wings, it becomes prone to be taken by any hunter or bird of prey. However, early scholars preferred that in times of health and strength, the fear wing should be stronger than that of hope. When one is about to depart this life, the wing of hope should be stronger. This is expressed by Abu Sulaymān and others, as he said: ‘The predominant feeling at heart should be fear. If hope is predominant, it will become corrupt’.

Others said: ‘The best condition is a proper balance between hope and fear, but love should be predominant. Love is the means of transport, hope sets the way and fear is the driver. By His favour and bounty, Allah is the One who takes us home’.





## THE STAGE OF HUMILITY OF THE HEART

**Allah** says: ‘Is it not time for believers that their hearts should feel humble at the remembrance of Allah and the truth that has been bestowed from on high’. (57: 16) Ibn Mas‘ūd said: ‘Allah reproached us with this verse when we had only been Muslims for four years’.<sup>30</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās said: ‘Allah considered that believers’ hearts were slow, and He reproached them when thirteen years had passed since the beginning of the Qur’anic revelations’.<sup>31</sup> Allah says: ‘Truly, successful shall be the believers, who humble themselves in their prayer’. (23: 1-2)

What we are describing here is *khushū‘*, which means that the heart stands in front of Allah, full of humility. Al-Junayd said: ‘It is that hearts feel their humility before the One who knows all secrets’. Scholars are unanimous that it is felt by the heart, but its effect is seen on the body’s organs. Some companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against hypocrisy in humility. When they were asked to explain this, they said: ‘That the body is seen standing in humility while the heart feels no such humility’.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb saw someone bending his neck in prayer. He said to him: ‘You, man with the bent neck, lift your neck. Humility is not manifested through necks; it is a feeling at heart’. ‘Ā’ishah saw some young people walking, but showing much weakness. She asked people close by: ‘Who are these?’ They said that they were devout people. She said: ‘‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was truly devout, but he walked fast, and

<sup>30</sup> Related by Muslim, 3,027.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Vol. 14, p. 276. He attributes this to Ibn Abi Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh.

when he said something, he spoke loudly so that he was heard. When he punished, he hurt, and when he fed others, he gave them their fill'. Al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ said: 'For a person to show more of humility than he felt at heart was unbecoming'.

Ḥudhayfah said: 'The first thing of your religion you will lose is humility, and the last is prayer. There may be some praying people who are not good. There may come a time soon when one goes into the main mosque without finding in the congregation a single worshipper with true humility'. It may be asked whether a prayer which is devoid of humility will count or not. In response, it was said: 'As for its reward: only the parts when the worshipper has been alert and in humility before his Lord are credited to him. As for its status in this world and whether it needs to be offered again, scholars say that if it is mostly offered in humility and with a presence of mind, then it is definitely counted. This is the view of all scholars. If it is largely devoid of humility and the worshipper is mostly distracted, scholars hold different views. Some say that it should be repeated'.

Scholars upholding this last view say: Humility and full attention are the essence and purpose of prayer. How could a prayer which is devoid of its essence and purpose, leaving only its apparent form, be counted? If a worshipper deliberately leaves out one of its duties, it becomes invalid. That part which is deliberately left out is merely a portion of it. It is like freeing a slave in atonement for some sin, but choosing a slave who has lost one of his body parts. This will not do as atonement. A prayer that is devoid of its essence and purpose is the same as a dead slave in this case. If freeing a slave with a missing body part is unacceptable, will a dead slave be accepted?

These scholars add that prayer may be compared to a slave being given as a gift to a king. Will anyone who wants to give such a gift choose a deformed, one-eyed, blind, one-armed, sick or ugly slave? Will he give the king a dead slave? Such is the prayer a person offers to his Lord, hoping to draw closer to Him. Allah is good and He accepts

nothing but what is good. A prayer devoid of its essence and soul is not good work.

Scholars said: When the heart is deprived of the worship of presence and humility, then it is the king of the body organs that is deprived of its worship. What is the use of the worship of other organs when their king has been isolated from its worship? They add that the body organs are subservient to the heart: when it is right and healthy, they are sound, and when it is unsound, they are the same. If the heart is inattentive to its worship, their worship is more likely to be discounted. If the heart's worship is spoilt by inattention and distraction, how can its subordinates' worship be sound, when they are subject to the heart and follow its commands?

In short, the importance of sincerity and attention, with the heart being fully alert, is greater than the importance of all other duties in prayer. Yet prayer becomes invalid if the worshipper deliberately omits a required *takbīr*, or standing right during an essential part of the prayer, or omitting a letter or a portion of a word of the obligatory recitation, or the omission of one glorification of Allah, or saying *sami` Allah liman ḥamidah* or *Rabbanā wa laka al-ḥamd*, and yet say that it is valid with its essence whilst its most essential requirements are missing?<sup>32</sup>

Such is the argument of this group of scholars. It is clearly a very strong argument.

Scholars upholding the other view maintain that Islamic legislation applies to apparent actions. As for the facts of faith in one's heart, these are those to which reward and punishment apply. Allah's ruling is of two levels: one that applies in this world to physical actions and duties, and one in the life to come judging facts and intentions.

It is true that the purpose of earning Allah's reward for prayer is not

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32 This argument refers to some essential parts or sentences of the obligatory prayer. If any such part is missing, the prayer is invalid. If it is deliberately omitted, this is a grave sin. – Editor's note.

granted when prayer is offered without attention and humility. This applies to both the immediate and deferred rewards. Prayer ensures an immediate reward, with the heart being strengthened in faith, feeling the light of prayer shining, and experiencing the sweetness of worship. There is a great feeling of pleasure when one's heart is devoted to Allah, feeling its presence close to him, similar to that experienced by someone when a king or a ruler draws him near and speaks to him favourably in private. Needless to say, Allah is much higher and greater than any king.

Moreover, a worshipper who is full of attention and humility in prayer will be favoured with the high grades in the life to come, as he will be with those who are brought nearest to Allah. All this will be missed out by the worshipper who is inattentive and lacking humility. Two people may be praying side by side, in the same row, but their prayers are as widely different as the distance between the sky and the earth. But we are not speaking about this now.

If the repeat of the prayer that has been devoid of attention and humility is required in order to gain such reward, this is left to the person concerned. It is up to him to try and secure such benefit or not. As for making such a repeat obligatory, making the worshipper liable to punishment for not doing it, and applying to him the rulings concerning one who neglects prayer altogether, then this is not right.

This second view is weightier, but Allah knows best.



## THE STAGE OF HUMBLING ONESELF, i.e. *IKHBĀT*

**Allah** says: ‘Give good news to those who are humble’. (22: 34) He then explains the characteristics of such people, saying: ‘[They are those] whose hearts tremble with awe whenever Allah is mentioned, and who patiently bear whatever befalls them, attend regularly to their prayer and spend in charity out of what We provide for them’. (22: 35) In another surah, Allah says: ‘Those who believe and do righteous deeds and humble themselves before their Lord are destined for Paradise, and there shall they abide’. (11: 23) These verses use the adjectives derived from the root *khbt*, which, linguistically speaking, means ‘low land’. Hence, Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah explain these adjectives as meaning ‘humble’. Mujāhid, on the other hand, says that *mukhbit* is a person who is reassured in his belief in Allah.

Since humbling oneself is the first stage in which a traveller gets rid of hesitation, and the traveller in this sense is on a journey towards his Lord, moving on towards Him all the time, as long as his life lasts, therefore when he humbles himself before his Lord he is like a thirsty traveller who arrives at a cool and fine spring of water. He is refreshed as he drinks its cool water. A little earlier he had some doubts about continuing with his journey or whether he should return to his hometown. However, when this thirsty traveller feels refreshed, all hesitation is gone, and he no longer entertains any thought of going back. The same is the case with the one taking his journey towards Allah. When he reaches the stage of humbling himself, i.e. *ikhbāt*, he gets rid of hesitation and thoughts of turning back. He is reassured about his journey and continues it with renewed effort and enthusiasm.

When a believer has taken his position in this stage of humbling and settled himself, he will have renewed determination. He will no longer

care for people's praise or criticism. This is the case of a person who disregards what is due to him and prepares to dedicate himself for serving his Lord. His heart is open to receive the light of Allah's names and attributes and experience the sweetness of faith and certainty.

To care for people's praise or criticism is a sign of one's heart being devoid of the essence of knowledge of Allah. He has not experienced the true sense of the love and knowledge of Allah, or the sweetness of relying on Him and being reassured as a result of such reliance.

The person who is at this stage is displeased with himself, disliking it and eagerly wishing to part company with it. Scholars use the term 'self' in this respect as referring to the flawed aspects of a person's character and his foul deeds and characteristics, whether these are natural or acquired. Hence, he strongly blames himself. This is one of two explanations given to the verse: 'I need not swear by the self-reproaching soul'. Sa'īd ibn Jubayr and 'Ikrimah said: 'Such a soul reproaches a person about good and bad things. It is impatient with both good and adverse situations'.

One of the rules agreed upon by all earlier and later scholars who undertake this journey is that the human ego is a shield separating a person from his Lord, and that a person can only reach Allah when he removes this shield. Abu Yazīd said: 'I saw my Lord in a dream. I asked: "My Lord, which is the way to You?" He said: "Discard yourself and come along"'.

The ego is like a high, steep mountain along the way to Allah. Whoever embarks on this journey must necessarily take this way and traverse this mountain. Some find it very difficult, and some find it easy. It is certainly easy for those for whom Allah makes it easy. On this mountain, there are rough paths, deep areas, impediments, thorns, harmful plants, thieves who try to block the way of travellers, particularly those who travel by night. Unless travellers have the necessary equipment of faith and the lantern of certainty, which is fuelled with the oil of humbling oneself, these impediments will stop their journey.

Most travellers who find the mountain very difficult abandon their journey and go back. Satan stands at a high point on the mountain, warning people against attempting to scale it, frightening them with its difficulties. Thus, the physical difficulty of the mountain is coupled with Satan's frightening warnings and the traveller's weakened resolve. All combine to stop him on his journey.

As the traveller climbs higher on the mountain, Satan's warnings are increased in substance and urgency. When the traveller reaches Satan's place, high as it is, he finds that all the things painted as frightening are really safe. The journey now easily progresses. All impediments and difficulties disappear. The traveller sees his way broad and safe, with resting places along the way, prepared for the travellers towards Allah, the Lord of Grace.

Therefore, a person's success and happiness require good resolve, patience and perseverance, courage and firmness of heart. After all, grace is in Allah's hand. He bestows it on whom He wills. His grace is great indeed.





## THE STAGE OF CARING LITTLE FOR COMFORT

**Allah** says: ‘Know that the life of this world is but a play, a passing delight, a beautiful show, a cause of boasting among you and a quest for more riches and children. It is like the rain that causes the plants to grow, and thus gives delight to the sowers. Then it withers, and you can see it turn yellow, and in the end it crumbles into dust. In the life to come there is terrible suffering, as well as Allah’s forgiveness and His goodly acceptance. The life of this world is no more than an illusory pleasure’. (57: 20) He also says: ‘Yet you prefer this present life, while the life to come is better and longer lasting’. (87: 16-17)

The Qur’an is full of admonition encouraging believers to care little for the life of this world and its comforts. It tells us of the triviality, short duration and quick termination of this life, urging us to care more for the life to come, which is better, permanent and is certain to come soon. When Allah wills to help a person to look for what is best, He will place in his heart a sign enabling him to see the truth about this life and the future life, so that he gives priority to the life that deserves it.

I heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah bless his soul) say: ‘True asceticism means abandoning what is of no use in the life to come, and true devoutness is to abandon what you fear to bring you harm in the life to come’. This is one of the best and meaningful statements defining asceticism and devoutness. Sufyān al-Thawrī said: ‘Caring little for the comforts and luxuries of this life does not mean eating what is hard or wearing rough garments. It means the realization of its short duration’. Abu Sulaymān al-Darānī said: ‘It means abandoning what diverts one’s attention from remembrance of Allah’.

Imam Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal defines asceticism and caring little for life’s

comforts as ‘that [whereby] man is not overjoyed when life is easy and plentiful, and not saddened when it is hard and gives little’. He was asked whether a person who has one thousand dīnars<sup>33</sup> may be considered as caring little for life’s comforts. He said: ‘Yes, provided that he is not delighted when the amount is increased and not saddened when it is diminished’. Imam Ahmad said that ‘asceticism is of three grades: the first, which is the asceticism of common people is refraining from what is forbidden. The second means abandoning what is unnecessary of permissible things, and this is the asceticism of special people. The third means abandoning what diverts one’s attention from Allah, and this is the asceticism of those who have real knowledge and insight’.

All scholars of insight agree that asceticism means that a person’s heart leaves its home in this life and seeks the homes of the life to come. It is concerned with six matters that a person should care little for in order to be truly ascetic: money, image, position, people, self and all that does not lead to Allah.

This does not mean that one should reject having these. Prophets David and Solomon were among the most ascetic people of their time, yet they had wealth, women and kingdom. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the most ascetic of all mankind, and he had nine wives.

‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf, al-Zubayr and ‘Uthmān were truly ascetic, yet all of them were very rich. The Prophet’s grandson, al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī was ascetic, yet he loved women and married many wives [but did not have more than four wives at any time], and he was very rich. ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak was a leading scholar and ascetic even though he was wealthy. The same was the case of Imam al-Layth ibn Sa’d and Sufyān. They were truly ascetic, leaders in scholarship and both wealthy. One of them said: ‘Had it not been for this wealth, I would have suffered at the hands of those people’.

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33 This amount of money represented real wealth during Imam Ahmad’s lifetime.

One of the best statements defining asceticism is attributed to al-Hasan, and to others. It goes like this: ‘Caring little for life’s comforts does not mean that you prohibit what is permissible, or waste your money. It means that you have more trust in what Allah has for you than what you have in hand, and that when you suffer a misfortune, you prefer its reward to not having had it’. This sums it up well.





## THE STAGE OF DEVOUTNESS

**Allah** says: ‘Messengers! Eat of that which is wholesome, and do good deeds: I certainly have full knowledge of all that you do’. (23: 51) He also says: ‘Clean your garments’. (74: 4) Ubay ibn Ka‘b, one of the Prophet’s companions who was a scholar, said that this means that ‘one must not wear one’s garments intending to commit doing an act of treachery, injustice or sin. One should wear them intending to stay fair and clean’.

There is no doubt that keeping one’s garment cleansed, unstained by impurity, is part of the required cleansing, because it adds to the purity of actions and manners. The fact is that surface impurity leads to inner impurity. Hence, everyone is commanded to remove impurity and stay away from it when one offers one’s prayers.

What is meant is that devoutness ensures that one’s heart is cleansed and free of impurity, in the same way as water cleanses garments, removing impurities. There is an apparent and subtle interrelation between garments and hearts. In dreams, a person’s attire indicates his condition and heart.

Muslims are prohibited to wear silk, gold articles and garments made of the hide of beasts, because they give an appearance that is contrary to the heart’s humility and man’s status as Allah’s servant. A person’s heart and ego have a subtle effect on clothing, known to people of insight. They gather it through the cleanliness, smell and overall appearance of the garment. Indeed, some may distinguish the garment of a good person from that of a bad person, when they are not worn.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) summed up devoutness in a short statement, when he said: ‘Part of someone’s being a good Muslim is

that he leaves alone what does not concern him'.<sup>34</sup> This applies to all that does not concern a person of speech, looks, listening, walking, thoughts, as well as all apparent and subtle actions. It is a comprehensive definition of devoutness.

Ibrāhīm ibn Adham said: 'Devoutness means leaving alone whatever is suspicious. To leave alone what does not concern oneself means that this person leaves alone what is unnecessary'. Ishāq ibn Khalaf said: 'Devoutness in speech is more difficult than in gold and silver. Caring little for high position is more difficult than caring little for gold and silver, because these are spent in order to obtain such high position'.

Yaḥyā ibn Mu'ādh said: 'Devoutness is of two types: an apparent aspect which means that a person does not take any action except for Allah's sake; and a subtle aspect which means that one's heart is devoted entirely to Him'. He also said: 'A person who does not pay attention to little devoutness shall not be granted what is highly valuable'. An early scholar said: 'A person does not attain the essence of fearing Allah until he abandons what is perfectly acceptable for fear of committing what is unacceptable'. Some companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'We used to leave alone seventy types of permissible things for fear of committing one thing which is not permissible'.

## THE BENEFITS OF DEVOUTNESS THROUGH AVOIDING WHAT IS UNBECOMING

One of these is self-purity which means keeping away from whatever detracts from its respect, or lowers its status with Allah, His angels and devout servants, as well as other people. A person who is mindful of his self-esteem will protect himself and ensure that he refrains from whatever causes him disrespect by others. He will ensure his own purity and will seek whatever enhances his character and invites respect. A person who cares little for his own status will indulge in all sorts of bad things that invite disrespect. He will not refrain from any shameful thing.

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34 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,317.

The second benefit is to accumulate good deeds. This is achieved in two ways. The first is dedicating one's time to earning reward through good deeds. Were a person to engage in foul things, he will not have plenty of time to earn such reward because he will not be able to do good deeds. The second is to ensure that the good deeds a person has already earned remain in credit, so that they are not reduced or wiped out through balancing them against bad and foul deeds. It has been mentioned under the Stage of Repentance that bad deeds may reduce, detract from or wipe out good deeds. This means that one's credit of good deeds is definitely reduced by bad deeds. Therefore, refraining from bad deeds preserves good ones. This is the same as the case of a person who has some money. However, he borrows some more. His indebtedness will either reduce his money or wipe it out altogether.

The third benefit is the preservation of one's faith, because all Sunni scholars are agreed upon the fact that faith is increased through good deeds and reduced through committing sin. That sinful deeds weaken faith is something felt and experienced. In a hadith, the Prophet says: 'When a person commits a sin, a black spot is shown on his heart. If he repents and prays for Allah's forgiveness, his heart is cleansed. If he commits a sin again, another black spot is shown. This will continue until [blackness] covers all his heart. This is the rust to which Allah refers as He says: "No indeed! Their own deeds have cast a layer of rust over their hearts"' (83: 14)

Bad deeds blacken one's heart and extinguish its light. Faith sheds light into the heart and bad deeds extinguish or at least diminish it.

Good deeds increase the heart's light, while bad deeds extinguish its light. Allah tells us that the rust that may cover people's hearts is due to their bad deeds. Indeed, Allah casts the hypocrites off on account of their hypocrisy, as He says: 'How could you be divided into two groups concerning the hypocrites, when Allah Himself has cast them off because of their guilt?' (4: 88)





## THE STAGE OF HOPE

**Allah** says: ‘Those whom they invoke strive to obtain their Lord’s favour, vying with each other to be near Him. They hope for His grace and dread His punishment. Indeed your Lord’s punishment is something to beware of’. (17: 57) Striving for Allah’s favour means seeking to be near Him through servitude and love. The verse mentions the three states which are associated with faith: love, fear and hope.

In an authentic hadith Jābir ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī said: ‘I heard Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) say three days before he passed away: None of you should die without hoping for the best from Allah, Mighty and Exalted’.<sup>35</sup> Another authentic hadith mentions that the Prophet quotes Allah as saying: ‘I am as My servant thinks I am. Let him then think of Me as he will’.<sup>36</sup>

Hope is a motivator driving hearts on their journey towards the beloved One, i.e. Allah and the life to come, making the journey easier to undertake. The difference between hope and wishful thinking is that the latter is associated with laziness. It does not prompt a person to exert good and serious efforts. Hope is associated with the exertion of good effort and reliance on Allah. The first is the status of a person who wishes to have a piece of fertile land to cultivate and reap its produce. The second is the status of one who tills his land, sows the seeds and takes care of its plants. Hence, scholars of knowledge are all agreed that hope is not proper unless it is associated with action.

<sup>35</sup> Related by Muslim, 2,877.

<sup>36</sup> Related by Ahmad, 16,016.

Hope is of three kinds: two are good and proper while the third is shunned as it is a kind of self-deception. The two good ones are: 1) the case of a person who is obedient to Allah, does what pleases Him benefiting by His light. He hopes for His reward. 2) The case of one who has committed a sin and then turned to Allah in repentance. He hopes for His forgiveness. The third kind is the case of one who continues to indulge in sin, hoping for Allah's mercy, without doing good deeds. This is tantamount to self-deception and wishful thinking.

A person undertaking the journey towards Allah casts two looks: one at himself, his defects and faults in his actions. This puts him in fear. The other is a look at Allah's boundless favours and bounties. This opens for him the gate of hope.

Abu 'Alī al-Rūdhbārī said: 'Fear and hope are like a bird's two wings: if they are well balanced, the bird is fine and it flies safely. If either drops low, the bird suffers a defect in its flight. If both wings are gone, the bird is lost and on the point of death'. Yahyā ibn Mu'ādh said: 'What I hope from You as I am a sinner can almost outweigh my hope with my good deeds. With these I am dependent on sincerity and true dedication. How can I achieve that when I am known to have flaws and errors? In the case of my sins, I rely on Your forgiveness. Why would You not forgive me when forgiveness is one of Your attributes?'

Hope is one of the highest and honoured stages. It is on hope as well as on love and fear that the journey towards Allah is undertaken. Allah praises those who pin their hopes in Him. He says: 'In Allah's Messenger you have a good model for everyone who looks with hope to Allah and the Last Day, and always remembers Allah'. (33: 21) The Prophet (peace be upon him) quotes Allah as saying in an authentic hadith: 'Son of Adam, as long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind'.<sup>37</sup> Al-A'mash narrated from Abu Šālih; from Abu Hurayrah; from Allah's Messenger (peace

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<sup>37</sup> Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,540.

be upon him); that he said: ‘Allah, Mighty and Exalted, says: I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he mentions Me. By Allah, Allah is more delighted with His servant’s repentance than when any of you finds his lost camel in the desert. If he draws towards Me a hand’s span, I draw towards him an arm’s length; and if he draws towards Me an arm’s length, I draw towards him a fathom’s length. If he comes towards me walking, I go to him at speed’.<sup>38</sup>

The strength of hope is dependent on the standard of one’s knowledge of Allah, His names and attributes, as well as that His mercy overcomes His wrath. Had it not been for the comfort of hope, the worship of both heart and body would be stopped, and this would lead to the desertion and eventual ruin of many a place of worship, where Allah’s name is extolled. Indeed, without the comfort of hope, physical worship would not be attended to. Hope is increased in line with the degree and strength of love. Every hopeful person is necessarily in awe, and as such his hope in his beloved One is at its strongest. The same applies to fear. He fears to fall in disgrace in His sight, which may lead to his expulsion and rejection. Thus, his fear is at its highest, while his hope from his beloved One is based only on love. As such, he pins his hopes on Him before he meets Him. When he arrives at his destination and reaches Him, his hopes are at their strongest, because his spirit is alive, and his heart is feeling the blessings of his beloved One. Allah looks at him with a pleased eye, and makes him ready to receive His love. He bestows on him what is necessary for the loving one in order to enjoy the comfort and happiness of being near and close to Him. Thus, his hope is at its highest and most perfect and complete stage.

Reflect well on this position and you are bound to find out some great secrets behind worship of Allah and loving Him.

Every love is accompanied with fear and hope, and the deeper its roots are in the heart of the loving person, the greater are his fears and hopes.

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38 Related by al-Bukhari, 7,405; Muslim, 2,675.

However, the fear of the one in love is unlike that of one who does wrong; it is not accompanied by a gloomy feeling. Likewise, the hope of the one in love is unlike that of a hired person: it is not attended by any flaw. How could the hope of the one in love be compared to that of a hired person when the difference between their hopes is the same as the difference between their respective status?

In short, hope is necessary for everyone who embarks on his journey towards Allah. Were a person of knowledge to be without hope even for a moment, he would almost be in ruin. He always moves between a sinful action and hope for its forgiveness; a flaw he hopes to mend; a good deed which he hopes to be accepted; a steady fulfilment of his duties and hopes to always maintain it; and a position of closeness to Allah he hopes to attain. Everyone who is on the journey towards Allah will always be in these conditions or some of them.

Allah has no grievance with His servant and He has no desire to punish him for it. He is not pleased to inflict such punishment. It does not increase His kingdom by an atom's weight. If Allah forgives all mankind all their sins, such forgiveness does not decrease His kingdom by an atom's weight. How, then, when His mercy is greater than His punishment and faster and more powerful than His wrath? From this we learn that He has committed Himself to be merciful.

## THE FRUITS OF HOPE

Hope yields a great variety of fruits including:

1. Demonstrating one's status as a servant of Allah and that one is in need of Him and His kindness. A hopeful servant will manifest that he cannot do without Allah's favours for a moment.
2. Allah, Exalted and Glorious, loves that His servants remain hopeful of His bounty and appeal to Him for it. He is the true King who is the Most Generous and whose treasures are inexhaustible. What

the generous one loves most is to be requested with hope. A hadith quotes the Prophet as saying: ‘Allah is displeased with whomever does not make requests of Him’.<sup>39</sup> Whoever makes a request of Allah is hopeful, and whoever does not pin his hopes on Allah incurs His displeasure.

3. Hope is a driver leading the one undertaking the journey towards Allah, making it easier for him and urging him to continue on his way. Without hope no one would have undertaken the journey, because fear on its own does not motivate a person to start on his journey. What motivates him is love, while fear disturbs him and hope encourages and drives him.
4. Hope places a person at the threshold of Allah’s love and pushes him forward. The greater his hope is and the more he gets of what he hopes for the greater is his gratitude and love of Allah.
5. His hope takes him to the highest position, which is that of thankfulness. This is the sum of servitude. When his hope is fulfilled, it invites more thanks and gratitude.
6. Hope gives a person better knowledge of Allah’s names and their meanings. Hope involves appealing and supplicating by Allah’s names that denote kindness and bestow favours. Allah says: ‘Allah has the finest names, so appeal to Him by these’. (7: 180)
7. As stated earlier, love is inseparable from hope: the two supplement and strengthen each other.
8. Fear necessitates hope, as hope necessitates fear. Every hopeful person fears and every one in fear hopes. Therefore, it is good that hope is entertained where fear is appropriate. Allah says: ‘What is the matter with you that you behave with insolence towards Allah?’ (72: 13) Many commentators say that this means: ‘Why do you behave showing no fear of Allah’s might?’ The verse uses the

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39 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,373; Ibn Mājah, 3,827.

word hope in the sense of fear. Commentators say that the two go together.

9. When a person entertains great hopes of Allah, and Allah grants him what he hopes for, he will find it better and more of a favour than being given what he has not hoped for.
10. Allah wants His servants to complete the various positions of servitude and worship including humility, reliance on Him and seeking His help, fear and hope, patience in adversity, gratitude, acceptance, devotion, etc. Therefore, He has made His servant liable to commit sin and He tests him through this, so that His servant completes his worship by repentance, which is one of the most loved aspects of worship by Allah. The same applies to hope and fear.
11. Hope involves waiting for, and expectation of Allah's grace and bounty. This makes a person's heart always present in remembering Allah, turning to Him, remembering His names and attributes and partaking of what each name and attribute denotes.



## THE STAGE OF WATCHFULNESS

**Allah** says: ‘Allah is well aware of the most stealthy glance, and of everything the heart would conceal’. (40: 19) In the hadith that mentions the Angel Gabriel questioning the Prophet, he asks him about *ihsān* [which means: doing things well]. The Prophet said: ‘It is to worship Allah as though you see Him, and while you do not see Him, He certainly sees you’.<sup>40</sup>

Watchfulness means that a person always knows and has the certainty that Allah is fully aware of all that he says and does openly and all that he conceals. His constant knowledge and certainty refer to this watchfulness. It is the outcome of knowing that Allah watches him, listening to him, aware of what he does at every moment and every eye wink. The one who does not have such awareness does not attain the status of those who are in the early stages, let alone the status of those who are farther ahead.

Dhun-Nūn said: ‘The mark of watchfulness is to prefer what Allah has revealed, glorify what Allah has glorified and belittle what He has belittled’. Abu Ḥafṣ said to Abu ‘Uthmān al-Naysābūrī: ‘When you sit in your circle, admonish your heart and soul. Do not be pleased by seeing them congregating to listen to you. They merely watch what you present, but Allah watches your inner self’.

The leaders on the way towards Allah are in agreement that being watchful of Allah in one’s thoughts ensures His protection in the open. Whoever watches Allah in private enjoys Allah’s protection in his movement in secret and in the open.

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<sup>40</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 50; Muslim, 9.

Watchfulness is to worship Allah by His names: the Watchful of All, the Protector, the All-Knowing, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing. Whoever understands these names and worships in accordance with their meanings fulfils the meaning of watchfulness.



## THE STAGE OF SINCERITY

**Allah** says: ‘Yet they were ordered to do nothing more than to serve Allah, to worship Him alone with sincere dedication and purity of faith’. (98: 5) Allah also instructs His Messenger, saying: ‘Say: My prayers, my worship, my living and my dying are for Allah alone, the Lord of all worlds. He has no partner. Thus have I been commanded, and I shall be the first of those who surrender themselves to Him’. (6: 162-163) ‘[Allah] has created death as well as life, so that He may put you to a test to show who of you is best in conduct.’ (67: 2)

Al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ said: ‘It means the most sincere and most right. People asked him what does this mean? He said: ‘A sincere deed which is not right will not be accepted. Likewise, a right but insincere deed is unacceptable. To be accepted, a deed must be both sincere and right. Sincere means that it is done for Allah’s sake, and a right action is that which is consistent with the Sunnah’. He then recited the verse that says: ‘Say: “I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your Allah is the One and only Allah. Hence, whoever expects to meet his Lord [on Judgement Day], let him do what is right, and in the worship due to his Lord admit no one as partner”’. (18: 110)

Allah also says: ‘Who could be of better faith than he who surrenders himself completely to Allah, does what is good’. (4: 125) Complete self-surrender to Allah means sincerity of purpose and doing one’s deed for His sake alone. Doing it well means following the example and the practice of Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him).

The Prophet said to Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ: ‘If you live longer and you do something seeking Allah’s pleasure, you will enhance your status

and standard'.<sup>41</sup> The Prophet mentions the first three people to be thrown into the Fire: one who recites the Qur'an, one who fights in jihad and one who gives much to charity. They only did such deeds so that they would gain reputation as a good reciter, or as a brave person, or one who is generous and charitable. In other words, their deeds were not done purely for Allah's sake.<sup>42</sup> A sacred, or *qudsī* hadith, quotes Allah as saying: 'Allah, Blessed and Exalted, said: I am the least in need of having an associate. Therefore, whoever does something for someone else's sake as well as Mine will have that action rejected by Me and left to him and his associate'. In another hadith the Prophet says: 'Allah looks neither at your bodies nor your forms, but He looks at your hearts'.<sup>43</sup> In reference to the meat of sacrificed animals, Allah says: 'Never does their meat or their blood reach Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him'. (22: 37)

Scholars define sincerity in different ways, but they congregate in meaning. It is defined as offering acts of worship, including voluntary ones, for Allah's sake alone. Another definition suggests that it means making sure of having no consideration for people, including oneself, when doing a good deed. To be truthful requires steering from giving consideration to oneself. A sincere person is one free of hypocrisy, and a truthful person is one free of self-admiration. Sincerity is incomplete unless coupled with truthfulness, and truthfulness is incomplete unless coupled with sincerity. They need patience to be complete.

Other scholars said: sincerity means forgetting the observation of people by always looking up to Allah. Whoever puts up a false appearance before people loses his status with Allah. Al-Fuḍayl said: 'To abandon good deeds for people's sake is an act of hypocrisy, and to do something for people's sake is an act of associating partners with Allah. Sincerity is to be free of both'.

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41 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,295; Muslim, 1,628.

42 Related by Muslim, 1,905.

43 Related by Muslim, 2,564.

## WRONGS AFFECTING ACTIONS

Any of three wrongs may affect a person's work: taking pride in it, seeking remuneration for it, and personal satisfaction and pleasure.

What will rid a person from taking pride in his work is to observe Allah's favour as He enabled him to do what is good. He thus realizes that he only managed to do his good deed through Allah's will, not his own will. It is as Allah says: 'You cannot will except by the will of Allah, Lord of all the worlds'. (81: 29) Had anyone been left to himself, he would not have done any good deed. Man's soul is ignorant, unfair, lazy and prefers to indulge in the gratification of its desires. It is the source of every evil. As such, it cannot be the source of anything good.

Whatever good a person does is from Allah and through Him, not from or through that person himself. It is as Allah says: 'Were it not for Allah's favour upon you and His grace, none of you would have ever been pure. It is Allah who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity'. (24: 21) The people of Heaven say: 'All praise is due to Allah who has guided us to this. Had He not given us guidance, we would certainly have not found the right path'. (7: 43) Whatever goodness a person has is a favour granted to him by Allah as an act of His grace. He should be praised for it.

In short, what rids a person of this wrong is knowing his Lord and knowing himself.

What rids him of the wrong of seeking remuneration for his deed is his knowledge that he is merely a servant of Allah. As such, he deserves neither remuneration nor wages for serving his Lord. He merely renders his service as a duty applicable to him by his status. What his Master gives him of reward is out of His grace and bounty. It is not wages he earns. Wages are given to a free person, but a servant of Allah is not.

Two things rid a person of the wrong of personal satisfaction and pleasure at his deed. The first is looking at the defects of his deed and

his shortcomings in doing it, as also his own personal share of it and the share Satan has in it. There is hardly a deed done by a human being without a share of it belonging to Satan, little as it may be. There is also another share of it for the person doing it. The Prophet was asked about a person turning his eyes sideways during prayer. He said: ‘It is a portion of his prayer Satan stealthily snatches’.<sup>44</sup> If this is the case of turning one’s eyes sideways, what about his heart turning to someone other than Allah? That is the greatest portion Satan gains of a person’s worship.

The other thing is the person’s awareness of what Allah deserves of the rights of worship and servitude, its apparent and hidden manners, and condition. He should also realize that he is too weak to be able to perform it fulfilling all its dues, so as to please his Lord. A scholar of knowledge knows that nothing of his deeds is really appropriate to be offered to Allah. He is unhappy with the quality of his deeds, and feels too ashamed to face his Lord, presenting his deeds to Him.

Thinking low of himself and his deeds, and his dislike of his ego will stop him from being happy with his work and being pleased with himself.



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44 Related by al-Bukhari, 751.

## THE STAGE OF STEADFASTNESS

**Allah** says: ‘As for those who say: “Our Lord is Allah”, and then steadfastly pursue the right way. For these, the angels will descend, saying: “Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of paradise which you have been promised”’. (41: 30)

Abu Bakr, the most truthful of the Muslim community and the best in steadfastness, was asked what being steadfast meant. He said: ‘That you do not associate any partner whatsoever with Allah’. He meant holding steadfastly to the pure concept of Allah’s oneness. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: ‘Steadfastness means that one should be steadfast in the implementation of commands and prohibitions. One must never try to be evasive like a fox’. I personally heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah say: ‘They remained steadfast in their love and worship of Allah, never turning right nor left away from Him’.

In his authentic anthology of hadiths, Muslim quotes Sufyān ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Thaqafī who said: ‘I said: Messenger of Allah, tell me something of Islam about which I will not need to ask anyone after you’. The Prophet said: ‘Say: I believe in Allah, then steadfastly pursue the right way’.<sup>45</sup> Thawbān mentions that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Remain steadfast, you will not always reckon. Learn that prayer is the best of your deeds. None but a believer maintains the status of valid ablution, i.e. *wudu*’.<sup>46</sup>

What is required of every Muslim is steadfastness, which means to do what is right. If one finds this very difficult, then one should try to remain

<sup>45</sup> Related by Muslim, 38.

<sup>46</sup> Related by Ibn Mājah, 277.

close to it. If one goes below this, then this is a case of negligence and loss. A hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah quotes the Prophet (peace be upon him) as saying: ‘Seek what is right, and stay close. Learn that no one attains safety through his own work’. People said: ‘Not even you, Messenger of Allah?’ He said: ‘Not even me, unless Allah bestows on me His mercy and favours’.<sup>47</sup>

In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) refers to all religious situations, stating first the order to be steadfast, which means doing what is right and proper in intention, speech and action. In the above-quoted hadith narrated by Thawbān, the Prophet tells his companions that they are unlikely to be able to achieve this. Therefore, he gives them the next best, which is staying close to it, as much as they can. It is like one shooting at a target: if he does not hit it, he may be close. Nevertheless, the Prophet tells us that neither steadfastness nor staying close to it guarantees safety on the Day of Judgement. No one should rely on his or her own deeds, thinking that they are good enough to ensure safety. Safety is only attained through Allah’s mercy and forgiveness.

*Istiqāmah*, which is translated as steadfastness, is a comprehensive word covering the main teachings of Islam. It means standing in front of Allah holding on to the truth and the fulfilment of the pledge to Him. It applies to speech, action, condition and intention. Steadfastness in these means that they are undertaken for Allah, by His help and in fulfilment of His command.

A discerning scholar said: ‘Be the one who is steadfast, not one seeking honour. Your ego wants to have honour, but your Lord demands that you remain steadfast’. I heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah say: ‘The greatest honour is to remain steadfast’.

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47 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,673; Muslim, 2,816.

## TWO MAIN PRINCIPLES OF STEADFASTNESS

The early scholars mention two main principles to ensure steadfastness: economy in action and adherence to the Sunnah. The Evil One smells and tests a person's heart. If he finds some leaning towards deviation and turning away from proper adherence to the Sunnah, he will work on him to take him away from it. If, on the contrary, he finds him keen to adhere to it, he realizes that he cannot turn him away from it. Therefore, he tells him to stick to it and do more of it, so that he goes beyond the proper balance. Satan will continue to tell him that what he does is good and earns reward, so he must do more and more of it. He must not slacken or give himself rest. He keeps urging him thus until that person is well beyond the properly balanced situation.

An early scholar said: 'In everything Allah has ordered, Satan tries two ways: one leading to negligence and one to excess. Satan does not mind which of the two gives him his purpose'.

Advising his companion, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, to be moderate in his voluntary worship, the Prophet said: 'O 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr: every worker has a period of enthusiasm, and every enthusiasm slackens. The one whose slackening is towards the Sunnah is successful, but the one who slackens, adopting a deviation, fails and loses'.<sup>48</sup>

The best policy is to exert good effort with moderation, and sincerity coupled with following the Sunnah.



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48 Related by Ahmad, 6,764.



## THE STAGE OF RELIANCE

**Allah** says: ‘In Allah you should place your trust, if you are true believers’. (5: 23) In reference to the Prophet’s companions, He says: ‘When other people warned them: “A big force has gathered against you, so fear them”, that only strengthened their faith and they answered: “Allah is enough for us; He is the best Guardian”’. (173) A hadith entered in the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* anthologies mentions: ‘Allah’s Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Seventy thousand of my community shall enter Heaven without being held to account”. People asked: “Who are these, Messenger of Allah?” He said: “These are the ones who seek neither supplication nor cauterisation as a cure, nor do they attribute anything to bad omens, but they place their trust in their Lord”’.<sup>49</sup>

Ibn ‘Abbās narrated that Allah’s Messenger used to say: ‘My Lord, to You I submit myself; in You I believe; on You I rely; to You do I turn; and for You I fight. My Lord, I seek refuge with Your might lest you leave me to go astray. There is no deity other than You. You are the Ever-Living who does not die while the jinn and humans die’.<sup>50</sup>

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb mentions that the Prophet said: ‘Were you to rely on Allah as He should be relied upon, He would have given you your provisions in the same way as He provides for birds: they start the day hungry and return in the evening with full stomachs’.<sup>51</sup>

Another hadith narrated by Anas quotes the Prophet: ‘Whoever says

49 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,705; Muslim, 220. This is Muslim’s version, but al-Bukhari’s version adds that they ‘do not pay attention to bad omens’.

50 Related by al-Bukhari, 7,383 & 7,385; Muslim, 2,717.

51 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,344; Ibn Mājah, 4,164.

[when he leaves home]: “In Allah’s name I start; in Allah I place my trust. No power has any effect except by Allah’s will”, will be responded to by: “You are well guided, spared [harm] and protected [against evil]”. One devil will say to another: “How can you work on one who is well guided, spared and protected?”<sup>52</sup>

Placing one’s trust in Allah and relying on Him is one half of religion, and the other half is devotion. Religion is seeking help and offering worship. Reliance on Allah is seeking His help and devotion is worship.

This stage is the broadest and most accommodating of all stages, and it will always be full of people, because of the breadth of its purpose, the numerous needs of people, the generality of reliance on Allah and the fact that it is done by believers, unbelievers, Allah-fearing people and sinners, birds, beasts and all animals. Indeed, all dwellers on earth and elsewhere, whether required to believe or not, are in a position of reliance on Allah, although the nature of their reliance differs.

Allah’s closest people rely on Him in doing what will please Him of their action, in His conduct of the affairs of His creation. They rely on Him in their belief, support of His faith, keeping His word supreme, fighting His enemies, and in doing whatever deeds He likes and in implementing His commands.

A grade lower is that of the one who relies on Allah in remaining steadfast and staying on the right course, looking for nothing from other people. Another step lower is the grade of those who rely on Allah in getting what they hope to have, such as provisions, curing an illness, support against an enemy, getting married, having children, etc.

Further down is the grade of those who rely on Allah in having what He neither likes nor approves of, such as injustice, aggression, committing all types of sin. In the majority of cases, those who seek such matters do not achieve their goals except through seeking Allah’s help and relying

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52 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 5,090; al-Tirmidhī, 3,426.

on Him. Indeed, their reliance may be stronger than that of many devout people. Therefore, they take great risks, relying on Allah to keep them safe and enable them to have what they want.

The best kind of reliance is to rely on Allah in what is a duty. I mean a duty towards the truth, other people, or oneself. Its broadest and most beneficial aspect is relying on Allah in influencing others in some religious purpose or repelling something that is harmful to religion. This was the sort of reliance demonstrated by prophets in establishing the divine faith and repelling the work of evil doers. It is also the reliance of those who are heirs to the prophets. Beyond that, people rely on Allah to obtain their goals and benefits. Some may rely on Him to gain a kingdom, while others rely on Him to have a loaf of bread.

Whoever truly and sincerely relies on Allah for a particular purpose shall have it. If it is something Allah likes and is pleased with, that person will have its good outcome. If it displeases Allah, that person will have the bad consequences of it. If it is of the permissible type, the person will receive the benefit of his reliance on Allah, but not the benefit of what he achieves through such reliance, unless he uses it for what pleases Allah.

Imam Ahmad said: ‘Reliance is an act of one’s heart’. Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh was asked: ‘When is a person considered to rely on Allah’. He said: ‘If he is happy to place his trust in Allah’. Some explain reliance as placing trust in Allah, being reassured and happy with that. Dhun-Nūn said: ‘It is to abandon one’s own management and discard one’s strength and power’.

All scholars agree that reliance on Allah is not contrary to taking the necessary measures. Indeed, it does not properly happen without taking the necessary measures. Without doing them, it is mere laziness and false reliance. The fact is that reliance on Allah is a situation that combines several matters, and it does not truly happen unless they are all in place.

## THE GRADES OF RELIANCE ON Allah

The first is to know Allah and His attributes of might, care, control, and that all matters are known to Him and done by His will and power. Such knowledge is man's first step in placing his trust in Allah and relying on Him.

The second grade is the confirmation of causes and effects. Reliance on Allah is one of the main and most important causes to achieve what is desired and repel what is to be avoided. A person who denies causes does not properly rely on Allah, but reliance on Him requires that one does not rely on causes. In fact, one should not attach any importance to them. In a person's heart and mind, what is to be done is done by Allah's will, not by any cause, while he physically ensures that they are taken care of.

The third grade is that one's heart has a firm hold in reliance on Allah alone. Reliance on Allah is not done properly unless it is felt to be on Him alone. When there is any association with others, then reliance on Allah is faulty. The more total the reliance on Allah is the more proper and correct it is. When man turns to anyone else, such a turn takes away a portion of his heart, and his reliance on Allah is diminished in relation to it. Hence, some people suggest that reliance on Allah is incorrect without dismissing the causes. This is true, but they should be dismissed in as far as one's heart is concerned, but not in relation to other organs. In other words, man should rely on the causes physically, but may not rely on them mentally. His reliance is on Allah alone, which requires taking the necessary measures.

The fourth grade is that one's heart relies totally on Allah, reassured of His help, so that there will be no mental interference by measures and causes, or trusting to them. In fact, one should dismiss them out of heart and mind, thinking only about the One who has made them causes. This is manifested by caring little for causes and whether they are working in a person's favour or not. His heart must not react to whatever happens to

such causes, because his reliance on Allah and trust in Him strengthens him against placing any hope on them or fearing their failure. He should be like a person who suddenly finds himself facing a mighty enemy whom he cannot overcome. He looks around and he finds an open fort. Allah enables him to enter the fort and then He causes its gate to be shut. He sees his enemy outside the fort, unable to enter it. To fear his enemy in this situation is meaningless.

The same applies to one who is given one pound by a king, but then it is stolen. The king tells him not to care as he has plenty more, and he promises to give him several pounds when he comes to him. If the man has no doubt that the king will fulfil his promise, he will not be grieved by the loss.

The fifth grade is to think well of Allah. The better you think of Allah and the more you pin your hopes on Him, the better is your reliance on Him. Hence, some scholars maintain that reliance on Allah means thinking well of Him. The fact is that when a person thinks well of Allah, he will rely on Him. It is inconceivable that anyone may rely on someone while thinking ill of him, or entertaining no hope of some help coming from him.

The sixth grade means that the heart surrenders itself to Him and looks up to Him for everything. This is the meaning of what some say whereby reliance on Allah means total acceptance of what Allah determines for you. This excludes Allah's commands and prohibitions. It applies to what Allah does for and with you, not what He bids you to do.

Grade seven is that of assigning the matter to Allah. This is the essence, spirit and truth of reliance on Allah. It means that one entrusts all one's affairs to Allah, by choice and appeal, not as a matter of necessity or under the pressure of circumstances. It is like a weak, helpless child assigning his affairs to his father whom he knows to be compassionate, merciful and caring for him and his interests. The child realizes that his father manages his affairs better than he can manage them for himself. He ensures all that is best for his child. The child knows that he cannot

bear the burden of looking after himself and does not know what suits him best. He also knows that his father looks after him better. So he entrusts his affairs to his father, having experienced his compassion.

When a person has established himself in grade seven, he moves to the next grade, which is the one of acceptance, which is the fruit of reliance on Allah. Our teacher used to say: ‘Two conditions involve every matter: reliance on Allah before it and acceptance of the outcome after it. Whoever relies on Allah before doing something and accepts what Allah determines for him after it, fulfils the requirements of servitude’.

I may add that this is the meaning of the supplication of *istikhārah* which the Prophet has taught us. This is the supplication requesting Allah to choose for us the option He knows to be better for us. The supplication starts with: ‘My Lord, I seek the help of Your knowledge in making a choice and seek Your assistance based on Your power, and appeal to You to bestow on me some of Your limitless favour’. This expresses reliance on Allah and assigning the choice to Him. He then says: ‘For You are powerful and I am not, and You know all, while I do not know. You are the One Who knows all that cannot be perceived’. This is an acknowledgement of one’s lack of knowledge, ability and power, and an appeal to Allah by His attributes which He loves that His servants appeal to Him by. The supplicant then prays to Allah to grant him the matter in hand if it is in his best interests in the short or long run, and to keep it away from him if He knows it to be disadvantageous to him in the short or long run. This is the matter he supplicates for. What is left is to be happy with whatever Allah determines for him in respect of that matter. Therefore, he says: ‘Give me what is good for me whatever it may be and make me happy with it’.<sup>53</sup> This supplication includes acknowledgement of Allah’s perfect knowledge and facts of faith which incorporate reliance on Allah and assigning matters to Him before undertaking something, and acceptance of the outcome after it. As we said earlier, such acceptance of and satisfaction with the outcome

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<sup>53</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 6,382.

is the mark of proper and correct reliance. Without it, the reliance is defective.

When a person has gone through all these eight grades, he completes the position of relying on Allah and takes a firm step in it.

Reliance on Allah is one of the broadest positions relating to Allah's fine names, as it is related especially to Allah's names indicating action and those indicating attributes. It relates to Allah's names: *al-Ghaffār* the Forgiving, *al-Tawwāb* the One who accepts repentance, *al-'Afuw* the One who pardons, *al-Raḥīm* the Ever-Merciful, as well as *al-Fattāḥ* the One who opens, *al-Wahhāb* the One who gives gifts, *al-Razzāq* the Provider, *al-Mu'īt* the One who gives in plenty, *al-Muḥsin* the Most Kind. It also relates to other names of Allah, such as *al-Mu'izz* the One who assigns high status, *al-Mudhill*, the One who inflicts humbleness, *al-Khāfiḍ* the One who brings down, *al-Rāfi'* the One who raises high, *al-Māni'* the One who withholds. These last few names of Allah may be used in relying on Allah to humiliate His enemies and deny such enemies the means to achieve victory. Thus reliance relates to Allah's names of ability and will. It is generally related to all Allah's fine names. Hence some leading scholars explain it as having true knowledge of Allah. They mean that the position of relying on Allah is commensurate with a person's knowledge of Allah. The better his knowledge the stronger is his reliance.

One of the aspects of reliance on Allah is to forgo asking people for anything whatsoever. To ask people is normally disapproved of except for an emergency, in the same way as the prohibition of eating carrion is permissible for one who is in a dire situation of starvation and has nothing else to eat. Imam Ahmad states that asking people is not a duty in such a case of emergency. The same is the view of our teacher. I heard him once saying about asking people: 'It is unfair in relation to Allah's rights, unfair to people and unfair to oneself'. As for Allah's rights, it is unfair because it involves sowing humility before anyone other than Allah, and standing in a weak position before someone other than the Creator, requesting His creation rather than the Creator Himself.

It is unfair to people because it means asking them for what they have. They dislike the one who asks and prefer that he does not ask them for anything they have. They love their property and dislike the one who wants to take it. It is also unfair to oneself because such a person puts himself in the disgraceful position of asking someone like himself. Indeed, the one who asks may be one of a higher position and status than the one being asked. Hence, the request lowers the man's position and humiliates him.

Thus, asking people is like a poor person begging from a similarly poor person. When one makes one's request to Allah, Allah loves the supplicant and is pleased with him, while man dislikes the one who comes to him with a request and looks down on him. One poet said: 'Allah is displeased with you if you do not supplicate to Him, while a human being is displeased if you put a request to him'. It is unbecoming of Allah's servant to stand in the position of asking people when Allah has all that he hopes for.

'Awf ibn Mālik al-Ashja'ī narrated: 'We were nine people, or eight, or seven with Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) when he said: "Will you not pledge to Allah's Messenger?" We had only recently pledged our allegiance, so we said: We have given you our pledges, Messenger of Allah. Then he said: "Will you not pledge to Allah's Messenger?" We said: We have given you our pledges, Messenger of Allah. Then he said: "Will you not pledge to Allah's Messenger?" We put out our hands and said: We have given you our pledges, Messenger of Allah. What shall we pledge to you? He said: "You pledge that you worship Allah alone, associating no partners with Him, attend to your five [daily] prayers, obey – and he whispered a word in private – and not ask of people anything". I have seen some of these people and any of them might drop his whip but he would not ask anyone to pick it up and hand it to him'.<sup>54</sup>



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54 Related by Muslim, 1.043.

## THE STAGE OF PATIENCE

**Imam** Ahmad said that Allah mentions patience in the Qur'an nearly ninety times. The Muslim community unanimously agrees that it is obligatory. It is half of faith, because one half of the faith is patience and the other half is thanksgiving. It occurs in the Qur'an in sixteen different forms.

1. It is ordered, as in Allah saying: 'Believers, seek strength in patience and prayer'. (2: 253)
2. The prohibition of the opposite, as in: 'Remain, then, patient in adversity, just as all messengers endowed with firm resolve bore themselves with patience. Do not seek to hasten their punishment'. (46: 35) 'Do not turn your backs to them in flight.' (8: 15)
3. Praising the ones who are patient, as in Allah's saying: 'They are patient in misfortune and adversity and in time of peril. Such are those who have proved themselves true, and such are the Allah-fearing'. (2: 177)
4. That Allah confirms that He loves them. He says: 'Allah loves those who are patient in adversity'. (3: 146).
5. He confirms that He is with them, which is unlike the general companionship of knowing their conditions and affairs. It is a special condition that ensures their protection, support and providing help, as He says: 'Allah is with those who are patient in adversity'. (8: 46)
6. Allah confirms that patience in adversity achieves what is best for those who put it into effect, as He says: 'To endure patiently is far

better for those who are patient in adversity'. (16: 126)

7. That their reward will be on the basis of their best deeds, as Allah says: 'We shall certainly grant those who are patient in adversity their reward according to the best that they ever did'. (16: 96)
8. Allah confirms that their reward shall be without reckoning, as He says: 'Those who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond reckoning'. (39: 10)
9. Good news is given to them in very general terms, as Allah says: 'We shall certainly try you with a certain measure of fear and hunger, and with diminution of wealth, lives and crops. But give glad tidings to those who remain patient in adversity'. (2: 155)
10. Support and added strength are guaranteed for them, as in the following Qur'anic verse: 'Indeed, He will, if you are patient in adversity and fear Allah, and if they [the unbelievers] suddenly attack you, your Lord will supply you with five thousand angels swooping down'. (3: 125) In the same vein, the Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'Know that support is granted when patience in adversity is shown'.<sup>55</sup>
11. Allah mentions that the ones who are patient in adversity are the people of strong resolve, as He says: 'As for the one who is patient in adversity and forgives; this requires the exercise of a truly strong resolve'. (42: 43)
12. Allah states that only the people who demonstrate patience in adversity are the recipients of good deeds and their reward, as well as truly great fortunes. He says: 'Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better, and he who is your enemy will become as close to you as a true friend. Yet none will attain this except those who are patient in adversity; none will attain it except those endowed with truly great fortune'. (41: 34-35)

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<sup>55</sup> Related by Ahmad, 2,308.

13. We are informed that only the people who are patient in adversity get the full benefit of Allah’s signs, as He says: ‘We have sent forth Moses with Our revelations, saying, ‘Lead your people out of darkness into the light, and remind them of the Days of Allah’. Surely in this there are signs for every one who is patient in adversity and deeply grateful [to Allah]’. (14: 5)
14. Allah confirms that earning the desired reward, remaining safe of what is feared and admittance into Heaven are ensured through patience in adversity, as He says: ‘The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: “Peace be upon you, because you have persevered”. Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode’. (13: 23-24)
15. Patience in adversity ensures that the one who is patient attains a leading position. I heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah say: ‘Leadership in the faith is attained through patience in adversity and through certainty’. He then recited the verse that says: ‘We raised among them leaders who, so long as they remained patient and steadfast and had sure faith in Our revelations, spread guidance in accordance with Our command’. (32: 24)
16. Patience is coupled with many situations that belong to Islam and belief. Allah associates it with certainty, faith, fear of Allah, reliance on Him, showing gratitude, good action and compassion. As such, in relation to faith, patience in adversity is like the head in relation to the body. Anyone who has no patience in adversity is devoid of faith, in the same way as one without a head cannot have a body. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: ‘We attained the best life through patience’. In an authentic hadith, the Prophet describes patience in adversity as light.<sup>56</sup> He also says: ‘Whoever endures in patience, Allah will help him to endure’.<sup>57</sup>

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56 Related by Muslim, 223.

57 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,469; Muslim, 1,053.

In an authentic hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) says: ‘Wonderful is a believer’s case. Everything that happens to him is good, and this is so for none other than a believer. If he encounters what is pleasant, he is grateful and this is good for him; and if he suffers an adversity, he remains patient and this is good for him’.<sup>58</sup> In another highly authentic hadith, ‘A black woman came once to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: “I suffer from severe epilepsy and parts of my body get exposed. Will you please pray to Allah for me?” The Prophet said to her: “You may wish to endure it with patience and you will be in Heaven; or you may wish me to pray to Allah to cure you”. She said: “I will endure it with patience”. She added: “But parts of my body get exposed, so pray to Allah for me not to be exposed”. The Prophet prayed for her’.<sup>59</sup>

The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered the Anṣār to remain patient when they were faced with selfishness after he had passed away, until they met him by the lake given to him on the Day of Judgement. He further ordered believers to remain patient when they meet their enemies, and when they suffer a calamity. He mentioned that patience is hardest at the initial stage. He recommended the one who suffers a calamity to remain patient and endure for Allah’s sake, as this will lessen his suffering and ensure his reward. By contrast, panic, impatience and complaining increase his suffering and loses him his reward. The Prophet further mentions that patience is good in every way. He says: ‘No one has been given anything better and more plentiful than patient endurance’.<sup>60</sup>

Patience is of three types: patience in doing what Allah has ordered His servants; patience in resisting disobedience of Allah, and patience in adversity which is a trial by Allah. The first two types are patience concerning action, while the third is patience in a situation a person has no part in bringing about.

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58 Related by Muslim, 2,999.

59 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,652; Muslim, 2,576.

60 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,469; Muslim, 1,053.

I heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah bless his soul) say: ‘Joseph’s patient endurance of disobeying his mistress concerning what she wanted of him was more valuable and perfect than patiently enduring his brothers’ action when they threw him in a well, parted him from his parents, and abandoned him to be sold as a slave. All these were done to him and he had no choice and no role in them. In this situation, he had no resort other than to suffer patiently. By contrast, his refusal to commit the sin with his mistress was out of his own choice, resisting his own desire. There were many elements of temptation: he was a young man with strong desire, unmarried and having no legitimate resort to satisfy his desire. Moreover, he was a stranger, and strangers do not feel embarrassed as would a person living among relatives and friends in his own hometown. He was a slave, and slaves do not have the same restraint as free men. Moreover, the woman was pretty, of high position and his own mistress. Besides, they were all alone and she was the one encouraging him and feeling a strong urge. She even threatened him with humiliation and imprisonment if he continued to resist her. In spite of all these factors, he chose to refuse her and remained patient, so as not to disobey Allah. This was a far more difficult endurance than the testing of his patience when he was thrown in the well, which was not a matter of his own choosing.

Ibn Taymiyyah also used to say: ‘Patience in the fulfilment of what Allah has commanded is more perfect and worthy than patience in refraining from what is forbidden. Doing what Allah has bidden is better liked by the Legislator than refraining from disobeying Him, and the evil of leaving his bidding undone is more disliked by Allah than doing what He has forbidden’.

## **ANOTHER CLASSIFICATION OF PATIENCE**

Patience may be differently classified into: patience by Allah’s help; patience for Allah’s sake; and patience with Allah. The first is that which relies on Allah’s help, in the knowledge that it is He who enables

His servant to endure. Without His help one cannot be patient in any situation. He says: ‘Endure, then, with patience, remembering always that it is only Allah who helps you to be patient’. (16: 127) In other words, if Allah does not help a person to be patient, that person will not be able to endure his situation.

The second type is patience for Allah’s sake. This means that one remains patient because one loves Allah and wishes to be close to Him. He has no thought of showing his strength and ability to go through difficulties, or seeking people’s praise, etc.

The third type is patience with Allah which means that a person adheres to what Allah requires of him in matters of faith and His religious rulings, accepting these patiently, revolving with them as they turn, taking him wherever they aim. In other words, a person makes himself committed to all that Allah has ordered and all that He likes. This is the hardest type of patience, attained only by the most sincere in faith.

The Prophet was asked about faith. He answered: ‘It is patience and tolerance’.<sup>61</sup> This is a most concise expression, embracing all situations of faith from beginning to end. What is required of any person is two things: 1) To render what one is ordered to give, and this is motivated by tolerance. 2) Abandoning what one is forbidden and steering away from it, and this is motivated by patience. In His Book, the Qur’an, Allah orders us to show goodly patience, fair forbearance and dignity when parting company with people. In all three actions, the Arabic adjective is the same, *jamīl*, which means ‘handsome’, but the context stresses different connotations. Hence, Ibn Taymiyyah said: ‘Goodly patience is that unaccompanied by any complaint. Fair forbearance is patience which involves no remonstrance. A dignified parting of company is that which does not involve causing any physical harm’.

Sufyān ibn ‘Uyaynah commented on the verse that says: ‘We raised among them leaders who, so long as they remained patient and steadfast

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61 Related by Ahmad, 19,435.

and had sure faith in Our revelations, spread guidance in accordance with Our command'. (32: 24) He said: 'They applied the most important aspect and Allah made them leaders'.

Putting one's complaint to Allah is not contrary to patience. Prophet Jacob promised to show 'sweet patience'. When a prophet pledges himself to do something, he will honour his pledge. Yet Jacob said: 'It is only to Allah that I complain and express my grief'. (12: 86) The same applies to Prophet Job, who is described by Allah as being patient. However, he complained to Him, saying: 'Affliction has befallen me; but of all those who show mercy, You are the most merciful'. (21: 83)

In short, patience is one of the most important stages along the way of love. It is the most needed by those who love Allah. They need this stage more than any other. It is one of the best known stages on the way of believing in Allah's oneness. Allah has commanded the one of His servants whom He loved most, Prophet Muhammad, to await patiently Allah's judgement, and He told him that his patience is with Allah's help. He praises those who remain patient and promised them the greatest reward, beyond reckoning.





## THE STAGE OF ACCEPTANCE

**Scholars** unanimously agree that acceptance is definitely recommended. As to whether it is a duty, they differ suggesting two views. One of the best ways to ensure acceptance is to adhere to whatever Allah has made acceptable for Himself. This will certainly lead a person to the stage of acceptance. Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh was asked: When will a person attain the position of acceptance? He answered: ‘When he adheres to four main principles in the way he deals with his Lord. He says to Him: “If You give me, I am pleased; if You withhold from me, I accept; if You abandon me, I worship You; and if You call me, I respond”’.

It is not a condition of acceptance that a person does not feel the pain or displeasure. Rather, the condition is that one does not object to Allah’s ruling or grumble and complain. The mere feeling of pain or displeasure is not contrary to acceptance. This is the same as an ill person willingly taking a medicine despite its being distasteful, or a fasting person on a very hot day feeling the pangs of hunger and thirst yet continuing his fast, or a fighter for Allah’s cause being resigned to whatever injury he suffers, etc.

The way to acceptance is very short, yet it leads to a great goal. It definitely incurs hardship, but this is not harder than the hardship of jihad. It does not have the same sort of obstacles and risks. Its difficulty is that it needs a strong resolve, a pure soul and a determination to accept whatever comes one’s way from Allah.

What facilitates this is man’s knowledge of his weakness and Allah’s mercy and grace. When he realizes both and does not place himself at

Allah's mercy, accepting whatever comes from Him, feeling genuine love of Allah and accepting all that comes from Him, then his soul stands away from Allah, unqualified to be close to Him, or it is a soul going through a trial with all sorts of misfortune.

The way of acceptance and love takes a person forward on his way while he is lying in bed, and he will soon be ahead of many travellers. The fruit of acceptance is a feeling of delight and pleasure with Allah, Blessed and Exalted.

Once I saw Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah in my dream after he had passed away. I think I mentioned to him some mental attitude, which I do not recall, and praised it. He said: 'As for me, my way is to be pleased and delighted with Allah', or something similar. Such was he during his life. This was clearly apparent from him and his condition reflected it.

Dhun-Nūn said: 'There are three clear and obvious signs of acceptance: making no choice before a situation is determined; experiencing no bitter feeling after its determination; and feeling the love of Allah when going through a trial'.

Al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī was told that Abu Dharr used to say: 'Poverty is dearer to me than affluence, and illness is more favoured by me than health'. He said: 'May Allah bestow mercy on his soul. As for me, I say: Whoever relies on the goodness of what Allah chooses for him will not hope for anything other than what Allah has chosen for him'.

Al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād said to Bishr al-Ḥāfi: 'Acceptance is better than asceticism and caring little for life's comforts, because the person who accepts what Allah gives him does not wish for a better condition'.

## ACCEPTANCE AND THE ESSENTIALS OF FAITH

Allah says in the penultimate verse of Surah 6, entitled Cattle: 'Say: "Am I, then, to seek a lord other than Allah, when He is the Lord of

all things?'" (6: 164) Ibn 'Abbās said in comment on this verse: 'How can anyone seek anyone else to be his master when Allah is the Lord of all things?' Yet Allah says early in the same surah: 'Say: "Am I to take for my master anyone but Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who gives nourishment to all and Himself needs none?"' (6: 14) 'Master' in this context means someone to worship; one who provides help in all situations and a refuge from danger and threats. This is the kind of master who is obeyed with love. In the middle part of the same surah, Allah says: 'Am I to seek for judge anyone other than Allah, when it is He who has revealed the Book to you, clearly spelling out the truth?' (6: 114) This means: How could I seek anyone to judge between me and you on our differences, when we have His Book as the best of arbiters? How can we refer for judgement to anything other than His Book, which spells out the truth most clearly and in detail?

When we thoroughly reflect on these three verses, we realize that they express the same principles mentioned in the hadith: 'Whoever accepts Allah as his Lord, Islam as his faith and Muhammad as [Allah's] Messenger experiences the meaning of faith'. Indeed the hadith is derived from these three verses. Yet many people accept Allah as their Lord and do not seek anyone else as their Lord, but do not believe in Him alone as their guardian and patron. They seek others for this role, thinking that they bring them closer to Allah. They imagine that this is the same as befriending the people close to a king in order that they themselves draw closer to the king. This is a clear example of associating partners with Allah, i.e. *shirk*. The proper belief in Allah's oneness requires that a believer must not take anyone for a master other than Allah Himself. Likewise, many people seek someone other than Allah to judge between them and their opponents. They do not accept His judgement.

These are the three essential principles of belief in Allah's oneness: He is the only Lord, Master and Judge. No one else may have any share in these.

## PROPER ACCEPTANCE MEANS FAVOURS AND TRIALS ARE EQUAL

A true servant of Allah who has attained the stage of acceptance will look on Allah's favours and trials as equal, for the following reasons:

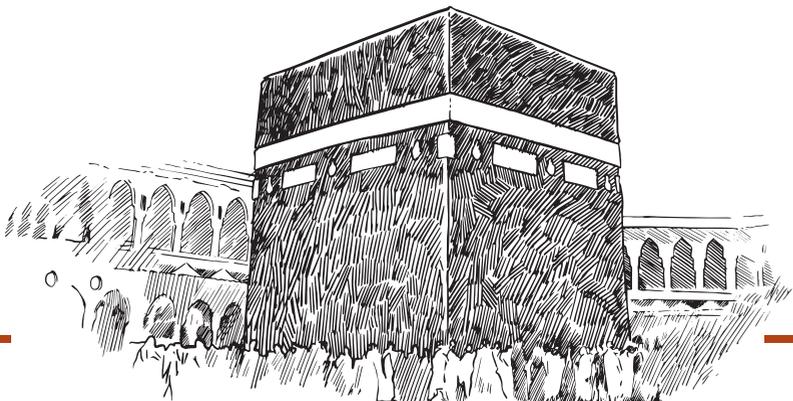
1. He himself is a mere servant of Allah [i.e. His slave], and a mere servant will not be unhappy with what his kind, generous master decides for him, knowing that his master wishes him well.
2. He himself is unaware of the consequences of events, while his master is well aware of what will benefit him.
3. He knows that when he accepts what is hard, it will become to him a favour and he will find it light to carry. He will receive help. By contrast, when he is displeased, it will be doubly heavy and his burden will be increased.
4. He should know that being pleased with his Lord in all situations will grant him the blessing of having earned his Lord's pleasure.
5. Acceptance opens for him the gate of safety. It will make his heart free of cheating, misrepresentation and dishonest action. None will be safe from Allah's punishment except the one who, on the Day of Judgement, comes to Him with a sound heart.
6. Acceptance puts a person in such a condition that he does not grieve for what he misses and is not overjoyed at what he gains. This is one of the best aspects of faith.
7. As a mental action, acceptance is the equivalent of jihad, which is a physical action. Each is considered the top grade of faith.
8. The one who attains the stage of acceptance is happy with what Allah chooses for him, and does not try to choose for himself. This is a sign of his profound knowledge of his Lord and himself. Wuhayb ibn al-Ward, Sufyān al-Thawrī and Yūsuf ibn Asbāṭ met one day. Al-Thawrī said: 'I used to hate sudden death, but nowadays I wish

I had died'. Yūsuf ibn Asbāt asked him why. He said: 'Because I fear temptation'. Yūsuf said: 'But I do not dislike a long life'. Al-Thawrī asked him: 'Why do you hate to die?' He said: 'I hope that I happen to go through a day when I turn to Allah in full repentance and I do a truly good deed'. Wuhayb was asked: 'What do you say?' He said: 'I do not choose anything. Whatever Allah loves for me I love it best'. Al-Thawrī kissed him between his eyes and said: 'By Allah, this is the true spirit'. This is the condition of a person who looks at life and death as equal. He is pleased with either condition Allah chooses for him.

9. For anyone to attain the status of Allah being pleased with him is a prize greater than Heaven and all it contains. Allah says: 'Allah has promised the believers, men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide, and goodly dwellings in the Garden of Eden. Yet Allah's acceptance is the greatest blessing of all. This is indeed the supreme triumph'. (9: 72)
10. Acceptance leads to maintaining good manners with Allah and with people. Indeed good manners are the result of acceptance, while ill behaviour is the result of discontent. Good manners elevate a person so as to attain the standard of one who often offers voluntary fasting and night worship, while ill behaviour devours one's good deeds in the same way as fire consumes wood.
11. When a person accepts what Allah has decreed, his acceptance frees him from incurring Allah's displeasure by trying to please people. It also frees him from criticizing people for what Allah has not granted him and from praising people for what is purely Allah's favour.
12. True love, sincerity and devotion cannot be achieved with acceptance. A lover accepts everything and every situation from his love. 'Imrān ibn Ḥuşayn, one of the Prophet's companions, suffered a chronic illness, spending a very long time on his sick bed, unable to sit or stand. A hole was made in his bed to enable

him to relieve himself. Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Shikhhk̄ir visited him, and when he realized his condition, he wept. ‘Imrān asked him why he was crying. He said: ‘Because I see you in this condition of suffering’. He said: ‘Do not cry. What Allah loves for me I love best. I will tell you something that may be of benefit to you, Allah willing, but do not tell anyone of it until I have died. Angels visit me and I am pleased with them. They greet me and I hear their greetings’.

13. Physical good deeds are rewarded in multiples up to a known limit, but good deeds of the heart are rewarded in multiples without an upper limit.



## THE STAGE OF GRATITUDE

**This** is one of the highest stages, and it is well above the stage of acceptance. Indeed acceptance is included in thankfulness and gratitude. It is impossible to be really grateful without being pleased. As stated earlier, gratitude is one half of faith, as it comprises two halves: one is gratitude and the other is patience. Allah orders His servant to be thankful and prohibits its opposite. He praises those who are grateful and makes it a characteristic of the elite among His creation. He makes it the purpose of His creation and command, promising the grateful that they will receive the best reward. He makes it a cause for increased favours and the cause of maintaining His blessings. He says that those who are thankful are the people who benefit by His signs. He gives them a name derived from His own name *al-Shakūr*, and He is the One who enables a thankful person to be with the One he thanks, and returns his thanks. It is the ultimate of Allah being pleased with His servant. Allah says: ‘Be grateful to Allah for His favours, if it is truly Him that you worship’. (16: 114)

An authentic hadith mentions: ‘the Prophet (peace be upon him) continued to pray until his feet were swollen. He was asked: Why are you so hard on yourself when Allah has forgiven you your earlier and later sins? He said: “Should I not be a thankful servant of Allah?”’<sup>62</sup> The Prophet said to Mu‘ādh: ‘Mu‘ādh, by Allah, I love you. Do not forget to say after every [obligatory] prayer: My Lord, help me to maintain remembering You, thanking You and worshipping You well’.<sup>63</sup>

62 Related by al-Bukhari, 4,836; Muslim, 2,819.

63 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 1,522; al-Nasā’ī, 1,303.

The essence of gratitude means that the effect of Allah's blessings is expressed by the recipient's tongue in the form of acknowledgement and praise, by his heart in the form of enjoyment and love of Allah, and by his whole being in the form of submission and obedience. Gratitude is based on five rules: the thanksgiver's submission to the One he thanks, his love, acknowledgement of His blessings, praising Him for them and making sure that he does not use them in a way He dislikes.

These five are the basis of thankfulness. When one is missing, then a rule is rendered inoperational. Every scholar who spoke about gratitude and its limits expressed the same idea, and focused on these five rules. It has been said that the limit of gratitude is to acknowledge the Giver's blessings, with clear submission. Others said that it means that one's heart is full of the love of the One who bestows the blessings, while his body acts in obedience of what He commands, and his tongue never ceases mentioning, praising and glorifying Him.

Prophet David asked: 'My Lord, how do I express my gratitude to You when whatever thanks I say are favours You grant me and for which I should be thanking you?' Allah said to Him: 'Now you have thanked Me'.

Sariy asked his student al-Junayd about gratitude when he was still young. Al-Junayd answered: 'Gratitude means that one must not use any of Allah's blessings in doing what constitutes disobedience of Him'. The teacher asked him: 'How did you learn this?' He answered: 'Through listening to you'.



## THE STAGE OF FEELING SHAME

**Allah** says: ‘Allah is ever watching over you’. (4: 1) He also says: ‘Allah is well aware of the most stealthy glance, and of everything the heart would conceal’. (40: 19) Ibn ‘Umar narrated that ‘The Prophet passed by someone who was admonishing his brother about [his] modesty. He [the Prophet] said: “Modesty is part of faith”’.<sup>64</sup> Abu Sa‘īd al-Khudrī narrated: ‘Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) was more modest than a virgin who is still in her private room. If he disliked something, we recognized it from his facial expression’.<sup>65</sup>

In Arabic, the word used for modesty or feeling ashamed is *ḥayā’*, which has positive connotations and is derived from the same root as the word *ḥayāt*, which means life. The more alive a person’s heart is, the stronger is his trait of modesty and feeling shame. The absence of modesty means that one’s heart and soul are dead. When one’s heart is more thriving, his modesty is more perfect.

Al-Junayd said: ‘Modesty is the result of beholding Allah’s blessings and recognizing one’s shortcomings. From the two results a condition called modesty, which is a trait that motivates a person to abandon what is unbecoming and prevents negligence of what is due to Allah’. Al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ said: ‘Five qualities are the marks of unhappiness: a hard heart, a fixed eye, lack of modesty, seeking life’s comforts and the expectation of a long life’.

Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh said: ‘If a believer feels ashamed when he is obeying Allah, Allah feels modesty when he commits a sin’. This needs

64 Related by al-Bukhari, 24; Muslim, 36.

65 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,102; Muslim, 2,320.

explanation. It speaks of a person who is so modest that he feels ashamed in the presence of Allah, even when he is obeying Him, and his heart is always in a state of shyness as he knows that Allah is watching him. If such a person commits a sin, Allah does not like to look at him doing this because the man is honoured by Him. Hence, He feels modesty at seeing His loved servant whom He honours doing what disgraces him in His sight. This is a natural feeling. When a person sees someone who is very close to him, such as his son whom he dearly loves, betraying him, he experiences a very strange feeling of shame, as though he himself is doing the disgraceful thing. This is a noble trait, because he sees what he would like to dismiss outright.

Allah's modesty towards His servant is of a different type which is beyond comprehension. It is a feeling that combines generosity, munificence and majesty. Allah's modesty means that when His servant stretches his hands as he supplicates to Him, He does not like his hands to return empty. His modesty also means that He would rather not punish an elderly Muslim person for his sins.

## TYPES OF MODESTY

Modesty is classified into ten types: modesty at committing an offence, at failure in duty, at feeling Allah's majesty, a modesty of generosity, a feeling of shame, a feeling of self-contempt, a feeling of love, a feeling of servitude to Allah, a feeling of honour and dignity and a feeling of being ashamed at one's own doings.

Modesty at committing an offence is the same as Adam felt when he ate of the forbidden tree, and then ran away trying to hide himself in Heaven.

Modesty at failure in duty is like the feeling of the angels who glorify Allah all the time, day and night. On the Day of Judgement, they will say: 'All glory be to You, our Lord. We did not worship You as You should be truly worshipped'.

Modesty at feeling Allah's majesty is a feeling based on knowledge. The better a person knows his Lord, the greater is his modesty before Him.

Modesty of generosity is the same as the Prophet's feeling when some of his guests at his wedding dinner stayed a long time and he felt ashamed to indicate a desire that they should leave. Therefore, he himself went out.<sup>66</sup>

Modesty associated with a feeling of shame is the same felt by 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib in asking Allah's Messenger about cleansing a discharge which is unlike semen, because he was married to the Prophet's daughter. So much so, he requested that someone else put the question for him.<sup>67</sup>

The modesty of self-contempt is that of a person praying to Allah for some of his needs.

The modesty of love is that of the one in love. Even when he thinks of his loved one in his absence, he experiences a sense of modesty to the extent that his face turns red. He cannot pin-point a reason for such a feeling. The same may be experienced when he suddenly meets the one he loves.

The modesty of servitude of Allah is a mixture of feelings of love and fear. A person feels that whatever he does in worship is too little to offer to Allah, whose majesty is much greater. Hence, he inevitably feels ashamed.

Modesty of honour and dignity is the feeling of a person who maintains a strong sense of dignity when he feels that what he gives away, whether as a gift or a charity, is less than what is expected from him. There are two reasons for this feeling. The first is that he feels that his status of honour and dignity requires him to give more. The second is that he feels

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66 Related by al-Bukhari, 4,793; Muslim, 1,428.

67 Related by al-Bukhari, 178 & 269; Muslim, 303.

ashamed towards the recipient. Indeed, some very generous people feel too shy to face the recipient, because they feel that the recipient feels ashamed of being in need.

Modesty at one's own doings is a feeling experienced by an honourable person as he is ashamed of allowing himself to do what is beneath him. This is the best type of modesty, because when a person feels ashamed of himself, he is more likely to avoid what is shameful in front of others.

When a person realizes that Allah, Mighty and Exalted, looks at him all the time, this gives him a sense of modesty encouraging him to tolerate the difficulty of obeying His commands. It is like a worker who is doing his work when his master is present. He is very attentive to what he is doing, keen to do it well, particularly if his master is kind to him and he feels love towards him. He does not give the same attention when he is doing his work when his master is away. Allah sees and watches us all the time. However, it is man who may be oblivious of the fact that Allah is watching him. If this occurs frequently, it leads to the loss of the sense of shame.

A person's awareness of Allah watching him all the time makes him feel disgusted with his sin. This feeling of disgust which results from a person's modesty is in addition to, and greater than what comes from remembering Allah's warning.

What is even of a higher grade is the sense of shame that results from the feeling of love. Indeed, this sense is greater than what results from a feeling of fear. Hence, such modesty stops a believer from putting his complaint to anyone other than Allah, because it means that he puts his complaint against Allah to His creation. By contrast, it does not stop a person from putting his complaint to Allah. Such complaint expresses a person's weakness, need for Allah's help, and his submission to Him. As such, it is not contrary to modesty.



## THE STAGE OF TRUTHFULNESS

**This** is the greatest stage, from which all other stages start. It is the correct and right way. Anyone who does not follow this way will be cut off and ruined. It is what distinguishes believers from hypocrites, the dwellers of Heaven from those in Hell. It is Allah's sword on earth that cuts everything to which it is applied, and refutes every falsehood it confronts. Whoever fights with it will gain the upper hand, and whoever speaks it, his word will be supreme. It is the right spirit of good deeds, and the test of all conditions. It motivates scaling all obstacles. It is the gate through which those who complete the journey are admitted to the presence of the Almighty. It is the firm foundation and the main pillar of the faith. It is the grade which is second only to that of prophets, since theirs is the highest grade of all mankind. From their dwellings in Heaven rivers flow to the dwellings of the truthful.

Allah commands the people of faith to be with those who are truthful. He says: 'Believers, have fear of Allah and be among those who are truthful'. (9: 119) He promises those upon whom He bestows His blessings to be 'among the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs and the righteous ones'. (4: 69)

Allah divides all people into those who are truthful and others who are hypocrites. He says: 'Allah will surely reward the truthful for having been true to their word, and will punish the hypocrites, if that be His will, or accept their repentance'. (33: 24) Truthfulness is the essence of faith, while hypocrisy is based on lying. Should faith and lies occur in a situation, they will be fighting each other.

Allah says: 'It is the one who brings the truth and the one who accepts it as true that are Allah-fearing. They will have all that they wish for

with their Lord: such is the reward of those who do good'. (39: 33-34) The one who brings the truth will always be truthful in what he says and does, as well as in his general condition. Truth applies to all three.

Truthfulness in speech means that one's tongue is straight with what it says, like the ear of wheat, full of grain, standing upright. Truthfulness of deeds means that deeds are true to the command and execution, like man's head standing upright over his body. Truthfulness in condition means that man's heart and organs are truly sincere, doing their best, sparing no effort. When a person fulfils all these situations, he will be one of those who bring the truth. The degree he achieves in the fulfilment of these three situations indicates how far he attains in the quality of *siddīq*, which is the highest degree of *ṣādiq*, which means truthful. Hence, Abu Bakr was given the title *al-Siddīq*, as he achieved the highest ever degree of this concept. *Siddīq* is a higher degree than *ṣadūq*, which in turn is higher than *ṣādiq*, meaning truthful. Therefore, *siddīq* means the most perfect and true follower of Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) with absolute sincerity to Allah who chose him as His Messenger.

Allah commanded His Messenger as stated in the following verse: 'Say, "My Lord, cause me to enter in a true and sincere manner and to leave in a true and sincere manner, and grant me, by Your grace, sustaining strength"'. (17: 80) Allah also mentions that Prophet Abraham prayed to Him to give him a truthful tongue in speaking to people. Abraham prayed to Him: 'Grant me the advocacy of the truth in later generations'. (26: 84) Allah gives His good servants a 'footing of truth' and a 'seat of truth'. He says: 'Give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sound footing of truth with their Lord?' (10: 2) He also says: 'The Allah-fearing will be in gardens and running waters, in a seat of truth, in the presence of an all-powerful Sovereign'. (54: 54-55)

These are five things: true entrance, true exit, a truthful tongue, a footing of truth and a seat of truth. The essence of truth in these five is the absolute truth which comes from Allah and leads to Him. This applies

to all that comes from Him and what is offered to Him of speech and deeds, and the reward of all this in this present life and in the life to come.

True entrance and true exit means that a person's entry and departure should be true, undertaken to please Him, hoping to achieve what is required and worked for. This is the opposite of false entry and exit which neither lead to any definite goal nor have a proper footing to stand upon. This was the form of the move undertaken by the Prophet's enemies at the time leading to the Battle of Badr. The true exit was the departure of the Prophet and his companions from Madinah which led to the same battle. The same was the Prophet's entry in Madinah: a true entrance by Allah's order, for Him and seeking His pleasure. Therefore, it led to Allah's support and victory for the Prophet and Islam. It achieved his goals in this life and in the Hereafter. It was unlike the false entry which his enemies attempted when they raised their forces to attack Madinah and exterminate the Muslims. Theirs was not for Allah or to seek His pleasure. On the contrary, it was motivated by their enmity towards Allah and His Messenger. Hence, it only led to loss and defeat.

The truthful tongue is the good praise of the Prophet given by all communities. This is true praise, sincerely felt. Allah says of Abraham and his descendants of prophets and messengers: 'We bestowed on them of Our mercy and We granted them the high honour of the truthful tongue'. (19: 50) What is meant by the 'truthful tongue' here is good praise.

The 'footing of truth' is suggested to mean different things. One suggestion says it means heaven, while another says it refers to the Prophet himself, and a third suggestion says it means good deeds. These and other suggestions are based on the fact that the word used in the Qur'an is *qadam*, which means 'foot'. However, it is derived from the same root as the verbs meaning 'to come' and 'to put forward'. Bearing in mind all the connotations suggested by the root word we say that the meaning of 'footing of truth' is what the believers have put forward and

where they will be coming on the Day of Judgement. What they put forward is their belief in Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his message, as well as their good deeds. Therefore, they will come to receive the reward of all that, which is admittance into Heaven.

The ‘seat of truth’ is Heaven, which belongs to Allah and He grants it to His best servants.

The fact that all these are described as true means that they are definite and settled. It also means that they are right, permanent, beneficial and fruitful. Moreover, they belong to Allah and are with Him.

‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd said: ‘Truthfulness means being true to Allah through one’s deeds’. It is also defined as man’s secrets being consistent with what he says. It is further said that it means that what a person declares and what he conceals are in full agreement. A liar puts on an appearance which is better than what he conceals. The same is true of a hypocrite: he appears better than his reality.

A truthful person seeks Allah’s pleasure, does what Allah bids him and follows what pleases Him. He moves in this way wherever it takes him, as long as he feels it earns him Allah’s pleasure. Hence, he may follow his prayer with repeating some glorifications of Allah. He undertakes the pilgrimage and follows it with being kind to people, offering whatever service he can to benefit others. He does not hesitate to encourage doing what is good and refraining from evil. He visits a sick friend, attends a funeral, supports someone suffering injustice, does whatever is acceptable to Allah and serves people.

A truthful person does not restrict himself to any particular position, habit, status or sign. Nor does he commit himself to a particular place of prayer, or a certain type of clothing, or a kind of worship which he prefers over all other kinds, although some of these are much higher in grade and earn much greater reward. Restricting oneself to any such thing is the cause of much wrong and it leads to putting on a false appearance. Moreover, it involves an element of self worship, as one

considers only the type one has chosen, placing it above everything else. Such restrictions prevent the worship of these people from going to their hearts, let alone moving forward from their hearts to Allah, Blessed and Exalted. Should any such person break his habit, taking up a different method, appearance or sign, he will be uncomfortable with it, even though it may be better and earn greater reward than his habitual practice. He will even consider it a fault that lowers his position with people. Indeed, his adherence to such restrictions lowers his position with Allah.

Furthermore, committing oneself to the truth is like carrying a mountain on one's back. It can only be carried by a person of strong resolve. He will be moving right and left because of his heavy burden. By contrast, hypocrisy and lies are featherweight. A person with such a load can carry it at will, feeling no difficulty.





## THE STAGE OF PREFERRING OTHERS TO ONESELF

**In** praise of His devout servants, Allah says: ‘They give others preference over themselves, even though they are in want’. (59: 9) This quality is the opposite of stinginess. When one gives another person preference over oneself, he actually gives away what he needs. ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak said: ‘Looking away from what people have is better than being generous with what one has’.

This stage is one of generosity and benevolence. It is called ‘preferring others’ because it is the highest of three grades. The first is that of a person who does not find it difficult to give away and provide help. This is the grade of generosity. The second is the case of one who gives away much of what he has, retaining some of it for himself. This is the grade of bountifulness. The third is to give to someone else what one really needs, preferring the other person to oneself. This is the opposite of greed, which is to appropriate for oneself what one’s brother needs. This is the grade to which the Prophet referred as he talked to the Anṣār, telling them that they will find much greed after he had gone. He advised them to remain patient, until they meet him by his lake, on the Day of Judgement.<sup>68</sup>

Qays ibn Sa’d ibn ‘Ubādah was renowned for bountifulness. Once, he fell ill, and he noted that some of his close friends did not visit him to enquire after his health. When he enquired about this, he was told that they were too shy to come, because they owed him money. He said: ‘Confounded is what stops close friends visiting a friend’. He then ordered an announcement to be made, forgiving all debts owed to him. By the evening, his visitors were numerous.

68 Related by al-Bukhari, 3,793; Muslim, 1,059.

Let us consider Allah's wisdom in this case. The Anṣār were the most bountiful of people, yet the Prophet told them that they would face the selfishness of other people, and counselled them to remain patient. Thus, Allah will reward them, favouring them with His positions in Heaven. Everyone will realize their special merit which earns them such great favour. Such is Allah's bounty which He grants to whomever He will.

Therefore, a person who is encountered with selfishness, although he prefers others to himself should know that Allah wants what is best for him. He is, therefore, certain to receive that.

Bountifulness is of ten grades. The first and most significant of these is to sacrifice oneself. The second is to sacrifice one's leading position, giving it over and preferring to concentrate on doing what people need. The third is to sacrifice one's rest and comfort. Such a person undertakes efforts, tiring himself in doing what benefits someone else.

The fourth grade is sacrificing one's knowledge and offering it. In this respect, being bountiful means offering such knowledge to one who has not asked for it. An aspect of this is that when someone puts a question to you, you do not give him only the answer to his specific question, but you give him a full answer covering all aspects of the issue raised by the questioner. Compare this to the method employed by some scholars when asked the ruling on some point, and whereby they merely give an answer as 'yes' or 'no', or some other suitable one word response.

I witnessed Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah doing something wonderful in this regard. When he was asked about the ruling concerning some issue, he would give a detailed answer, stating, if possible, the verdict of each of the four main schools of *Fiqh*, and explaining the points of difference, stating the view he thought weightier. He would also add some useful points concerning the matter in hand. These may well have been more useful to the questioner than his original question.

The fifth grade is to use one's status and position in what benefits others, such as interceding on behalf of someone, or accompanying someone

to meet a person of influence or high position. Then comes the grade of giving physical help, of all sorts, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) explains in the following hadith: ‘Every person’s every joint should perform a charity [i.e. *ṣadaqah*] every day the sun comes out: to act justly between two people is a charity; to help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belonging onto it is a charity; a good word is a charity; every step you take up to prayers [i.e. going to the mosque] is a charity; and to remove a harmful object from the road is a charity’.<sup>69</sup>

Grade number seven is to be generous with one’s honour, as Abu ḌamḌam who was one of the Prophet’s companions did. Every morning he supplicated: ‘My Lord, I do not have money to give to charity. Therefore, I offer my honour: I absolve anyone who has abused me of their offence’. Such conduct is indeed generous and it brings a person much inner comfort, as he bears no enmity for anyone. The eighth grade is that of patience and forbearance. This is an honourable grade and of better benefit to the person than being generous with his money. Therefore, whoever finds himself reluctant to be financially generous should resort to this kind of bountifulness. It yields its fruits in this life, in addition to its reward in the life to come.

Grade number nine is to be generous with one’s good manners and being cheerful with other people. It is a grade higher than that of patience and forbearance, as it earns for a person the high grade of one who often offers voluntary fasting and night worship. A person cannot be generous to all people with his money, but he can be so generous with his good manners and his forbearance. The tenth grade is that of not looking at what other people have. He neither covets what they have, nor hints at it by word or action. This is the type of generosity ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak described as being better than generosity with what one has.

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69 Related by al-Bukhari, 2,989; Muslim, 1,009.

Every grade of bountifulness gives more than what it takes. Every grade has its own special effect on one's heart and condition. Allah Himself has guaranteed giving more to everyone who is generous, while the one who withholds will have nothing.



## THE STAGE OF GOOD MANNERS

**Allah** says to His Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him): ‘**Most certainly, yours is a sublime character**’. (68: 4) What this means is that the Prophet maintains the values and character Allah states in the Qur’an. In fact, Allah directs him to the total of good manners and values, as He bids him: ‘**Make due allowance for man’s nature, and enjoin the doing of what is right; and turn away from those who choose to remain ignorant**’. (7: 199)

Anas said: ‘I never touched any brocade or silk softer than Allah’s Messenger’s touch. I never smelled anything better smelling than Allah’s Messenger’s personal scent. I served Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) for ten years, during which he never said to me ‘Ugh’ at all. He never said to me regarding something I did: “Why did you do this?” Nor did he ever say anything about something I omitted: “Why have you not done that?”’<sup>70</sup>

Faith is all good manners. Whoever is of better manners than you, is more religious than you. It is said that good manners mean: being generous, refraining from causing harm and bearing harm caused to oneself. Good manners are based on four main essential pillars: patience, decency, courage and maintaining fair balance. Patience encourages a person to forbear, restrain his anger, refrain from causing harm, exuding forbearance, gentle manners and never being hasty. Decency encourages a person to refrain from whatever is unbecoming of word or deed. It encourages him to be modest, and modesty is an essential part of every good trait. It stops a person from vulgarity, stinginess,

<sup>70</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 1,973; Muslim, 2,330.

lying, backbiting and carrying tales. Courage motivates a person to show dignity, prefer the best traits and to be generous in every respect. Generosity is indeed the type of courage that enables a person to give away what he loves. Fair balance encourages a person to seek the middle way between extremes. It thus encourages him to be generous, which is the middle way between stinginess and wasteful squandering. It promotes modesty which is the middle way between subservience and effrontery. It also motivates bravery which is the middle way between cowardice and recklessness; and forbearance which is in between anger and acceptance of humiliation. These four traits are indeed the origin of all good manners.

Bad manners are based on four things: ignorance, injustice, desire and anger. Ignorance shows a person what is good as bad and what is evil as fair. It shows him perfection as defective and defects as fine qualities. Injustice makes a person behave wrongly, getting angry when he should be satisfied, being hasty where the situation requires careful consideration. It makes him hard-fisted when he should be generous, rushing forward when he should be holding back, or holding back when he should move forward. He is soft when he should be hard, and he is hard where softness is much better. He humbles himself when he should show dignity, and behave arrogantly where he should show humility. Desire causes a person to be stingy, indecent, greedy, humble and behaving in every low manner. Anger makes him conceited, grudging, covetous, aggressive and ill-mannered.

When any two of these four combine, they lead to foul manners. The four revert to two basic qualities: excessive weakness and excessive power. Excessive weakness gives rise to disgrace, stinginess, vileness, knavery, humbleness, greed and all vile manners. Excessive power leads to injustice, anger, fury, vulgarity, etc. The combination of the two leads to a variety of bad qualities. A person may combine power with weakness. This makes him most tyrannical when he is in power, and most humble when he is overpowered. He is either a ruthless tyrant or a cowardly imbecile who pretends to be strong when he is with a

weak person. Ill-manners beget other bad manners, while good manners produce similarly good behaviour.

Every good characteristic is a middle way between two bad ones. Bountifulness, for example, is in the middle between stinginess and wasteful squandering, while humility is in the middle between ignominy and conceit. When a person moves away from the good middle point, he will inevitably go towards either foul extreme. Thus, when a person moves away from humility, he goes either to arrogance and conceit or to disgrace and contempt. Forbearance is the middle characteristic. Deviation from it leads either to rashness and hardness or to disgraceful and odious behaviour. Deviation from the middle way of deliberate consideration leads to either recklessness and violence or to careless loss. Deviation from courage leads to either rashness or to cowardice.

A person who always maintains the middle qualities is well respected and loved, enjoying good position and consorting with good people.





## REFINING GOOD MANNERS

**This** is a very useful chapter for everyone undertaking the journey towards Allah. It takes him forward, benefiting by his own traits which he cannot discard or change. One of the most difficult things for human nature is to change its inherent characteristics. Those who resorted to hard self-discipline undertook a very difficult task, but most of them could not achieve their purpose. When a trait imposed itself, it rendered all past training and self-discipline useless.

In this chapter, we aim to enable the traveller to go ahead on his journey without changing his traits or suppressing them. Yet his progress will be quicker than that of anyone trying to change his characteristics.

Before we discuss how to use such traits, we will give an example. Suppose that a river runs its course, ending up in a populated land. The people there realize that the river will inevitably destroy their homes and land. They consider what to do and how they can avoid this inevitable disaster, but cannot agree on the course and measures to be followed. One group thinks that they should block the river so that it will not run onto their land. However, their efforts will not achieve much, because the river will soon destroy the blockage and cause more destruction.

When this attempt fails, another group thinks that they must stop the river at its springs. When they try to do this, their efforts again will not achieve much. For whenever they block a spring, the water will come out from another area. The more effort they put into such an attempt, the more apparent is its uselessness. Besides, such efforts would divert them from other necessary work on their land and in their homes.

A third group realizes that much effort would need to be made in either

of the above options, but that this would yield no good result. They decide that the proper way is to divert the course of the river, so that it does not end at their populated area. They would run it into an area where they could make better use of its water, and which would enable them to cultivate new areas. This, then, would be the successful line of action, yielding very good results.

In His infinite wisdom, Allah gave man and all animals a nature that benefits from two intrinsic traits: anger and desire. These two are the essence of all manners and characteristics. Desire, which is the motive of man's will, prompts man to try to secure what is of benefit to him. Anger, on the other hand, is the force that is used to repel what is harmful.

In our example, the river represents these two forces of desire and anger. It runs in the course of human nature to all that the heart achieves of good results, destroying them all. Ignorant and heedless souls take no action. As such, it destroys the basis of faith, uproots and ruins whatever faith builds. Instead, it gives rise to every harmful plant. This is what the people of Hell will suffer on the Day of Resurrection.

Good and virtuous souls realize what havoc this river will cause. They choose three different ways to deal with it. Those who opt for self-discipline, hard effort and training want to stop the river at its source. However, Allah's wisdom and the nature Allah has given man resist their efforts. For this would lead to hard struggle, and the struggle would continue with their attempt to alter human nature yielding no decisive result.

Another group wants to turn away from these traits, devoting their time to good deeds. Thus, they would not allow the river to destroy what they build, sparing no effort in fortifying their buildings and giving them strong foundations and structure. They realize, however, that the river will ultimately reach these buildings, but they hope that it cannot destroy them, but will rather find a way round them.

In other words, one group seeks to concentrate their efforts on fortification

to prevent destruction, while the other would try to stop the evil at its source, hoping to preserve their structure.

One day I asked Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah about this problem, and the two methods of attempting to eradicate the problem at source, or putting in strong effort in trying to keep the way free of dirt. He answered me at length, and his answer included: ‘The human soul is like a reservoir of dirt: when you stir it, it will overflow. If you can cover it and cross over it, do so without trying to stir it. You cannot reach the bottom of it. The deeper you go the more dirt you find’. I told him that I put the same question to a scholar who answered me saying that the bad traits of the human soul are like snakes and scorpions on a traveller’s way. If he tries to look for these and kills them, he will disrupt his journey and cannot go much further. The proper way for the traveller is not to care about them, but to leave them alone. Should any of them come across the traveller’s way, he should kill them and resume his journey. Shaykh al-Islam commended the scholar who gave this answer and thought he described the problem and its solution excellently.

Bearing this in mind, the third group realizes that these traits have not been created for no purpose. They are like water which irrigates roses and thorny plants, as well as fruit trees and fruitless ones. They are like the shell protecting a valuable pearl. They further realize that what the others fear can be utilized to achieve success. They see that conceit is like a spring of water which irrigates pride, self-exultation, injustice and aggression, as well as fine spirit, a sense of honour, striving against Allah’s enemies. This is the pearl that can be extracted through this characteristic. Hence, they retain the characteristic and use it for such useful and beneficial purposes. The Prophet (peace be upon him) saw his companion Abu Dujānah walking proudly in the area between the Muslim army and the attacking forces of the unbelievers. The Prophet commented: ‘This type of walk is disliked by Allah, except in such a situation’.

This is a case where a characteristic is used for the best purpose, transforming its hateful appearance into an act that earns Allah’s reward.

The others who engage in self-discipline and those who try to uproot the bad characteristics outright achieve little. By contrast, here we see a case of using the characteristic of conceit in the right place, turning it into a factor that helps to achieve the right result.

The same applies to the characteristic of envy. It is like the shell hiding the pearl of competition, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘No envy is acceptable except in two things: a person to whom Allah has granted money and enabled him to spend it in what is right, and a person to whom Allah has given the Qur’an and he recites it in [all] hours of night and day’.<sup>71</sup> Envy leads to the sort of competition which Allah loves and encourages. He says: ‘For this let the strivers emulously strive’. (83: 26) It is wrong to try to stifle this trait, but it should be diverted so as to remain within the limits of what is permissible, making it a motivator to compete for the high positions on the Day of Judgement. One must never wish that anyone loses a favour granted to him or her by Allah. Such a wish leads to depriving the person who so wishes of Allah’s favour and retaining it for the other.

Another example is the urge to possess. It is very useful and may lead to very good results. A person works hard in order to possess what he is keen to have. Therefore, it should not be smothered, but rather diverted to whatever is of benefit to himself in the life to come, as this will also make him a better person in this present life. The Prophet says: ‘Make sure to have what benefits you, seeking Allah’s help. Do not feel helpless’.<sup>72</sup> The urge to possess need not be condemned. It needs to be diverted to what is of benefit for a person. If it is directed to what is of no benefit, or to what is harmful to have, then it is unhealthy.

A strong desire can also be a very useful characteristic. As it generates love, it can lead to one’s improvement and happiness. The greater a person’s desire to achieve perfection, the keener he works for it. The

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71 Related by al-Bukhari, 73, Muslim, 816.

72 Related by Muslim, 2,664.

more he desires a comfortable life and the company of loved ones, the keener he is to have these in Heaven. Indeed, a person may be ready to go without something he loves and strongly desires in order to achieve what is loved more and even more strongly desired.

This is a consistent rule which is applicable to all traits and characteristics. All Allah's messengers taught that they should be diverted away from their unhealthy courses and be put to good uses and purposes. The sexual desire, for example, should be diverted to legitimate marriage. It is said that Prophet Solomon had one hundred wives, while Prophet David had ninety-nine. Prophet Muhammad had nine wives and Islam allows Muslims to have four wives at the same time. This is all to divert the sexual desire from what is forbidden to what is lawful and acceptable to Allah. According to scholars, marriage is better liked by Allah than voluntary worship.

The other force, which is anger, should be diverted to opposing and fighting Allah's enemies, and even to being hard on them.

Listening to melodious voices should not be condemned. It is indeed commendable. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stopped by Abu Mūsā al-Ash'arī's door, listening to his recitation of the Qur'an. He said to his companions that Abu Mūsā 'had been given a voice like those of David's household'.<sup>73</sup> The second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, used to request Abu Mūsā when he attended him with a number of the Prophet's companions to recite the Qur'an so that they would enjoy listening to him. Who can object to listening to such recitation? This is indeed the practice of devout people. It is totally different from listening to frivolous singing or what distracts the listener away from good things.

The human soul needs to listen to what is good nourishment for it. There is a great difference between one who feeds on pure honey and wholesome food and one who feeds on carrion, pork and other filthy stuff.

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73 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,048; Muslim, 793.

In short, natural traits and motives cannot be suppressed and rendered inoperative in this life which is a life of trial and tests. A person of insight will use them in what is useful, which leads to nothing forbidden and cannot adversely affect his position in Allah's sight.

A question may be asked whether a characteristic may be acquired or must be inborn? Well, it can be acquired by deliberation and practice until it becomes part of one's natural response. 'The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to al-Ashajj of 'Abd al-Qays: "You have two qualities which Allah and His Messenger love". He asked: "Are these part of my nature with which I was created or are they acquired qualities?" The Prophet said: "They are part of your nature". Al-Ashajj said: "Praise be to Allah Who has created me as Allah and His Messenger love".<sup>74</sup> The hadith makes clear that some characteristics are inborn while others may be acquired. The Prophet used to say in the supplication with which he started prayers: 'My Lord, guide me to the best of manners, for none but You guides to their best, and turn me away from the worst of manners, for none but You turns away from their worst'.<sup>75</sup> He thus refers to both acquisition and what is natural.

## REACTION TO PEOPLE'S ILL MANNERS

A person may react in eleven different ways to whatever affects him of people's bad behaviour. The first is that he takes it as something that happens by Allah's will, treating it as he reacts to hot or cold weather, or to illness and pain. The second is to take it patiently. He realizes the reward granted by Allah for those who show patience in adversity and he is keen to receive it. The third way is that of forbearance and pardon. He realizes that this is a reaction of dignity which rebounds well on him. Therefore, he is keen to maintain it. The fourth is a reaction of

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74 Related by Muslim, 17 (up to 'forbearance and deliberation'); the rest is related by Abu Dāwūd, 5,225.

75 Related by Muslim, 771.

acceptance, which is higher than the reaction of forbearance and pardon. It is only a reaction by souls at peace, particularly when the offence committed against him was due to his attitude in defence of Islam, which he took for Allah's sake. He accepts whatever happens to him as a result, because he only does this seeking Allah's pleasure. Fifth comes the reaction of doing a kindness to the one who offended against him. He returns his ill manners with an act of kindness.

The sixth type is that of keeping his own heart free of ill feeling. This is a very noble reaction when it is experienced and appreciated. It means that he does not think about what was done against him, trying to avenge himself against the perpetrator of the offence. He dismisses all such thoughts and considers that his own cool attitude is better, sweeter and more helpful to him in looking after his own interests. The seventh is the ensurance of safety. When he refrains from returning the offence, he will be safe from any further consequences. By contrast, if he avenges himself against the one who offended him, he will inevitably fear further trouble. The eighth is that which comes through a person's striving for Allah's cause. He tries to urge people to do what is right and refrain from what is unacceptable and evil. His purpose is to keep Allah's word supreme. This may bring him some adverse reaction from people. The one in this position has sold himself, his property and honour to Allah, receiving the best price ever.

The ninth position is that of Allah's blessing, in different ways. One way is to appreciate Allah's blessing as He wants him to suffer a grievance, hoping for support, rather than being the one at fault incurring Allah's displeasure. Another is to appreciate Allah's blessing in wiping away some of his own sins. Whatever grievance or hurt a believer suffers ensures that Allah takes away from him some of his past sins. A third one is that he realizes that what he has suffered is easier to bear than something else that might have happened to him. Whatever trial a person suffers is less in degree than something else that is harder and more bitter. If it is the utmost that may befall him in body and property, let him think of holding firm to his faith. Any calamity that befalls a

believer is light if it does not affect his faith. Another method of good reaction is to hope that he will receive Allah's reward in full on the Day when everyone is in need of His kindness.

The tenth position is that of following the right lead. This is an highly honourable position. The person who follows the example of Allah's messengers, prophets and devoted servants is one who is wise. They are the ones Allah loves best. Yet they are the ones who suffer the hardest trials. People are quick to cause them the worst of harm. We need only to look at what prophets suffered at the hands of their own peoples. Prophet Muhammad suffered from his enemies greater harm than anyone else. In the early days of his message, he received a clear warning. Waraqah ibn Nawfal told him that he would be disbelieved, harmed and driven away from his city. He explained this telling him: 'No man has ever preached a message like yours and was not met with enmity'.<sup>76</sup> This continues into his heirs and followers. Yet does not a Muslim feel happy to follow in the footsteps of the best of mankind?

The eleventh position is the noblest and highest. It is the position of Allah's oneness. When a person's heart is full of the love of Allah, sincere in his faith, preferring to please Him and seeking to draw closer to Him, he will experience in his heart a feeling of delight, reassurance and serenity granted by Allah. He will yearn for his meeting with Allah, looking at Him as his only patron, entrusting all his affairs to Him and accepting whatever He determines for him. In this position, a person cares nothing for whatever harm people cause him.



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<sup>76</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 3; Muslim, 160.

## THE STAGE OF HUMILITY

**Allah** says: ‘The true servants of the Lord of Grace are those who walk gently on earth’. (25: 63) He also says: ‘Believers, if you renounce your faith, Allah will bring forth [in your stead] people whom He loves and who love Him, humble towards the believers, proud towards the unbelievers’. (5: 54) Since their humility is one of grace, compassion and care, the verse says that it is ‘towards’ the believers. This is not an act of one who feels himself low and accepts contempt. It is a humility associated with a generous and kind attitude. An authentic hadith narrated by ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd quotes the Prophet: ‘A person with an atom weight of arrogance in his heart will not enter Heaven’.<sup>77</sup>

The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to greet children when he passed by them. A slave girl would take him by the hand and he would go with her wherever she wanted to attend to her need. At home, he always helped and served his wives. He never avenged himself against anyone. He used to mend his shoes, patch his robe, milk a sheep for his family, feed a camel, eat with servants, sit with poor people, walk with a widow or an orphan child to attend to their needs, be the first to greet anyone who meets him along the road, accept an invitation even to a very humble meal.

The Prophet was easy to deal with, fine mannered, having a generous nature, kind in his treatment of others, always smiling, having a cheerful face, showing graceful humility, generous but not a spendthrift, soft-hearted and compassionate to every Muslim, dealing easily with all believers.

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<sup>77</sup> Related by Muslim, 91.

Al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ was asked about humility. He answered: ‘that a person submits to the truth and accepts it from whoever says it’. ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr reports: ‘One day I saw ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb carrying a leather water container on his shoulder. I said to him that this was not right for him, as he was the ruler of the Muslim community. He said: “When delegations came to me declaring their allegiance, I experienced a feeling of elation. I thought I must humble myself”.

It is reported that Abu Dharr one day insulted Bilāl referring to his being black skinned. He subsequently regretted what he said. He threw himself on the ground swearing that he would not lift his head until Bilāl had stepped on his face. He did not lift his head until Bilāl did so.

The first two sins committed in disobedience of Allah were arrogance and greed. Arrogance was the sin committed by Iblīs, and it condemned him to his lasting position. Adam (peace be upon him) committed the sin of greed. Iblīs argued that his sin was his lot and he insisted on it. Adam, on the other hand, attributed his sin to himself, admitting his fault and praying for Allah’s forgiveness. Allah accepted his repentance and gave him guidance.

Those who are arrogant, persist in their sins and attribute them to Allah’s will are with their leader, Iblīs who takes them to Hell. Those who experience desire, then repent, acknowledge their faults and seek Allah’s forgiveness, refraining from attributing their faults to Allah’s will, are with their first father, Adam, in Heaven.



## THE STAGE OF MANLINESS, i.e. *MURŪ'AH*

The Arabic word used in this title, *murū'ah*, has no English equivalent. As it is derived from the same root as *umru*, which means 'male human', the author defines it, even though it is widely used in a positive sense describing a person's character.

**The** real meaning of *murū'ah* is the acquisition of human traits that distinguish man from animals and the accursed Satan. There are three forces within man pulling him in different directions. One force tries to get it to adopt Satan's characteristics of conceit, envy, arrogance, evil, aggression, corruption and cheating. Another force, which is the urge of desire, pulls it towards animal behaviour. The third force pulls it towards the characteristics of angels including kindness, good counsel, dutifulness, knowledge, obedience, etc. The reality of *murū'ah* is the dislike and turning away from the first two forces and the willing response to the third force.

The lack of *murū'ah* and its absence is to respond to the first two forces and move with them wherever they lead. An early scholar said: 'Allah created the angels giving them reason but no desire. He created animals giving them desire, but no reason. He created man and gave him both reason and desire. When a man's reason overcomes his desire, he joins the angels, but the one whose desire overcomes his reason joins the animals'. Hence, it is said that the edge of *murū'ah* is that of reason controlling desire.

The reality of *murū'ah* is the avoidance of all that is low and unbecoming of speech, manners and deeds. The *murū'ah* of speech is its decency, kindness and readiness to please. The *murū'ah* of manners is treating everyone with kindness, extending it to those we love and those we do not love. The *murū'ah* of money is to spend it in ways which are fair

and acceptable to reason, social tradition and divine faith. The *murū'ah* of one's social standing is to use it in helping whoever is in need of such help. The *murū'ah* of charity is to be prompt with it, making it easy and available, without staring at it when given and forgetting it after it has been given. This is the generous and bountiful way.

There is a different kind of *murū'ah*, which is turning away. Thus, a person of high *murū'ah* turns away from dispute, remonstrance, demand, contentiousness, turning a blind eye to what someone takes away of one's rights, overlooking people's faults, behaving as if you do not know of any fault they have. This type of *murū'ah* is of three grades.

The first grade is dealing with oneself. This involves that a person forces himself to observe what is good and gives a fine impression, abandoning whatever is shameful and unbecoming. He trains himself to do this until it becomes his natural behaviour in public. The point here is that when one habitually does something shameful in secret, it is bound to appear in public. Therefore, one must not do in private what one feels ashamed to do in public, except an action that is naturally private and religiously acceptable.

The second grade is dealing with other people, observing the rules of propriety, decorum and good manners. A person must not show himself doing what he dislikes to see done by others. He should consider other people as a mirror of himself. Whatever he dislikes of speech, action or manner should be avoided, and whatever he feels good and appropriate he may do.

The third grade relates to one's position with Allah, realizing that He looks at us at every moment. Therefore, the person should feel ashamed of his faults being observed by Allah. He must exert his best effort to mend his faults and shortcomings. Allah buys our souls from us, and everyone will hand his soul over to Him. It is not right to hand it over with defects, asking for the full price. To do so is contrary to *murū'ah*.



# THE STAGE OF POLITENESS

**Politeness** is the area of taking care of one's tongue and speech, using fine words which are appropriate for the situation in hand, making sure that there is no fault or flaw in what is being said. It is a branch of good manners. Politeness is of three kinds: politeness with Allah, politeness with Allah's Messenger and His code of law, and politeness with His creation.

## POLITENESS WITH Allah

This has three levels: the first is to ensure that one's dealings with Him are free of defects and flaws. The second is to make sure that one's heart does not look up to anyone else. The third is to ensure that one's will does not embrace what may cause His dislike. Ibn al-Mubārak said: 'We need a little politeness more than we need much knowledge'.

Consider how Allah's messengers spoke to, and requested Allah; you will find it overflowing with politeness. Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) said to Allah in answer to His question whether he told people to treat him and his mother as deities: 'Had I said this, You would certainly have known it'. Note that Jesus did not say: 'No, I did not say that'. From a politeness point of view, there is much difference between the two answers. Jesus referred the proof to Allah's perfect knowledge of his own condition and secrets. He added: 'You know all that is within myself'. He then disclaimed any knowledge of what belongs to Allah, saying: 'Whereas I do not know what is in Yourself'. (5: 116)

The same standard of politeness is demonstrated by Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) as he said: 'It is He who has created me, and is

the One who guides me. He is the One who gives me to eat and to drink. When I fall ill, He is the One who restores me to health'. (26: 78-80) As he was continuing his reference to Allah's favours, Abraham says: 'When I fall ill'. He did not say: 'When He causes me to fall ill'. Maintaining politeness with Allah, Abraham attributes his illness to himself, not to Allah.

When explaining his deeds which seemed to Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) very strange, al-Khaḍir said of his making a hole in the boat: 'I desired to slightly damage it'. (18: 79) He did not say that Allah desired him to damage it. But when he explained his raising up the wall that was about to collapse, he said: 'Your Lord has willed it that when they come of age they should dig up their treasure by your Lord's grace'. (18: 82) The difference is that the first act appeared bad, while the other was very good. Al-Khaḍir attributed the apparently bad deed to himself and the very good one to Allah, although he did both at Allah's bidding.

The same may be said about the way the believer jinn expressed their ignorance of Allah's purpose concerning certain developments. They said: 'We do not know if this bodes evil for those who live on earth, or if their Lord intends to guide them to what is right'. (72: 10) The possibility of good results for the people on earth is attributed to Allah, while the other alternative is left undefined. A more refined way of expression is Prophet Moses' supplication: 'My Lord! Truly am I in dire need of any good which You may send me'. (28: 24) Moses had just arrived in Madyan after a long journey across Sinai. He had nothing, a total stranger in the place. Yet he does not specify what he needed most.

'Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak said: 'The one who is complacent in observing politeness will be punished by being deprived of voluntary worship, and the one who is complacent about voluntary worship will be punished by being deprived of obligatory ones. The one who is complacent about obligatory worship will be punished by being deprived of knowledge'.

Politeness is religion in its entirety. Covering one's 'awrah, i.e. the part of one's body which is forbidden to expose before others, is an aspect of

politeness and propriety. The same may be said about ordinary ablution, i.e. *wudu*, and grand ablution, i.e. *ghusl*. The same applies to keeping one's body and clothing free of impurity. Thus, a Muslim stands in front of Allah, offering his prayer, completely pure. This is the reason why scholars recommend people ensure good appearance when they pray. Some early scholars bought a fine suit, paying a large sum of money for it, to wear when they prayed. They used to say: 'My Lord is the One for whom I should wear the best I have when I pray'. What all this means is that politeness with Allah, Blessed and Exalted, equates with fulfilling the teachings of His religion and the implementation of its manners and values in public and private.

Politeness with Allah cannot properly be observed unless one fulfils three requirements: 1) knowledge of His names and attributes; 2) knowledge of His faith, code of law and what He likes and dislikes; and 3) a willing and accommodating soul which is ready to accept the truth, learn it, act on it and be happy with it.

## **POLITENESS WITH Allah's MESSENGER**

The most important aspect of politeness with Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) is full submission to and acceptance of his orders, accepting and believing whatever information he gives, without contrasting it with some imaginary thing which a person considers reasonable when it is false. He must not raise any doubt about it, or put someone else's view ahead of it. The Prophet must be considered the ultimate arbiter and his rulings willingly accepted in the same way as Allah is the only One to be worshipped, submitted to and relied upon.

Another aspect of politeness with Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) is to refrain from any presumptuous behaviour in his presence. In other words, one must not express any order, prohibition, permission or any other action until the Prophet has given his order or permission. This is clearly stated by Allah in the Qur'an, as He says: '**Believers! Do not behave presumptuously in the presence of Allah and His Messenger**'.

(49: 1) This commandment remains valid until the Day of Judgement. Presumptuous behaviour about his Sunnah after his death is the same as such behaviour in his presence during his life. There is no difference between the two, as all people with sound minds will agree.

Politeness with the Prophet includes that no one may raise his voice above the Prophet's voice, because this could lead to all one's deeds coming to nothing. What can be said about raising people's views and ideas above his Sunnah and teachings? Could this be a reason for the acceptance of people's deeds, when the mere raising of their voices above the Prophet's will ruin their deeds?

Furthermore, politeness with the Prophet means that his statements are not questionable. Indeed, we should question people's views if they are inconsistent with what he said. What he stated may not be opposed by any analogy. Indeed, all conclusions made through analogy are discounted if they are in conflict with what he said. His meanings may not be twisted in order to agree with some thought people may presume to be logical.

## **POLITENESS WITH OTHER PEOPLE**

Politeness with people means treating them as is fitting with them, according to their different positions and levels. There is a different standard of politeness for every level, and within every level there may be a special type of politeness. With one's parents, a certain kind of politeness should be observed, and within this a special standard applies to one's father in particular. A different kind applies to dealing with a scholar, and yet a totally different kind is observed with the sultan, or ruler. The ruler himself observes a particular standard of politeness when he deals with his counterparts. With foreigners he adopts a type of politeness which is different from his normal one with his friends. Be that as it may, a person maintains a standard of politeness with his family which differs from what is due to his guests.

Needless to say, a person's politeness is the key to his happiness and success, while impoliteness is the key to his unhappiness and failure. Nothing ensures success in this life and the life to come better than politeness, and nothing leads to failure in both worse than impoliteness.

Two long hadiths mention two stories concerning politeness with one's parents. In the first, a man finds himself with his two friends in a cave when a large rock falls and blocks their way out. He prays to Allah, citing an act of his dutifulness towards his parents as his means of appeal, and Allah responds by moving the rock for them to leave. In the other hadith, the Prophet mentions that prior to his time, a devout was praying in his hermitage when his mother called him. He continued with his prayer without answering her. As this was repeated on more than one day, it led to him going through a difficult test. He was falsely accused of fornication, beaten up and his hermitage destroyed before the truth became known.





## THE STAGE OF CERTAINTY

**In** relation to faith, certainty is like the soul to the body. It is in their certainty that scholars competed and excelled one another. Certainty of faith is the goal of such workers, and all their teachings pointed to it. When certainty is coupled with patience in adversity, the two together give birth to leadership in faith. Allah says: ‘We raised among them leaders who, so long as they remained steadfast and had sure faith in Our revelations, spread guidance in accordance with Our command’. (32: 24)

Certainty is the spirit of the heart’s actions, and, in turn, these are the spirit of physical actions. It is indeed the essence of belief, and the pivot around which one’s faith turns. Certainty goes hand in hand with reliance on Allah, and this has led to the definition of reliance as ‘profound certainty’. The right thing to say is that reliance on Allah is the fruit and result of the certainty of faith. Hence, it is right to couple it with right guidance. Allah says to the Prophet: ‘So, place your trust in Allah; for yours is surely the path of the clear truth’. (27: 79) The truth is the certainty. Allah’s messengers said to their communities: ‘Why should we not place our trust in Allah, when He has guided us on our paths?’ (14: 12) When certainty touches one’s heart, it becomes full of light. No more does it entertain doubt, worry or sorrow. It becomes full of the love of Allah, fearing Him, yet pleased with Him, grateful and devoted to Him, and relying on Him. It is the essence of all the believer’s positions.

Scholars held different views on whether it is acquired through a person’s hard work or granted by Allah. The fact is that from the point of view of its causes, it is acquired, while from the point of view of its nature and essence, it is granted.

Al-Junayd said: ‘Certainty means knowledge that takes root in one’s heart so that it neither alters nor changes’. Another scholar said: ‘I saw Heaven and Hell in reality’. He was asked: ‘How could you do that?’ He said: ‘I saw them through Allah’s Messenger’s eye. My viewing of them through his eye is more certain than if I saw them with my own eye. Unlike his, my vision may err or be thwarted’.

Certainty motivates to do the difficult thing and take risks. It requires that one always goes forward. Therefore, unless it is coupled with true knowledge, it may lead to a disaster. Knowledge, on the other hand, encourages taking care and not pressing ahead. Unless it is coupled with certainty, it may cause slackness and missing out on gains.

There is a difference between certain knowledge, true certainty and absolute certainty. The difference is the same as between true information and witnessed information. Absolute certainty is even more certain. The three grades are likened to a person telling you that he has honey and you have no doubt that his information is correct. He then shows it to you and you are more certain. You then taste the honey he has. The first is true information, while the second gives you more certainty. The third is absolute certainty based on seeing and tasting the honey.

Our present knowledge of Heaven and Hell is that of certain knowledge. When Heaven is brought within sight on the Day of Judgement so that all people behold it and the blazing Fire is placed in full view of all, this becomes true certainty. When the people of each are taken into their respective abodes, this becomes the absolute certainty.



## THE STAGE OF Allah's REMEMBRANCE

**Allah's** remembrance is like a bridge: whoever crosses it is given a firm bond, and whoever stops before it remains isolated. It is the nourishment of people's hearts: when a heart does not have this nourishment, the body becomes its grave. It is the structure providing people's dwelling place: when it is not built, their land remains barren. It is people's weapon with which they fight robbers lying on their way, and the water they need to fight the raging fire. It is the cure for their ills: when they do not take it, their hearts remain poorly. It is the relationship between people and Allah who is well-aware of all things.

With Allah's remembrance people can keep away troubles, identify their worries and overcome their calamities. For every organ of the human body there is an act of worship required at a specific time. Allah's remembrance is the worship done by one's heart and tongue, but it has no specific time. We are required to remember Allah whom we love and worship in every status and position, standing, sitting or lying down. Heaven is like a fertile land and Allah's remembrance is the young shoots of its trees.

Likewise, for man's heart, it is the foundation and structure of its palace. It is what keeps the heart bright and shiny. It is the cure for it when it is unwell. The deeper a person goes in his remembrance, the greater is his love of the One he is remembering and the more eager he is to meet Him. When his remembrance is joined by his tongue and heart together, he forgets everything else. Allah will protect him from all things and compensate him for every loss. With Allah's remembrance, man's hearing, sight and speech are at their clearest. With it, Allah adorns the tongues of those who remember Him, as with light He adorns the sight

of the onlookers. A tongue that is oblivious of Allah's remembrance is like a blind eye, a deaf ear and a motionless arm.

Allah's remembrance is the widest gate between Him and His servants. It remains open unless man closes it. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: 'Look for sweetness in three things: prayer, remembrance of Allah and reciting the Qur'an. If you experience it, well and good. Otherwise, know that the door is closed'. It is through remembrance of Allah that man can overcome Satan, in the same way as Satan overcomes oblivious people.

Remembrance of Allah is highlighted in the Qur'an in ten ways:

1. It is ordered, either in general or under conditions.
2. The opposite, which is being oblivious to it, is unacceptable.
3. Success is attached to doing it much, frequently and in all situations.
4. Praise of those who do it, stating what Allah prepares for them of forgiveness of their sins and admittance into Heaven.
5. Stating that those who neglect it, being busy with other things are losers.
6. Allah makes the reward of their remembrance of Him that He mentions them.
7. Stating that Allah's remembrance is greater than everything else.
8. It is the last of all good deeds, as it is the first.
9. Stating that those who remember Allah often are the ones who benefit by His signs and that they alone are the ones endowed with insight.
10. It is in company with all good deeds and their soul. When these are done without remembrance of Allah, they are like a body without a soul.

Those who remember Allah often are the ones who excel, as stated in a

hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah: ‘Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) was marching towards Makkah when he passed by a mountain called Jumdān. He said: “Move along; this is Jumdān. The single ones have taken a lead”. People asked: “Who are the single ones, Messenger of Allah?” He said: “All men and women who always remember Allah”’.<sup>78</sup>

Abu al-Dradā’ narrated that Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: ‘Shall I tell you which is the best of your deeds, the best liked by your Lord, and the one which gives you the highest grades, and is better than that you give gold and silver in charity and fight your enemies striking their necks and having your necks stricken by them?’ They said: ‘What is that, Messenger of Allah?’ He said: ‘Remembrance of Allah, Mighty and Exalted’.<sup>79</sup>

To appreciate the high status of Allah’s remembrance it is sufficient to remember that Allah praises its people to His angels. This is clearly stated in an authentic hadith narrated by Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abi Sufyān: ‘Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) saw a circle of his companions and asked them: “What are you sitting here for?” They said: “We are engaged in glorifying Allah, praising Him for guiding us to Islam and favouring us with it”. He said: “I ask you by Allah, is it the only thing you are sitting here for?” They said: “By Allah, we are only sitting here for that”. He said: “I did not ask you to swear because of any doubt on my part, but Gabriel came and told me that Allah, Mighty and Exalted, praises you to the angels”’.<sup>80</sup>

In a highly authentic hadith, Abu Mūsā al-Ash‘arī mentions that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A person who remembers his Lord and one who does not are like one who is alive and one who is dead’.<sup>81</sup>

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78 Related by Muslim, 2,676.

79 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,377; Ibn Mājah, 3,790.

80 Related by Muslim, 2,701.

81 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,407; Muslim, 779.

## TYPES OF Allah's REMEMBRANCE

There are three types of Allah's remembrance: 1) Mention of Allah's names and attributes with their meanings. Praising Allah and stating His oneness with them; 2) Mention of His commands and prohibitions, what is lawful and what is forbidden; and 3) Mention of His favours and blessings.

In a different classification, it is also of three types: 1) Remembrance by both heart and tongue, which is the best type; 2) Remembrance by heart alone, which is the second grade; and 3) Remembrance by the tongue alone, which is the lowest of the three.

When a person mentions his Lord, this is flanked by two mentions of him by his Lord: a mention before that person does it, and this makes him one who remembers Allah; and a mention that follows his remembrance of Allah, which makes him remembered. Allah says: 'Remember me, then, and I will remember you'. (2: 152) In a *qudsī*, or sacred hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Allah, Mighty and Exalted, says: I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he mentions Me. If he mentions Me to himself, I mention him to Myself; and if he mentions me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly'.<sup>82</sup>



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82 Related by al-Bukhari, 7,405; Muslim, 2,675.

## THE STAGE OF KNOWLEDGE

**Unless** this stage accompanies the one undertaking the journey towards Allah from the first to the last step he takes along the road, then he is on the wrong track and cannot reach his destination. Without knowledge all ways of right guidance and success are closed to him. This is agreed upon by all scholars with insight. None says that knowledge is unnecessary except those who stand in ambush to stop travellers. These are Satan's assistants and guards.

Al-Junayd ibn Muhammad said: 'All routes are closed to all people except for those who follow Allah's Messenger's footsteps'. He also said: 'In this matters of ours, only a scholar who has memorized the Qur'an and studied the hadith may be followed, because our knowledge is based strictly on the Qur'an and the Sunnah'.

Knowledge is a guide. It is the heritage of prophets, and those who learn it are the prophet's own people and heirs. Knowledge is life for one's heart, light for one's sight, satisfaction for one's breast, the field of activity for one's mind, the pleasure of souls, the company for the lonely, and the guide for the doubters. It is the scales on which people's speech, action and condition are weighed. It is the arbiter between doubt and certainty, guidance and error.

It is through knowledge that Allah is known, worshipped, remembered, praised, glorified and declared to be One without partners. With knowledge, the travellers have been guided to Him. Through it, He has been reached. Knowledge is the gate admitting those who seek to be with Him. It is the standard by which laws and rulings are known, what is lawful is distinguished from what is forbidden, ties of kinship

are maintained, and the ways that are acceptable to the loved One are identified and followed.

Knowledge is in the lead and action follows. Knowledge is the company in the strange land, the interlocutor when one is alone, the friend when one is lonely, the dispeller of doubt, the treasure that permanently enriches its owner, the refuge that guarantees permanent safety.

To learn and study is equal to glorifying Allah. To search it is jihad, to pursue it is akin to worship, to offer it is an act of charity, to review it with colleagues is equal to voluntary fasting and night worship. The need for it is greater than for food and drink. Imam Ahmad said: ‘People need knowledge more than they need food and drink. A man is in need of food and drink once or twice during a day, but he is in need of knowledge with every breath’.

Al-Shāfi‘ī is quoted as saying: ‘The pursuit of knowledge is preferable to voluntary prayer’. Abu Ḥanīfah also states this. Ibn Wahb said: ‘I was sitting with Mālik. I put down my sheets and offered some prayer. He said to me: “What you rose to do is not better in reward than what you abandoned”’. This is mentioned by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr among others.

Allah states the testimony of scholars concerning the greatest truth of all, namely, His oneness. He mentions their testimony along with His own testimony and that of the angels. This is sufficient to make them reliable witnesses, because an unreliable person is unacceptable as a witness.

Knowledge is Allah’s argument on earth, His light given to His servants, their guide to His Heaven and what brings them an honourable position with Him.

To emphasize its high position, it is sufficient to remember that the scholars’ status is superior to that of ordinary people in the same way as the moon is superior to all planets. The angels lower their wings for scholars to give them shade from the sun. All living beings on earth and in the heavens, including sea fish and ants in their holes, pray to

Allah for scholars. Allah and His angels bless those who teach people goodness.

Prophet Moses, who was honoured by Allah speaking to him directly, without an intermediary, travelled a long distance with his servant, tiring themselves out, in pursuit of knowledge. The result was that he learnt three cases. Yet he was one of Allah's most honoured servants.

Allah ordered Prophet Muhammad, His last messenger, to supplicate for more knowledge. He told him to 'always say: My Lord, increase my knowledge'. (20: 114)





## THE STAGE OF TRANQUILLITY

**Allah** mentions tranquillity, or inner peace, six times in the following verses of the Qur'an: 'Their Prophet also said to them, "The portent of his kingship is that a casket shall be brought to you, wherein you shall have peace of reassurance from your Lord".' (2: 248) 'Allah then bestowed from on high an air of inner peace on His Messenger and on the believers.' (9: 26) 'When these two were alone in the cave, he said to his companion: "Do not grieve, for Allah is with us". Thereupon Allah bestowed on Him the gift of inner peace, and sent to his aid forces which you did not see.' (9: 40) 'It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers, so that they may grow more firm in their faith. To Allah belongs all the forces of the heavens and the earth; He is indeed all-knowing, wise.' (48: 4) 'Allah was indeed well pleased with the believers when they pledged their allegiance to you under the tree. He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent down tranquillity upon them, and rewarded them with a speedy victory.' (48: 18) 'The unbelievers fanned fury in their hearts, the fury of ignorance. Meanwhile, Allah sent down tranquillity on His Messenger and on the believers, and made the word of piety binding on them.' (48: 26)

It was the practice of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, when he faced particularly difficult situations, to recite these verses which mention tranquillity and inner peace. I heard him speak about a momentous event that occurred to him during a severe illness, in which he was facing evil spirits which appeared to him when he felt very weak. He said: 'When I was extremely troubled by the situation, I said to my relatives and those who were around: "Recite the verses speaking of tranquillity and inner peace". The trouble was then relieved. I sat up feeling no worry'. I myself tried reciting these verses when my mind

and heart were troubled with what may occur. I found them to be very effective in giving reassurance and tranquillity.

The Arabic word used in all the six verses mentioned at the opening of this chapter is *sakīnah*, which linguistically means ‘reassurance, serenity’. It is the tranquillity which Allah grants to His servant when he is perturbed by great fears. He will then be reassured, untroubled by whatever comes. His faith is strengthened and he feels more firm. It may be translated as tranquillity, inner peace or serenity.

Allah mentions that He sent tranquillity down on His Messenger and the believers at times of worry and uncertainty. It happened on the day the Prophet started his migration to Madinah. He needed it when he and his companion, Abu Bakr, were in the cave, with the enemy just outside. Were any of the enemy soldiers to look where he was stepping, he would have seen them. Allah also granted it to the believers on the day of the Battle of Hunayn, when they retreated and were in confusion, confronted by a determined enemy. A different occasion when they needed and were given such tranquillity was when the unbelievers of Makkah were determined to prevent them entry into the holy city. They imposed on them harsh conditions which they found unbearable. Even ‘Umar was extremely unhappy until Abu Bakr reassured him. Ibn ‘Abbās said that every mention of *sakīnah* in the Qur’an means tranquillity and inner peace, except the first one, which is in Surah 2, which states ‘reassurance’.

When tranquillity is settled in a person’s heart, all his body will be in a state of reassurance. He is in a state of peace, speaking rightly and wisely. It stops him from using vulgar language and false statements. Ibn ‘Abbās said: ‘We used to say that tranquillity speaks through ‘Umar’s tongue and heart’.



## THE STAGE OF LOVE

**This** is the stage to reach and for which all hard workers compete. To arrive at its signpost is the aim of all front runners. Reaching it is the prize for which lovers will sacrifice all. It is nourishment for heart and soul. It is life, and whoever is denied it stays among the dead. It is the light, and whoever is without it remains in deep darkness. It is the cure, and whoever does not have it is prone to all diseases. It is the happiness, and whoever does not have it lives in total misery. It is the essence of faith, action, position and condition. When these are devoid of it, they are a body without a soul.

Love is what carries the loads of travellers heading to distant lands which they could not otherwise reach without bearing much hardship. It takes them to destinations they cannot reach without it. It gives them positions they cannot otherwise attain. Love is their vehicle that takes them to meet the One they love. It is their direct way to the position they dream of.

The people who feel this love get the highest honour of this present life and the honour of the life to come, because they will be the closest to the One they love. When He determined the destiny of all creation according to His infallible wisdom, Allah willed that ‘everyone shall be with whom he or she loves’. What a great blessing for those who love Him most!

These lovers have certainly gone ahead of the speeding travellers while they themselves are asleep in their beds. They are on their easy track, yet they are far ahead of those going at speed. They responded to the beckoner of love when he called on them: ‘Come to success’. They offered themselves, willingly and with pleasure, seeking only to go to the

One they love. They continued their march morning, evening and during the night. When they arrived, they were pleased for having continued on their journey through the night and thanked their Master for what He had given them. An old Arabian proverb says: ‘It is in the morning that travellers realize the great benefit of marching by night’. This compares marching during the cool hours of the night as compared to travelling in the desert during the hours of blazing heat on a summer’s day.

The first price of love is self-sacrifice. What will a coward, stingy bankrupt offer? What is on offer is not something without appeal to buyers. It is put on auction, with a reserved price for the soul itself. The lazy pretenders stayed behind when the true lovers stepped forward to find out who of them will meet the right price. The offered commodity was turned around and fell in the hands of those who are ‘**humble towards the believers, proud towards the unbelievers**’. (5: 54)

When those who claim to be lovers are numerous, they will be asked for proof of their claims. Were people to be given whatever they claim to be theirs, many will come with great claims. Those claiming love bring a variety of proofs, but they are told that the only proof of this particular claim of loving Allah is: ‘**Say: “If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins”**’. (3: 31) All people will step behind except those who have followed Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) in what he did, said and in his manners and values. They will be asked to prove the validity of their evidence. This proof is: ‘**They will strive hard for Allah’s cause and will not fear to be censured by any critic**’. (5: 54)

At this point, most lovers will stay behind except those who have striven for Allah’s cause. They are told that the life of a lover does not belong to him. You need to make a bargain: ‘**Allah has bought of the believers their lives and their property, promising them heaven in return**’. (9: 111) As they realize the greatness of the Buyer, the nature of the price offered and the One who conducts the bargain, they realize the great value of the commodity being bought. It is clear to them then that selling it to anyone else for a trifling price would be exceedingly unfair

and unjustified. Therefore, they conclude the sale with Him, willingly, with no right of choice attached to the sale. They say to Him: ‘By Allah, we shall not accept any turning back and we will never turn back’.

When the contract of sale is thus concluded and the purchased commodity is delivered to the Buyer, they are told: Since your souls and property are now Ours, We return them back to you in their best conditions, and We will in addition give you much more: ‘Do not think of those who are slain in Allah’s cause as dead. They are alive, and well provided for by their Lord. Happy they are with what Allah has granted them’. (3: 169-170)

If the tree of love is planted in the believer’s heart and irrigated with the water of sincerity, and looked after by the lover, it will give a variety of fruits, yielding them at all times by its Lord’s leave. It is firmly rooted in the believer’s heart and its branches are at the highest point in the sky, reaching up to the farthest limit. The lover’s deeds will continue to go up to his loved One, with nothing to stop it, as Allah says: ‘To Him ascend all good words, and He exalts the good deed’. (35: 10)

## THE DEFINITION OF LOVE

Love is not given a limit that can make it clearer than it really is. Whatever limit is attached to it will make it less understood. Its limit is the fact that it happens and it is present. It cannot be described by anything clearer than itself. People only speak about its causes, duties, signs, evidence, fruits and rulings. All their statements and limits are based on these six matters. They use a variety of expressions and descriptions, according to every person’s understanding, position, condition and facility of expression.

One of the most comprehensive statements about it was given by Abu Bakr al-Kattānī who said: ‘A question about the love of Allah was raised in Makkah, during the hajj season. Scholars spoke about it. Al-Junayd was the youngest among them. They said to him: “Tell us what you

think, as you come from Iraq”. He lowered his head and his eyes were tearful. He then said: “A servant of Allah who is oblivious of himself, concentrating on remembrance of his Lord, attending to what is owed to Him by right, looking up to Him with his heart. His heart is burnt by the awesome light of Allah. His drink is pure as it comes in a cup full of His love. The Great Compeller appears to Him from behind the curtains of the realm beyond. Therefore, when he speaks, his speech is by Allah; when he utters something, he quotes from Allah; if he acts, it is for what Allah has ordered; if he sits still, he is with Allah. As such, he is by Allah, for Allah and with Allah”. The scholars were tearful. They said: “Nothing can be added to what you said. May Allah bless you, as you are the crown of scholars of knowledge”.

## TEN REASONS FOR LOVE

1. Reciting the Qur’an with reflection and deliberation over its meanings and what it is intended for. This should be like one who reads the work of another, trying to understand what the author wants to convey.
2. Drawing nearer to Allah by offering the recommended prayers after one has done the obligatory ones. These will take that person to the status of being loved after that of being in love.
3. Remembrance of Allah in all situations, by tongue and heart, action and condition. A person’s share of love is equal to his share of such remembrance.
4. To prefer what Allah loves over what a person loves, particularly at the moments when one’s desire is very strong. To strive to go up to what He loves, even when this is found difficult.
5. That one’s heart surveys His names and attributes and gets to know these. The heart should indulge in such knowledge and its broad scope. When a person knows Allah by His names, attributes and

action, he will inevitably love Him. Hence deviant groups, like those who deny His attributes, are like highway robbers, trying to stop people's hearts from going to their loved One.

6. Looking at Allah's bounties, favours, signs and evident and subtle blessings. These motivate people to love Allah.
7. This is one of the most amazing of all. It is one's heart being felt broken before Allah. This cannot be expressed except through words and phrases.
8. To use the time when He descends [during the night] and be alone with Him, appealing to Him, reciting His words, and standing with one's heart before Him in the manner of His devout servant. Then, to finish all this with expressing one's repentance of past sins and seeking His forgiveness.
9. To frequent the circles of true lovers and pick the best of their speeches, in the same way as one picks the best of fruits. One should not speak unless there is clear indication that what one is about to say is of benefit to others as well as to oneself.
10. To stay away from everything that keeps one's heart distant from Allah, Mighty and Exalted.

It is through these ten ways that lovers attain the stage of love and reach their loved One. The whole matter relies on two things: that one's soul is ready for it and one's insight is open to it. In addition, Allah's help must be sought.

## **MAN'S LOVE OF Allah AND Allah's LOVE OF MAN**

Allah says: 'Say: "If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you"'. (3: 31) This verse is called the verse of love. Abu Sulaymān al-Dārānī said: 'When people's hearts claimed to love Allah, He set a test for them: "If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you"'. (3: 31)

A hadith related in both authentic anthologies and narrated by Anas quotes Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) as saying: 'Three qualities: when combined by a person, ensure that that person will experience, through them, the sweetness of faith: that Allah and His Messenger are dearer to him than anyone else; that he loves a person for no reason other than for Allah's sake; and that now that Allah has saved him from disbelief, he hates to return to it just as he hates to be thrown into the Fire'.<sup>83</sup>

Abu Hurayrah narrated that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'Allah, Mighty and Exalted says: Whoever stands in enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him. My servant will continue to draw near to Me with voluntary works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it'.<sup>84</sup>

Abu Hurayrah narrated that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'When Allah loves one of His servants, He calls Gabriel and says to him: "I love so-and-so. Love him". So Gabriel loves him, then calls out to the people of Heaven and says: "Allah loves so-and-so. Love him". So the people of Heaven love him. Then he is granted acceptability among people on earth'.<sup>85</sup>

The Qur'an and the hadiths are full of the mention of the people Allah loves and what He loves of their deeds, speech and manners, such as: 'Allah loves those who are patient in adversity'. (3: 146) 'Allah loves those who do their duty well.' (3: 148) 'Allah loves those who turn to Him in repentance, and He loves those who keep themselves pure.' (2: 222) 'Allah loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as

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83 Related by al-Bukhari, 21; Muslim, 43.

84 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,502.

85 Related by al-Bukhari, 3,209; Muslim, 2,637.

though they were a firm and compact building.’ (61: 4) ‘Allah loves the righteous.’ (3: 76)

Many hadiths include sentences like: ‘The deeds Allah loves best are such-and-such’ and ‘Allah loves this-and-that’. For example, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘What Allah loves best is prayer on time, then dutifulness to parents, then jihad [i.e. striving] for Allah’s cause’.<sup>86</sup> He also said: ‘The deeds Allah loves best are belief in Allah, then jihad [i.e. striving] for Allah’s cause, then a pilgrimage with complete devotion’.<sup>87</sup> He also said: ‘The good deed Allah loves best is the one a person does constantly’.<sup>88</sup> The Prophet also said: ‘Allah loves that His concessions are used’.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, there are many more hadiths speaking of the types of deeds loved by Allah. Moreover, Allah is well delighted by His servant turning to Him in repentance from sin. This is indeed the greatest delight of Allah known to His servants. This is so because He loves repentance and the repentant.

Were the bond of love to be removed, all the positions and grades of faith and excellence would be removed, and the stages of the journey towards Allah would be non-existent. Love is the soul of every position, stage and deed. When any of these is devoid of love, it becomes dead. In relation to deeds, it is the same as sincerity. Indeed, it is the essence of sincerity. Love of Allah is Islam itself, because Islam means surrendering oneself to Allah with humility, love and obedience. The one who is devoid of this love does not belong to Islam. Love is the reality of the declaration, ‘there is no deity other than Allah’, which in Arabic is *lā ilāh illa Allah*. The term *ilāh* means the one people worship in love, humility, fear, hope, glorification and obedience.

As such, love is the reality of servitude to Allah and worshipping Him.

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86 Related by al-Bukhari, 527 & 5,970; Muslim, 85.

87 Related by al-Bukhari, 26; Muslim, 83.

88 Related by al-Bukhari, 43; Muslim, 785.

89 Related by Ahmad, 5,866.

Does devotion exist without love, acceptance, praise, gratitude, fear and hope? Is patience in adversity ever resorted to except by those who are in love? They rely on Allah whom they love, hoping to achieve what He is pleased with and what He loves. The same may be said of ascetism. It is in reality the attitude of those in love. They care little for everyone else, because they love Him. The same applies to modesty, because it is shown by those in love. It is an attitude that is produced by a combination of love and glorification. What is not an outcome of love is mere fear.

The same is the position of dire need, because it is the need of the soul to be with the loved one. It is the highest type of need, because none can be more needful than the heart when it feels the need for the loved One, particularly when it has no other to take the place of the loved One. This is the reality of need according to the scholars whose knowledge is profound.

The same is the feeling of richness, because it is the feeling of being rich by being with the loved One. Likewise is the yearning for the meeting with Allah. It is the very essence of love.



## THE STAGE OF TASTE

**An** authentic hadith mentions that Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: ‘Whoever accepts Allah as his Lord, Islam as his faith and Muhammad as [Allah’s] Messenger experiences the taste of faith’.<sup>90</sup> In this hadith the Prophet says that faith has a taste and that the believer’s heart experiences it in the same way as one tastes food and drink with one’s mouth.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) expresses the understanding of the truth of faith and what it means for a person’s heart in different ways. He refers to it as a taste at times, and like food and drink on occasions. He also mentions that it has a special sweetness. In the above-quoted hadith, he speaks in terms of experiencing the taste of faith. In another hadith he says: ‘Three qualities: when combined by a person, ensure that that person will experience, through them, the sweetness of faith: that Allah and His Messenger are dearer to him than anyone else; that he loves a person for no reason other than for Allah’s sake; and that now that Allah has saved him from disbelief, he hates to return to it just as he hates to be thrown into the Fire’.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, it was the taste that Heraclius considered the evidence of the truth of Muhammad’s prophethood. When he questioned Abu Sufyān, who was an unbeliever at the time, about the Prophet and his followers, one of his questions was: ‘Do any of his followers turn away from his religion in anger after having embraced it?’ Abu Sufyān answered ‘No’. Heraclius commented: ‘Such is faith when its sweetness is felt as delight

<sup>90</sup> Related by Muslim, 34.

<sup>91</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 21; Muslim, 43.

in people's hearts'.<sup>92</sup> Heraclius considered that when the taste of faith mixes with the heart's delight, it makes the believer firm in his faith. To Heraclius, this was the proof that Prophet Muhammad was a prophet delivering Allah's message. He was not aspiring to be a king or a ruler.

In short, the sweetness of faith is experienced by a believer's heart. To the heart, it is akin to the sweet taste of food in one's mouth, or akin to the pleasure of sexual intercourse. In this context, the Prophet referred to sexual pleasure as 'sweetness', saying to one woman: 'No way, until you have experienced his sweetness and he experienced yours'.<sup>93</sup> Faith has a taste and sweetness giving clear sensations. Doubts are not totally removed until a person has had such experience, with faith settling in his heart and he experiences its taste and sweetness.

## THIS FINE TASTE AND ITS SIGNS

One of the signs of this fine taste is that nothing of the affairs of this world or the aspiration for its comforts should stop a person from seeking it. Both hope and greed may disrupt a heart's endeavour to seek its higher purpose. A person who experiences the sweet taste of knowing Allah and the pleasure of being close to Him will not pin any hopes on anyone else. If he hopes for something from someone, it is only to help him in his work to win Allah's pleasure. Thus, this person's help is sought for Allah's sake, not as something sought in addition.

It may be asked: how can a person prevent such hopes from other people? The answer is the strength of his desire to achieve the highest goal and his knowledge of the triviality and transitory nature of any other hope. He realizes that such lowly hopes are nothing more than a floating image, a mere shadow or a star that is on the decline and bound to disappear soon.

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92 Related by al-Bukhari, 7; Muslim, 1,773.

93 Related by al-Bukhari, 2,639; Muslim, 1,433.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Why would I care about this present life? I am only like a traveller who stops to rest under a tree. He then leaves to continue his journey’.<sup>94</sup> He also said: ‘By Allah, compared to the Hereafter, all this world is like any of you putting this finger – pointing to his index finger – in the sea. Look, how much does it bring?’<sup>95</sup> The Prophet compares the life of this world in relation to the life to come as no more than the wetness of one finger when it is dipped into the sea.

‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb said: ‘Were this whole world to be given to one man and he then dies, he would be just like a person who sees a pleasant dream, then wakes up and finds out that it was all a dream with nothing real’. Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abdullāh, or someone else, said: ‘Compared to the joys and comforts of the life to come, all the comforts of this world are less than a particle in comparison to the world’s mountains’.

Whoever looks carefully at this life and the life to come will realize that all this is true. Is it right, then, for a person of sound mind and good knowledge to allow a desire for this trivial pleasure to prevent him from seeking an everlasting and never diminishing happiness? Yet the desire for this trivial pleasure will stop him from seeking a much greater happiness, which is the happiness of knowing and loving Allah and the delight of being close to Him. Allah says: ‘Allah has promised the believers, men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide, and goodly dwellings in the Garden of Eden. Yet Allah’s acceptance is the greatest blessing of all. This is indeed the supreme triumph’. (9: 72) His acceptance is greater than Heaven and all that it contains. In the hadith that mentions the dwellers of Heaven seeing Allah, the Prophet says: ‘By Allah, they have not been given anything which they like more than that they are looking at their Lord, the Mighty, the Exalted’.<sup>96</sup> Whoever is prevented from seeking this by any misplaced hope shall have nothing but utter loss.

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94 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,377.

95 Related by Muslim, 2,858.

96 Related by Muslim, 181.



## EARLY ENTHUSIASM AND LATER SLACKENING

**Al-Junayd** said: ‘How much I yearn to regain the early days’. He is referring to the ecstasy accompanied by the beginning of the journey towards Allah, when one is full of enthusiasm, looking forward to the journey ahead. Those early days are very pleasant because one gives little attention to other people and concentrates instead on pursuing one’s objective.

Abu Bakr passed a man who, in his acute Allah-fearing sense, was weeping. Abu Bakr commented: ‘We were like him, until our hearts hardened’. The Prophet (peace be upon him) refers to enthusiasm and that in time it becomes slower. He says: ‘Every worker has a period of enthusiasm, and every enthusiasm slackens’.<sup>97</sup> A serious worker will inevitably go through a period of slackening, and he will miss his time of enthusiasm.

Going through such periods of slackening and cooling down is inevitable. Whoever slackens and goes through a time when he is still on the right track, but doing very little, remains hopeful. If he ensures not to neglect what is obligatory and not to indulge in something forbidden, it is hoped that he will regain his enthusiasm and even be better than he was earlier. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: ‘Hearts alternate between going forward and staying back. When they move forward, ensure that they do what is recommended, but when they hold back, make sure that they do not ignore what is obligatory’.

Such periods of slackening, when one’s horizon is overcast, reflect a wisdom which is known only to Allah. However, they expose who

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<sup>97</sup> Related by Ahmad, 6,764.

is true and who is false. A false person will turn back on his heels, reverting to his original nature and his desire. The true will await the clearing up of the clouds. He does not despair of Allah's mercy, but believes that it will not be long coming. He lies down at the door, full of humility, feeling himself like an empty jug with no drop of water in it. He is full of hope that the jug's Maker and Owner will put something suitable in it. Yet, refilling it does not happen through anything a person does, although his clear need for it is an important reason. Still, it is not through what a person does. It comes by Allah's blessing and the favours He bestows. He does not leave His servant to himself. Indeed He comes in between a man and his heart.

When you realize that He has placed you in this position of slackening, know that He wants to bestow mercy on you and to fill your jug. If you place your heart in a different position, then it will be a lost heart. You need then to pray to your Lord to return it to you, because hearts are within Allah's fingers, and He turns them as He wills.



## THE STAGE OF CLARITY

**Al-Junayd** used always to say: ‘Our knowledge is based strictly on the Qur’an and the Sunnah. A scholar who has not memorized the Qur’an, studied the hadith and has not learnt *Fiqh* is not one to be followed’.

Such clear knowledge, received from the niche of prophethood will prepare the person who has it to follow the route of worship. Its essence is to adopt Allah’s Messenger’s manners and accept his rulings outwardly and within oneself. This means that you stop with him where he wants you to stop and go with him wherever he takes you. In other words, you consider him your imam to whom you have given full authority over all your affairs, and whose example you follow in all situations. You adhere to everything he orders. Thus, Allah’s Messenger will be to you the ideal you pursue and the example you follow. You attach your heart and spirit to his heart and spirit, responding positively when he calls you and stopping where he tells you to stop. You go with him, take rest when he does and encamp where he encamps. You share his acceptance and anger. When he tells you about something, you treat it as if you see it with your own eyes, and when he informs you about something from Allah, you treat it as if you hear it directly as Allah says it.

In short, you consider the Prophet (peace be upon him) your teacher, the scholar you follow and your educator. You dismiss all intermediaries between him and you, except in learning what he delivers of his message, just like you drop all intermediaries between Allah and yourself in worship. The only intermediary between the Prophet and yourself is in respect of you receiving his orders and prohibitions.

These two kinds of dropping intermediaries are the essence of the

declaration that there is no deity other than Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger. Thus, Allah is the only one to be worshipped, and no one else deserves to be worshipped. His Messenger is the one to be obeyed and followed as guide. No one else deserves to be obeyed. Others may only be obeyed when they order that he be obeyed.

This means that the right way of the journey towards Allah is that of following in the footsteps of Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him), and to emulate his example in all public and private matters. Let no traveller waste his effort on any other track, because he will achieve nothing other than tiredness. His 'deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty traveller supposes to be water, but when he comes near to it, he finds that it is nothing. But he finds that Allah [has always been present] with him, and that He will pay him his account in full; for Allah is swift in reckoning'. (24: 39)

The traveller along this route should not think it hard. He will reach his destination, even if he has to crawl. Those who follow Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) may feel that they do not have a large enough volume of good deeds. However, their intention, resolve and following the Prophet's example will drive them on. Clear knowledge shows a person the destination he aims to reach through his hard work. Many, indeed most of those undertaking the journey towards Allah rely on their efforts and sustained action, without giving much thought to what they are working for. I will give a good example.

A group of people arrived at a city, coming from a distant land. However, they were all looking remarkably fine, apparently untired, clearly happy, wearing clean clothes. The local people wondered at their condition and asked them how they were. They said: Ours is a fine country, having all the comforts people need, with a fine climate, plenty of water sources, an healthy atmosphere, yielding a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Its population are the best in form and appearance. However, our king is beyond description in his handsome form and perfect personality. He is most kind, having profound knowledge, yet he is most forbearing,

generous and merciful to his people and very close to them. Yet, he is held in awe by the rulers of all our neighbouring countries. None of them even contemplates going to war against him. Therefore, our people enjoy real security. In addition, at certain times, he makes himself accessible to his people, enabling them to attend him. When they look at him, all their comforts and enjoyments seem to them to be trivial. If he turns towards any one of them in particular, all the people of his kingdom will hold that person in great respect. He has sent us to you to invite you to come to him. Here we have his letters addressed to the people. We have witnesses to remove any doubt regarding what we say, so that no one can accuse us of misrepresentation.

The people of the city differed in their response. One group said: We shall not leave our homeland to undertake such a long journey. We cannot leave our familiar homes and way of life, and we cannot especially part with our parents, children and friends on the basis of a promise to be fulfilled somewhere away from our land. After all, here in our own country, we need to work hard to earn a living. How can we leave all this?

This group felt that leaving their homeland was the same as parting with their own bodies. Because man's soul is so familiar with his body, it hates leaving it, even when it is assured of permanent happiness. We may say that the urge of what is familiar and natural overcomes reason in this case.

Another group assured themselves that those people were stating the truth and started to prepare themselves to accompany them on their way back to their land. However, their own families, friends and neighbours who decided to stay discouraged them. They also felt the appeal of their homes and farms. All this left them hesitant. When the thought of an easy and pleasant life beckoned to them, they wanted to leave, but when they looked at their familiar life in their city, they wanted to stay. They were constantly pulled in opposite directions. They remained waiting for one of the two options to become more appealing.

A third group were clearer in their decision. They thought that going to the king's land was the better alternative. Hence, they paid no attention to other people's arguments and decided to head there. However, their march was slow because of the inadequate information they had about that land and its king.

A fourth group were more serious. They started their journey and went at speed. However, they concentrated on the trip, doing whatever was needed to move along and continue their travel. They did not think of the ultimate purpose and the great goal.

There was a fifth group, and these started their journey in earnest, concentrating on the goal they had set for themselves. As they progressed, they continued to look forward to the one they aimed to join, as though they could see him faraway, calling on them to come along and join him. It is as though this picture was clear in their minds and they were doing their best to make it a reality.

Everyone works according to the clarity of what he sees. A person whose knowledge enables him to see the one he works for endeavours to make his work of the best quality, excelling the one who does not see him. Moreover, he does not feel as tired as the other. This is clearly seen in life. Whoever serves a king in his presence, when the king is watching him, is different in position and the quality of his work from one who serves the same king when he is away and uncertain of meeting him.

The clarity of a person's knowledge gives him sound intention and resolution. When these are sound, they aspire to what is best. They remain low when the intention and resolution are unsound.

The healthiest intention and resolution are those which seek the truth and sincerely urge people to embrace it. Such are the intention and resolution of Allah's messengers and those who follow them. Their intention and resolution are healthy because they have a single aim, objective and way. Their sincerity gives them a single aim, their truthfulness a single objective, while their way is one because they follow the guide appointed for them by Allah, not chosen by their own preferences.

How different resolutions are, and how varied the intention upon which they are based. One resolution looks up to the One on the Throne, while another looks at trifles. Ordinary people say that a person's value depends on what he does well, while the elite say that a person's value depends on his goal. The elite of the elite say that a person's value depends on his resolution in his effort to achieve his goal.

To have an idea of the different levels of people's resolution in seeking their goals, we need only remember Rabī'ah ibn Ka'b al-Aslamī, who was the Prophet's servant. The Prophet told him to make a request of him. He said: 'I request to be in your company in Heaven'.<sup>98</sup> Others would have requested a meal or a garment of clothing.

The best of all examples is the Prophet's own resolution. He was offered the keys to the world's treasures, but he declined. Needless to say, had he taken these treasures, he would have spent them in ways that earn Allah's pleasure. Yet his high resolution was focused on Allah and what He likes. He was offered to be made a king, but he declined, preferring to be merely Allah's devoted servant. Most certainly, there is no deity other than Allah, the Creator of such resolution and the man who lived by it. He is also the Creator of people whose resolution is as lowly as that of the most abject of animals.



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98 Related by Muslim, 489.



## THE STAGE OF REJOICING

**Allah** says: ‘Say: “In Allah’s bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass”’. (10: 58) Allah commands His servants to rejoice in His bounty and mercy. This certainly follows the rejoice and delight with the One who bestows such bounty and mercy. When a person is delighted with a gift sent him by one who is very kind and generous, he is far more delighted with the one who sent such a gift.

What we are speaking about here is a feeling of pleasure at obtaining what is loved and desired. When such is obtained, it generates a condition normally identified as rejoice and delight.

Allah gives His servants this order to rejoice in his bounty and mercy immediately after saying: ‘Mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all that may be in your hearts, and guidance and grace for all believers’. (10: 57) Nothing deserves to be rejoiced at than a bounty and mercy that incorporate admonition and a cure for hearts’ ills. This is far better than whatever people can obtain of the fine things and precious matters of this world. This is what should be rejoiced in, because it is the most precious. As for what people accumulate in this life, it is nothing to be delighted at, because it is prone to all sorts of misfortune, bound to end soon, leaving a depressing result. It is like an image one sees in a dream: when one wakes up, the dream is gone, and the image has disappeared.

Rejoicing in Allah, His Messenger, faith, the Sunnah, knowledge and the Qur’an is one of the highest positions of scholars of insight. Allah says: ‘Whenever a surah is revealed, some of them say: “Which of you has this strengthened in faith?”’ It certainly strengthens the believers in

their faith, and so they rejoice’. (9: 124) He also says: ‘Those to whom We have given revelations rejoice at what has been bestowed on you from on high’. (13: 36)

To rejoice in knowledge, faith and the Sunnah is evidence which confirms that the person who is so rejoicing loves and highly values these, preferring them to other things. Indeed when a man has got something, his rejoice in it is commensurate with his love of it and desire to have it. When he has no desire for it, he neither rejoices at having it, nor grieves at missing out on it.

Rejoice is a fine attribute. Therefore, Allah is attributed to having it at its fullest and most perfect. He rejoices when a servant of His turns to Him repenting of his sins. His rejoice then is described as greater than that of a person who finds his mount, which is carrying his food and drink, after having lost it when he is travelling alone in the desert. He looked for it everywhere but to no avail. He lay down in despair, then suddenly he found it standing close to him.

In short, rejoice is the highest level of the heart’s pleasure and enjoyment. Rejoice and delight impart to the heart a state of great pleasure while worry and sorrow impart pain. Rejoice is superior to mere acceptance of a situation. Acceptance indicates reassurance and comfort, while rejoice connotes pleasure and delight.

## THE POSITIVE OUTCOME OF REJOICE

Rejoice has a great effect on a believer on his journey towards Allah, as it dispels three types of sorrow. The first of these is a sorrow generated by fear of being left out. This sorrow is felt by those who do not join the procession going to Heaven. These are the ones Allah describes in the Qur’an as follows: ‘Allah was averse to their going, so He caused them to hold back; and it was said to them: “Stay behind with those who stay”’. (9: 46) He caused them to slacken so that they had no urge to go to Him and to Heaven.

The second sorrow is that of dark ignorance. Ignorance is of two types: one means lack of knowledge and the other is manifested through foul deeds and error. Both impart a layer of darkness in the heart. Just as knowledge grants light and a pleasant atmosphere, the opposite generates darkness and causes loneliness. Allah describes the knowledge He gave to His Messenger as light, guidance and life, while the opposite is darkness, error and death. Allah says: ‘Is he who was dead and whom We have raised to life, and for whom We set up a light to see his way among men, to be compared to one who is in deep darkness out of which he cannot emerge? Thus do their deeds seem goodly to the unbelievers’. (6: 122) The light in a believer’s heart may be compared to ‘a niche containing a lamp; the lamp within a glass, the glass like a radiant star; lit from a blessed tree – an olive tree that is neither of the east nor of the west. Its very oil would almost give light even though no fire had touched it. Light upon light! Allah guides to His light him that wills [to be guided]. Allah propounds parables for all people, since Allah alone has full knowledge of all things’. (24: 35)

The third sorrow is caused by the loneliness of divergence, which means that a person’s heart and worries are parted, going in different directions. Such parting leaves a great sorrow for missing out on the unity of heart and soul looking up to Allah and the great happiness this generates. Were the entire pleasures of this world to be enjoyed by one person, his pleasure and enjoyment are nothing but a trifle, compared with the rejoice felt by the heart and soul when they are united in seeking Allah, delighted with being near to Him and yearning to meeting Him. This is something that is believed only by one who has experienced it. No one will believe your experience unless he has gone through the same.

Had this divergence produced nothing except the pain of loneliness and the distress of separation, it would have been a sufficient punishment. Yet, the least punishment it generates is that a person has only the companionship and service of people who are left out. Thus, his time, which is the substance of his life and has no value, is devoted to serving them and fulfilling their needs. This is the punishment given to a heart

which has experienced the great pleasure of starting the journey towards Allah, delighted with being totally devoted to it, then stopped and turned away, preferring to be with his own people, joining them in their erring ways. Whoever has the slightest measure of life and light in his heart cries from the pain generated by this divergence just as a woman does during childbirth.

A person's heart experiences a sort of scattering which can be remedied only by turning to Allah and moving towards Him; a loneliness that is dispelled only when one is alone addressing and appealing to Him; a sorrow that can only be overcome by the delight of knowing Him; a worry that is calmed only by turning fully to Him, with one's body, heart and soul altogether. There is also in man's heart a fire of distress that can only be fought with accepting His command and judgement, remaining true to these until the time of meeting Him. The heart has a great need that continues to press until it becomes the only need. The heart feels deprived and this feeling of deprivation can only be removed through love of Allah, devotion, permanent remembrance and total sincerity. This deprivation is a sort of poverty that cannot be removed even if one has all the treasures on earth.

Divergence causes the loneliness of being isolated, and the pain it gives is worse than torture. Allah says: 'No indeed! On that Day they shall be shut out from their Lord. They shall enter the blazing Fire'. (83: 15-16) Thus they have the combined pain of being shut out and of suffering the blazing fire of Hell.



## THE STAGE OF SECRECY

**Al-Harawī** said: ‘Those who have the secret are the unknown ones mentioned in the hadith’. He may be referring to the hadith that mentions Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqāṣ when there was much talk about choosing the next caliph. Sa‘d stayed away on his farm, and his son went to him. He said to his father: ‘Are you looking after your camels and sheep, leaving people to compete for kingship? Sa‘d slapped him on his chest and said: Be silent. I heard Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) say: “Allah loves a servant who is pious, content and keeping low”’.<sup>99</sup> Alternatively, he may be referring to the hadith quoting the Prophet as saying: ‘A person with dishevelled hair may be one who is pushed away from people’s doors, yet were he to say an oath to Allah, Allah will honour it’.<sup>100</sup> Al-Harawī then mentions three positive and three negative characteristics of theirs.

The first positive characteristic is the strength and firmness of their resolution. This means in practice that one does not consider or accept anyone or anything in preference to Allah and being close to Him, enjoying the delight and ecstasy of being with Him. Whatever else is indeed too poor in comparison. A superior resolution is like a bird which flies high in the sky. The bird will not descend to the low levels of other birds. Hence it remains free of the ills that they may contract. When resolution is superior, it distances itself from lowly resolutions and stays free of the ills that attack it from all directions, stopping it and pulling it sideways. Lowly resolutions cannot go higher to strengthen themselves. They are affected by what is even lower. Therefore, the higher the level of resolution is, the greater is its success.

<sup>99</sup> Related by Muslim, 2,965.

<sup>100</sup> Related by Muslim, 2,622.

The second positive characteristic is the clarity of their objective, which means that it is pure of foreign bodies that impede progress towards the ultimate goal. What is meant by clarity of objective is that it is free from the influence of any will that tries to compete with Allah's will. A person becomes focused on Allah's commandments which define what He wants from His servants.

The third characteristic is the proper behaviour on the journey, ensuring its being free of ills, impediments and disruptions.

The three may be expressed in one sentence: The traveller must be in a situation of devotion of one-to-One, taking one way, ensuring that his need and objective are intertwined, and his way remains free of diversions.

The first of the three negative characteristics is that no image of them is drawn or known. This means that having great resolution, they travelled much faster on their journey, leaving everyone else behind. They are the 'single ones' who left no trace on the way for those who follow. Hence, the ones behind them do not know how they have gone. Those behind who have good resolution may be able to see a trace of their fire at a great distance ahead. It merely appears to them as a star in the sky.

The second negative characteristic is that they are not known by any name. In other words, they do not gain any reputation by adhering to the practice of anyone who is well-known to the people as a leader along the journey towards Allah. Moreover, they do not stick to a certain type of effort by which they would have been known. Such conformation to a particular worship practice is not recommended because it restricts worship. A person whose worship is general, unrestricted is not known by the name of any type of his worship. He simply answers the callers of all varieties of Islamic worship and shares with those who practise it. As such, he is not known by any sign, name, form or method. If he is asked who is his imam, he says: 'Allah's Messenger'. Which is his method? He says: to follow. What garments does he wear? He says: the robe of righteousness. Which school of thought does he follow?

He says: the Sunnah. What is his objective? He says: Seeking only His pleasure. Where is his guarding post: he says: ‘In houses which Allah has sanctioned to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there are [such as] extol His limitless glory, morning and evening – people whom neither commerce nor profit can divert from the remembrance of Allah, and from attending regularly to prayer, and from paying their zakat; who are filled with fear of the day when all hearts and eyes will be convulsed’. (24: 36-37) To which family does he belong? He says: ‘Islam is my only father. Let others be proud of their tribes and ancestors’.

The third negative characteristic is that they cannot be pointed out. They remain unknown among their own people.





## THE STAGE OF STRANGERS

**Allah** says: ‘If only there had been among the generations that have gone before you some people of virtue to speak out against the spread of corruption on earth, as did the few whom We saved from among them’. (11: 116) It is to such people that the Prophet (peace be upon him) refers as he says: ‘Islam started as strange, and it will revert to being strange as it started. Blessings be to the strangers’.<sup>101</sup> In another hadith, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr says: ‘One day as we were sitting with the Prophet (peace be upon him), he said: “Blessings be to the strangers”. He was asked: “Who are the strangers, Messenger of Allah?” He said: “They are good pious people, small in number, living with a large community. Those who disobey them are more than those who obey”’.<sup>102</sup>

These are the praised strangers. They are given this description because they are very few in the community. Most people do not have these qualities. In relation to all mankind, Muslims are strangers, and in relation to Muslims, the true believers are strangers; and in relation to believers, scholars are strangers. The followers of the Sunnah who can distinguish it from deviant practices are strangers, while those who advocate it and endure with patience the harm caused them by their opponents are the total strangers. However, these last are Allah’s own people and as such no strangeness applies to them. They are only described as strangers in reference to their small number compared to the rest of people about whom Allah says: ‘If you were to pay heed to the greater part of those on earth, they would lead you away from Allah’s path’. (6: 116) These are the ones who are apart from Allah, His Messenger and His faith.

<sup>101</sup> Related by Muslim, 145.

<sup>102</sup> Related by Ahmad, 6,650.

Their condition is one of depressing alienation, although they may be well-known in their communities.

When Moses escaped from Egypt where a plot to kill him was being prepared, he arrived in Madyan in the condition mentioned by Allah. He was on his own in a strange land, hungry and worried. He said: ‘My Lord, I am lonely, ill and a stranger’. He was told: ‘Moses, a lonely person is one who does not have one like Me to talk to; and the ill person is one who does not have a physician like Me; and the stranger is one with no contact with Me’.

### **THREE TYPES OF STRANGERS**

The first type of stranger includes Allah’s people who believe in Him and follow His Messenger’s Sunnah, as they live among the rest of people. These are the ones praised by the Prophet as he said that the religion he delivered as Allah’s message started as strange and will revert to being strange as it started, and that its followers are strangers.

The condition of being a stranger may entail being in a certain place, time or community, but not in others. Those who are in this strange condition are truly Allah’s people, as they believed in none other than Allah, and they never affiliated themselves to anyone other than His Messenger. They never advocated any creed other than His message. They are the ones who parted with other people when they needed them most. On the Day of Judgement, communities will be called with their idols and they go with them, while these strangers will stay in their place. They will be asked: ‘Are you not going as others have gone?’ They will say that they parted with people when they were in greater need of them than now, but they are waiting for their Lord whom they worshipped.<sup>103</sup>

A person in this condition of strangeness does not feel loneliness.

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103 Related by al-Bukhari, 4,581; Muslim, 183.

Indeed, he is in company when the rest of people are lonely. His loneliness is at its highest when others are socializing. His patrons are Allah, His Messenger and the believers; even though the rest of people may be hostile towards him. Among such strangers is the one described in a hadith narrated by Anas quoting the Prophet (peace be upon him): ‘A person with dishevelled hair may be one who is pushed away from people’s doors, yet were he to say an oath to Allah, Allah will honour it’.<sup>104</sup>

These strangers praised by the Prophet are characterized by adhering to the Sunnah, purity of belief in Allah’s oneness and affiliation to none other than Allah and His Messenger. They adhere to the Sunnah when others abandon it. They reject what people do even though it is very common practice. Their belief in Allah’s oneness is pure, even if the great majority of people object. They do not claim allegiance to a teacher, leader, special practice like those of the different Sufi methods, or groups. Indeed, these strangers declare their allegiance to Allah addressing their worship to Him alone, and to Allah’s Messenger following his example. They are the ones whose attitude is that of one holding a brand of fire in his hand, unwilling to throw it away. Yet the majority of people, if not all of them, continue to blame them. Being strangers among the people, they are often described as extreme, deviant and rejecting the way of the majority.

The early believers in Islam were individuals from different tribes, parting with their tribes and clans to join the fledgeling Muslim community. They were the real strangers, until Islam prevailed, with its message spreading far. It was then that people flocked to it in large groups. The early Muslims then were no longer strangers. Much later, Islam gradually became strange, until it became as strange as it was at the beginning.

Indeed, the true Islam which was practised by Allah’s Messenger and

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<sup>104</sup> Related by Muslim, 2,622.

his companions is today in a greater condition of strangeness than it was in its early days, despite the fact that its distinctive marks are seen everywhere. True Islam is certainly strange and its adherents are strangers among the rest of people.

It is only logical that a single group should be very few in number when there is a total of seventy-two groups, each of which has its own followers, heads, positions and authorities when none of them can actually have any standing without contradicting what Allah's Messenger taught. His very message is contrary to their views, pleasures, the deviant ideas which represent their wisdom and the desires they primarily want to pursue.

A believer who is taking the journey towards Allah, following the Prophet (peace be upon him), will naturally feel a stranger among those who follow their desires, obey their whims and cling to their own views. Therefore, in such a time, such a believer is granted a reward equal to that of fifty of the Prophet's companions. He is awarded such a great reward because of being a stranger among his people, adhering to the Sunnah in the midst of the darkness of their doctrines.

A believer whom Allah has favoured with insight into his faith, knowledge of the Prophet's Sunnah, an understanding of His Book, and who has shown him how far people have gone away from the straight and right path followed by the Prophet and his companions will find himself in a difficult position. If he is determined to follow this path, then he should expect that ignorant and deviant people will severely criticize him, hold him in contempt, warn others against listening to him, just as the unbelievers of old did to the Prophet (peace be upon him). If he, nevertheless, calls on them to join him, criticizing their ways, he will face a determined onslaught with people trying to undermine him in every possible way.

Such a believer is a stranger in his faith because their beliefs are wrong; a stranger adhering to the Sunnah when they embrace deviant practices; a stranger in his prayer because their prayers are wrong; a stranger in

his way of life because theirs is awry; a stranger in his dealings with them because they dislike such dealings. In short, he is a stranger in all matters of his present life and the life to come. He has none to assist him because he is a learned person among ignorant people; following the Sunnah among the followers of deviation; advocating Allah's message among those who advocate their own erring creeds; enjoining right and forbidding wrong among those who see falsehood as right.

The second type of strangeness is a bad one, because it is the status of the people of falsehood among the people of truth. It may apply to a large number of people, but they are nevertheless strangers, feeling lonely despite having many friends.

The third type of strangeness is neutral, neither good nor bad. It is that which is felt because of being away from one's homeland. All people in this present life are strangers, because this is not a permanent life. They are not created to abide here forever. Hence, the Prophet said to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar: 'Consider yourself in this life as a stranger or a traveller on his way'.<sup>105</sup> Such is the truth, as the Prophet tells 'Abdullāh to have a careful look at the real situation of mankind and to know it perfectly.



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105 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,416.



## THE STAGE OF BEHOLDING

**Allah**, Blessed and Exalted, cannot be seen by humans. They cannot look at Him or His light or His attributes and their light. However some signposts of these may be felt by a person's heart, as happens when he mentally sees a sign of the Day of Judgement, Heaven and Hell, and what Allah has prepared for their inmates.

This is what was experienced by ‘Abdullāh ibn Ḥarām al-Anṣārī on the day of the Battle of Uḥud. He shouted: ‘How splendid is the scent of Heaven. By Allah, I can smell it close to Uḥud’.<sup>106</sup> This is the same as the Prophet advising his companions: ‘When you pass by the gardens of Heaven, stay and enjoy’. They asked: ‘What are the gardens of Heaven?’ He said: ‘The circles devoted to Allah’s remembrance and glorification’.<sup>107</sup> The same may be said of the hadith quoting the Prophet (peace be upon him): ‘The place in between my home and my platform is one of the gardens of Heaven’.<sup>108</sup> It is a garden for people of knowledge and faith, because of the signposts of Heaven they feel at heart, as though they can behold them with their own eyes. A hypocrite who sits there will not find the place as a garden of Heaven. It is the person himself and his deeds that enable him to see the signpost. With Allah’s help, we will refer to the signposts so that the matter will be clear, Allah willing.

106 This is perhaps a slip of the pen by the author. The Prophet’s companion who said this was Anas ibn al-Naḍr of the Anṣār.

107 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 3,510.

108 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,888; Muslim, 1,391.

## THE SIGNPOSTS ON THE TRAVELLER'S WAY

The first signpost the traveller on the journey towards Allah and the world beyond sees is that he feels the triviality of this present life and that it is unfaithful, unfriendly, brief in duration, shared by lowly people. He further realizes that its lovers endure great suffering as it ill-treats them in many ways. It makes them laugh but little and weep much. It gives them its cup of poison to drink after they have been drinking its wine. Thus, their infatuation with it makes them drunk and its turning away from them leaves them dead.

When a believer has seen this signpost of the present life, his heart turns away and he continues his journey seeking the life to come. Now a different signpost is shown to his heart. It is one of the life to come and its being everlasting. It is the true life whose people never depart from it. It is the lasting home and the journey's end. Compared to it the present life is just as the Prophet describes: 'Compared to the Hereafter, all this world is like any of you putting this finger – pointing to his index finger – into the sea. Look, how much does it bring?'<sup>109</sup>

The traveller then sees another signpost, and this one reveals to him the Fire of Hell and how it rages. He notes the great depth of its bottom, its fierce heat and the unbearable suffering of its dwellers. He sees them as they are driven into it, with black faces and blue eyes, and with shackles and chains round their necks. When they arrive at it, its gates are thrown open and they behold a frightful scene, tearing their hearts apart in sorrow. Allah says: 'And when those who were lost in sin will see the Fire, they will realize that they are bound to fall in it, and will find no way to escape from it'. (18: 53) As they are pushed into it, they are made to see the truth of faith. A call from the Lord of all worlds gives this command: 'Halt them awhile; they shall be asked'. (37: 24) They will be told: 'This is the Fire you used to deny! so is this sorcery, or do you not see? Burn in it! It will be the same whether you bear it with or without patience. You are being requited for what you have done'. (52: 14-16) They again see the truth of

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109 Related by Muslim, 2,858.

faith as they are dragged on their faces in the Fire so as to be its fuel: ‘Hell shall be their resting place, and sheets of fire shall cover them’. (7: 41) How depressing is the covering and how painful the resting place. Should they cry out of help, as they feel extremely thirsty ‘they will be given water hot like molten lead, which will scald their faces’. (18: 29) When they drink it, it will tear their bowels and melt what is in their bellies: ‘As for the unbelievers, the Fire of Hell awaits them. No term shall be determined for them so that they could die, nor shall its suffering be reduced for them. Thus shall We requite all unbelievers. There they will cry aloud: “Our Lord! Let us out and we will do good, not like what we did before”. [They will be told:] “Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning? And a warner had come to you. Taste it, then. Wrongdoers shall have none to support them”’. (35: 36-37)

When this signpost has been contemplated by the believer’s heart, it will tear itself away from sin, disobedience and the pursuit of desire. He will be cautious, fearing any shortcoming. He will feel that any calamity will be easy to bear as long as it does not affect him in his faith. The stronger the effect of this signpost is the farther away a person is from disobeying Allah. This signpost will have the effect of melting any residue of foul stuff in the believer’s heart and throwing it away. Now his heart will feel sound and healthy and enjoy this delightful feeling.

This is followed by a signpost showing Heaven and what Allah has prepared for its people. This is something that no eye has ever beheld, no ear has ever heard of and no mind has ever imagined. In addition, he will see something of what the Prophet has told of the details of the great enjoyments offered to the people of Heaven, their food, drink, clothing, happiness, etc. Thus, the believer’s heart will have a feeling of the endless comforts and enjoyment provided for its dwellers: its soil is musk, its gravel is pearls, and the bricks of its buildings are made of gold and silver. Its drink is sweeter than honey, with a scent better than musk, and it is tastier than ginger. Should any of its women show her face in the present life, it will overshadow the sun. The inhabitants of Heaven wear green garments of silk and brocade. They are served by youths who look

like pearls. Their fruits are available at all times, and they eat of the best bird meat they wish for. Their drink is wine that causes neither headiness nor intoxication. They will be given fruits of their choice. Their mates have beautiful eyes and look like hidden pearls. They recline on couches and enjoy their abode where they have all that they desire and is pleasant to their eyes. This is their everlasting abode.

Another signpost will be added here which is the thought of looking at Allah's face and hearing His speech, directly without an intermediary. As this signpost is added to all those seen earlier, the believer's heart will go straight to his Lord, faster than wind, turning neither right nor left. There is in addition here a signpost to forget all previous ones. It is the vision of Allah's majesty, beauty, power, sovereignty, establishment on His throne, speech in His books and address to His angels and prophets.

As the believer's heart looks, it sees an all-powerful Eternal-Master, having sway over all His creation, established on His throne, alone managing all affairs of His universe, issuing commands and prohibitions, sending His messengers and revealing His books. He is pleased and displeased. He rewards and punishes, grants and withholds, empowers and humiliates, loves and hates, bestows mercy when He is appealed to for mercy, grants forgiveness and favours, answers prayers and forbears. He is bigger, greater, mightier, more powerful, more knowledgeable and wiser than all else. Were the power of all beings joined together and given to one person and were everyone to be given the same combined power, and then the total of all their powers were compared to Allah's power, they will not amount to the power of a mosquito when compared to a lion's power. Were the beauty of all mankind given to a single human being, and then every single one of them given the same total beauty, and all that beauty of them all was to be compared to Allah's beauty, it would be no more than the light of a small candle compared to the sunlight when the sun is at its highest. Were the knowledge of all generations of mankind given to one person and were all mankind to have the same amount of knowledge, and their total knowledge compared to Allah's knowledge, it will be no more than a drop in the sea.

The same may be said of all His attributes, such as His hearing, sight, etc. He hears all sounds, in all languages, expressing all needs, with nothing attracting his attention more than another. He is not confused by conflicting appeals, nor is He bored by the urgency of those in desperate need. To Him it is all alike, whether something is spoken aloud or in secret, and whether something is kept hidden or exposed. He hears the steps of a black ant walking on a smooth rock in the night's deep darkness, and he sees its inner body and the food it ate. He puts the heavens on one of His fingers, the earth on another, the mountains on a third, the trees on a finger and the water on a finger. He holds all the heavens in one hand and all earths in another. In his hands, the heavens are no more than a small seed in man's hand. Were all mankind, in all generations, to stand in one row, they would not encompass Allah. Were the screen to be removed from His face, His light would burn all before Him.

When a believer's heart looks at this signpost, all the previous signposts dwindle and take a back seat, as it were, but they remain, even though this signpost outshines them all. Whoever sees this signpost travels on his journey in a special way, different from that of others who are oblivious to it, or see it vaguely. The one who sees this signpost continues his journey towards Allah when awake or asleep, when moving or sitting, whether fasting or not: he is in a different world from that of other people; he has his concerns which are totally different from theirs.

In short, the beholding and sight in this life are only through signposts and comparison. It is the effect that these have on the hearts of Allah's devoted servants. It is what motivates them in their worship, love, devotion and fear of Allah. They differ in all these, but their differences are limitless. Everyone has their own position, and they cannot exceed their positions. The One in the highest position acknowledges that he cannot praise Allah enough, and that He is above all praise.

The purity of a believer's heart and its being free of foul elements, desires and attachment to anything other than Allah are the pillars of this signpost upon which it stands firm. A heart tainted with dirty and foul elements and lowly desires cannot see this signpost.

When Allah's oneness sends the rays of its sun, warming souls and enlightening insights, it dispels all inner darkness and enables souls to look up towards the One who is without compare: 'Nothing bears even the slightest comparability to Him; He alone hears all and sees all'. (42: 11) The believer's heart travels on its journey, stopping at its stages, one by one. The believer moves from one act of worship to another, addressing all to the One Allah whose attributes are alive in his heart, waking him up when he sleeps, reminding him if he forgets, driving him on. When his heart sees one of the signposts, he realizes that all matters belong to Allah, and that His is the only command: 'Whatever grace Allah opens up to man, none can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, none other than Him can release. He is the Almighty, the Wise. People! Remember the blessings Allah has bestowed upon you. Is there any creator other than Allah who can give you sustenance from heaven and earth? There is no deity other than Him. How can you turn away?' (35: 2-3) Signposts indicating the Godhead show the believer's heart the divine command, prophethood, scriptures, codes of law, love and acceptance, dislike, reward and punishment. It sees that commands descend from the One established on His throne, and that people's deeds are presented to Him. The good ones He rewards with generous kindness in the present life and with radiance and joy in the life to come. What is at variance with His code of law he discards into nothing.

When the believer's heart views a signpost indicating mercy, it sees that the entire universe functions by virtue of this attribute, as Allah's mercy is granted to all. His mercy reaches as far as His knowledge. When the heart looks at a signpost indicating Allah's might and greatness, it reacts in a different way. This applies to all Allah's attributes as they are felt by a believer's heart. What we have mentioned is merely a brief pointer to them. Indeed, in the present life, the beholding does not go beyond the signposts.



## THE STAGE OF LIFE

**Allah** says: ‘Is he who was dead and whom We raised to life...’. (6: 122) This refers to one whose heart was dead as it was bereft of the soul of knowledge, guidance and faith, then Allah Almighty gave him a soul other than the soul that made him physically alive. This other soul is that of knowing Him as the One Allah who has no partners, and loving and worshipping Him alone. Allah’s revelation is referred to in this verse as ‘soul’ because it imparts life to heart and soul. Allah says: ‘Thus have We revealed a spirit to you [Muhammad] by Our command. You knew neither revelation nor faith, but We made it a light, guiding with it whoever We will of Our servants. You most certainly give guidance to the straight path’. (42: 52)

Allah grants the goodly life to those who know, love and worship Him. He says: ‘Whoever does righteous deeds, whether man or woman, and is a believer, We shall most certainly give a good life. And We shall indeed reward these according to the best that they ever did’. (16: 97) A goodly life has been explained as a life of contentment, acceptance and fine provision. It is also given other explanations. However, the correct meaning is that it refers to the delight of a believer’s heart by his faith, its knowledge and love of Allah, as well as devotion to Him and the placing of trust in Him. No life or happiness is better than such a life except the future life in Heaven. A discerning scholar said: ‘There are times my heart goes through and I would say: if the people in Heaven are in a similar situation, then they are enjoying a good life’. A different scholar said: ‘The heart goes through periods when it is dancing, full of joy’.

When the heart’s life is goodly, the life of the body is in a similar condition, as the heart has sway over the body. Hence, Allah leaves

those who turn away from His message in a straitened life, which is the opposite of the goodly life. These two different lives, the goodly and the straitened ones, apply to all three terms of life: the present life, the life to come and the stage in between, which is referred to as the *barzakh* life. The righteous will have happiness in all three while the unbelievers will be in misery. Allah says: ‘For those who do good in this world, good reward [is assured]; but far better is their abode in the Hereafter’. (16: 30) The remembrance of Allah, loving and obeying Him ensure the best of life in the present world, while turning away from Him and disobeying Him gives a troubled and straitened life in the present world and the next.

## LIFE’S DIFFERENT LEVELS

The first level is the earth’s life as plants grow. The second level is the life of nourishment and growth, which is the life of both plants and animals. The third level is the life of animal which is in excess of its nourishment and growth. This is the level of feeling and movement. Level four is the life that does not depend on nourishment with food and drink. Such is the life of the angels and the life of the soul after it leaves the body. This is a higher level than the life of animals which is sustained by food.

Then at level five we have the life of knowledge as opposed to the death of ignorance. Level six is the life of will, love and resolution. The goodly life is attained through firm resolution, true love and free will. The worst life is that of those who have the weakest resolution and are devoid of love and will. The life of animals is better than such a life. In short, a heart is alive through knowledge, will and resolution. When people see someone who reflects these, they say that his heart is vibrant with life. A person’s heart gains such a life through continued remembrance of Allah and abandoning sinful action. ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak said in one of his poems: ‘I see that sin leaves the heart dead, and frequent sin leads to disgrace’.

I heard Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah say: ‘Whoever says: “My Lord, the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master: there is no deity other than You”, forty times every day in between praying the sunnah prayer before *Fajr* and the obligatory *Fajr* Prayer, Allah will give him a thriving heart’. Just as Allah made the life of the body dependant on food and drink, the life of the heart depends on frequent remembrance of Allah, devotion and turning away from sinful actions.

When the heart suffers a cloud of oblivion, and looks for fleeting, lowly pleasures, its life is weakened. Its gradual weakening increases until it dies. The sign indicating its death is that it no longer recognizes what is right or disapproves of what is wrong and evil. ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd asked people: ‘Do you know who is the living dead? The one to whom a poet refers, saying: “The one who dies and is at rest is not the really dead one. That one is the living dead”’. People asked him to define this person. He gave them the same definition of one who neither approves what is good nor criticizes what is wrong.

A truly alive person is one who fears the death of his heart, not his body. Most people fear the physical death of the body and give little thought to the death of their hearts. The only life they recognize is the natural physical life. This is due to the death of one’s heart and soul. The physical life is akin to a temporary shadow, or a plant that will soon dry up, or a dream which appears to the dreamer as a reality. Yet, when he wakes up, he realizes that it was a mere image. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: ‘Were this whole world to be given to one man and he then dies, he would be just like a person who sees a pleasant dream, then wakes up and finds out that it was all a dream with nothing real’.

The seventh level of life is that of good manners and worthy characteristics. The life of a person who is naturally modest, chaste, generous, truthful, maintaining dignity, true to his promise is more fulfilling and perfect than the life of one who strives to be such, having to overcome his own leanings. When such characteristics are more perfect, a person’s life is more complete and fulfilling. Hence, the life

of a brave person is more perfect than that of a coward, and the life of a generous person is better than that of a miser.

The eighth level of life is that of delight and rejoice in being with Allah. This is the highest level of life. How can it be attained by one whose mind is fixed on physical desires, his hopes focused on seeking pleasures, his conduct reflecting the worst of habits, his religion undermined by sinful actions and his faith not received from the Prophet's teachings?

Such a person indulges his desires, entertains doubts, turns away from sincere advice and objects to the one who tries to give him proper guidance. He is asleep when others undertake the night journey towards Allah. His heart roams confusedly through all valleys. Were such a person to stand apart from his own pattern of life, distancing himself from others of the same pursuit, moving away from the narrowness of ignorance to the expanse of knowledge, and from the prison of desire to the freedom of divine guidance, he would have a totally new experience. He will realize that the friends whose company he has long enjoyed, giving and receiving mutual support, are like a cloud blurring his insight, a deviation taking him away from the true faith and a disease that spells utter ruin.

I may be told that this refers to a sort of life unknown to those who are among the living dead. I may be further asked to describe its way, so as its merit may be appreciated. The questioner may add that he begins to realize that this prevalent life is not far above animal life. Indeed, animals may be better off as they commit no sin and are not accountable for their actions. In response I say that when a person's heart aspires to this sort of life and starts to ask to learn about it, this indicates that it is alive and thriving. It is not one of the dead.

The first step on the way to this life is to know Allah and identify a way that leads you to Him. This should burn the darkness of one's habits by the radiance of insight, enabling one's heart to see a signpost of the life to come so as to be wholly attracted to it. He will see the triviality of all that belongs to this transitory life. He should be keen

to ensure that his repentance is serious and true. He fulfils all common and private obligations and refrains from prohibitions. He then watches over his own heart, permitting him no thought that displeases Allah or is of no benefit to himself. This frees his heart of the promptings of his soul, ensuring his own freedom, enabling his heart to focus on Allah's remembrance, love and devotion. He will release himself from the confines of his own nature to enjoy the expanse of speaking and appealing to his Lord. Thus, his heart, thoughts and soul are all focused on his love of his Lord and yearning for the ultimate meeting with Him.

When he is true in all this, he will be granted real love of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Prophet's spirituality will be imparted to his own heart, and the Prophet then becomes his leader, teacher, guide and the one to emulate, in the same way as Allah made him His Messenger who guides mankind to Himself. He will study his life and how he started. He will learn how revelations were given to him, and study his manners, characteristics and how he conducted himself when he sat and moved, how he slept and how he behaved when awake, his worship and his dealings with his companions and with his family. Thus, he lives with the Prophet as though he is one of his companions.

When his heart has firmly embraced all this, he will have a better understanding of what was revealed to the Prophet. Thus, when he recites a surah of the Qur'an, he will see in his heart the purpose for which it was revealed. He will learn what applies to himself of it, finding out the qualities, deeds and behaviour it censures so as to try to get rid of these in the same way as one tries to be cured of a serious disease. He will also identify the deeds and behaviour the surah approves of so as to implement them.

When he has mastered this, his heart will benefit by another eye with which he sees Allah's attributes. These will be so clear to him in the same way as what he sees with his eyes. He will thus see Allah's establishment on His throne, how high He is above all His creation, how His command descends from Him to conduct the affairs of His

dominion. He will see that Allah has spoken His revelations, imparting them to His servant Gabriel, and sending Gabriel to anyone He chooses with the message He wishes to give. He will see how matters are raised and presented to Him.

His heart will then see his Lord, holding sway over all His servants, commanding and prohibiting, sending His messengers, revealing His scriptures, worshipped and obeyed. He will know that his Lord has no partner and no equal, with the command belonging to Him alone. He sees Him managing all things and everything: nothing moves or stops, causes benefit or harm, grants or withholds except by His will and management. This gives him the realization that the entire universe functions by Allah's will, and that He exists and gives everything else their existence.

When his heart has truly accepted this, the believer will see the attribute that sets right all aspects of perfection. This is the attribute of life, the perfection of which necessitates the perfection of hearing, sight, power, will, speech and all other attributes of perfection. It will also see the attribute of command which ensures that all actions are set right. Hence, when we say that Allah is the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master, i.e. *al-Hay al-Qayyūm*, we mean the One who combines every attribute and aspect of perfection, and the One who does whatever He wills.

When his heart has fully appreciated all this, the believer will be shown the scene of nearness and company. He will see that Allah is with him, close to him even though He is on His throne above all heavens, apart from His creation, doing and managing everything, creating and commanding. He will appreciate Allah's glory and feel His greatness, yet this attribute of Allah gives him the feeling of companionship after he had felt lonely. He finds himself strong after he had felt weak, delighted after having been sad. It is now that he fully understands what Allah says: 'My servant will continue to draw near to Me with voluntary works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he

strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it'.<sup>110</sup>

The best goodly life is that of such a believer, because he is in love and loved, drawing near to Allah and his Lord is close to him. As his loved One holds his heart and as he is always remembering Him, eagerly seeking His pleasure, his beloved has become to him as his sight, hearing and effort. It is with his beloved One that he hears, sees, strikes and walks.

A believer undertaking the journey towards Allah concentrates on two things: that his heart is given fully to his true love, and his effort is dedicated to the fulfilment of what he is commanded. He will continue to do so until his private condition witnesses what knowing Him means and sees the effects of His names and attributes. However, this will appear to him at times and disappear at others. It appears through Allah's generosity and disappears in times of slackening. Such periods of slackness are inevitable for all. 'Every worker has a period of enthusiasm, and every enthusiasm slackens.' The leading aspect of this is the slackness of revelation which affects prophets. Scholars of insight experience a slackness of condition, while others slacken in their resolution or their action. Such periods of slackness include diverse aspects of wisdom and grace. They enable a person to appreciate the bounty Allah has given him, and make him eager to have it back and hold on firmly to it.

Such scenes will become frequent and repeated until they are settled and impart their hue to the heart. The period of slackness will no longer be a period of sorrow. On the contrary, it will become a favour giving him rest. A lover whose soul is firmly attached to his loved One and is eager to increase and strengthen his love will continue to do so. He will then move another step to seek the reciprocity of his love and he exerts

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110 Related by al-Bukhari, 6,502.

his effort to attain this. He will not abandon his first objective at all, but it will be incorporated in his second one, and his efforts will focus on both. It is the achievement of his second objective that gives him the status which is expressed in the hadith: ‘I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees’. This happens when he has achieved being loved by his beloved One: ‘When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees’. He draws closer to his Lord to maintain his own love of Him and to appeal for Allah’s love of him.

The believer will then increase his efforts in seeking the reciprocity of his love, offering various sorts of advances. His heart expresses love, devotion, reliance, fear and hope, while his tongue continues with the remembrance of Allah and reciting His words, and his other organs are employed in other ways that help him draw closer. This type of continuing with one’s journey takes the traveller to his destination. He cannot reach it in any other way. This is his only way and only gate. Here he combines all the different aspects of progress on his journey: the full presence, the awesome feeling, watchfulness, removal of alien thoughts, heart-felt sincerity.

A lover starts by drawing closer through obvious actions. He then moves on to the next level which is the state of drawing closer. This means moving wholly, with his heart, soul, mind and body, towards his loved One. The next level to which he aspires is that of *ihsān*, which is defined as ‘to worship Allah as though you are seeing Him’. He draws closer to Him through his heart’s actions: love, devotion, glorification, fear and feeling His majesty. From within him there will rise the will to offer his soul to his loved One. He offers it without any affectation, offering his life, will and deeds.

If the devoted lover feels that, he will have attained closeness to Allah in reality. If not, then he is drawing closer to Him by his body, tongue and appearance only. He should continue and try to give more of action and glorifications of Allah. He may eventually achieve the condition

of closeness. This inner closeness is different. It cannot be expressed in any way better than the Prophet's hadith in which he quotes Allah, Blessed and Exalted, as He says: 'If My servant draws towards Me a hand's span, I draw towards him an arm's length; and if he draws towards Me an arm's length, I draw towards him a fathom's length. If he comes towards me walking, I go to him at speed'.<sup>111</sup> This lover will find within himself the flavour of what this hadith means.

This hadith mentions three levels of closeness, pointing also to lower and higher levels. It mentions a person's drawing towards Allah by a hand's span, which Allah rewards by drawing towards him by an arm's length. When the believer experiences the reality of this closeness, he will move on to draw closer to Allah by an arm's length. This will bring him the experience of Allah responding by being nearer to him by a fathom's length. This second experience will motivate him to walk fast towards Allah, and this will give him the sweet experience of Allah moving towards him at speed.

The hadith stops at this point, implying that if the believer moves towards Allah speedily, Allah will move towards him even faster. The hadith does not mention this in words, because of the great level of this reward, and that it belongs to the category expressed as something which 'no ear has ever heard of and no heart has ever imagined'. Alternatively, the hadith stops at this point indicating the nature of the response. This implies that the same generosity applies further. The more a believer offers, the greater is Allah's response, with no specific limit. This means that when a person draws closer to Allah, with his soul, all his powers, his will, speech and deeds, Allah Himself will draw closer to him. The nearness in all these levels is not a tangible one; it is a real nearness with Allah on His throne and His servant here on earth.

The essence of this whole matter is first the intention to draw closer, then to actually put this into practice and draw closer. The third stage is the

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111 Related by al-Bukhari, 7,405; Muslim, 2,675.

condition of becoming closer, which means moving entirely towards the loved One. This entire move means that one prefers what Allah wants over what one personally wishes. One gives priority to what Allah loves over what one wants. In other words, what Allah wants becomes all that a person wants and wishes for.

As it is clear now, whoever draws closer to his loved One with anything, he is rewarded with much greater closeness. Moreover, the best type of drawing closer to Allah is when a person draws towards Him with his entire being, outwardly and inwardly, leaving nothing of himself to anyone other than his loved One. Since the one who seeks to be close to Allah through his own deeds will be given many multiples of what he offers, what will be the case of one who draws closer with his soul, will, resolution, speech and deeds? Just as he offers his entire being to Allah, he deserves to be rewarded generally, with his Lord being his share, in compensation to all. It is a truly sufficient gift, and there is much evidence to confirm this. One such evidence is what Allah says: ‘For everyone who fears Allah, He will grant a way out, and will provide for him whence he does not expect. Allah will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him’. (65: 2-3) These verses make a clear distinction between the two rewards. The first is for fearing Allah, but the second reward is for the one who puts his trust in Allah. His reward is that Allah will be sufficient for him. Another evidence is the hadith in which Allah is quoted as saying: ‘Allah, Mighty and Exalted, says: I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he mentions Me. If he mentions Me to himself, I mention him to Myself; and if he mentions me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly’.<sup>112</sup>

The ninth level of life is the life of the soul when it leaves the body, being released after having been confined to it. Beyond it, there is an expanse of mercy. In relation to our world, this expanse is as wide as this world compared to the mother’s womb.

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112 Related by al-Bukhari, 7,405; Muslim, 2,675.

To appreciate the goodness of this life we say it is sufficient to mention that it means parting with troublesome companions whose mere sight gives an unpleasant feeling. At this level, one goes to the highest company ‘among those upon whom Allah has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs and the righteous ones. How goodly a company are these!’ (4: 69) This company will be close to Allah, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. Had death been nothing other than the gateway to this life, it would have been a great gift for a believer.

Needless to say, whoever travels to the land of justice, security and delight will patiently bear any hardship on the way. He will part with those staying behind, even if he needs them. He will respond to the caller announcing, ‘Come to success, i.e. *hay ‘ala al-falāḥ*’. He will spare no effort to get there, moving ahead morning and evening, until he arrives at his destination, when he will feel that the journey was truly easy and what he had to put up with was of no great difficulty. It is indeed not difficult, considering the shortness of this present life since, compared to the life to come, it is no more than an hour in a day. Allah says: ‘On the Day when they see what they were promised, it will seem to them as though they had dwelt [on earth] no more than an hour in a single day’. (46: 35) ‘On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another.’ (10: 45)

The tenth level of life is the everlasting life when this transitory world has been folded. This world and its people will have been transferred to the only true life for which some have been putting in every effort to get ready. It is the goal for which believers have been competing. It is the life we have been talking about, and which all divine revelations and all Allah’s messengers have explained. It is the life that causes the lamentation of those who made no preparation for. They will be saying: ‘No indeed! When the earth is systematically levelled down, and your Lord comes, with the angels rank on rank, and on that Day, hell is brought near, then man will remember, but how will that remembrance

avail him. He shall say, “Oh, would that I had prepared for my life!” On that Day, none will punish as He punishes, And none will bind with chains as He binds’. (89: 21-26) It is the life which Allah describes as He says: ‘The life of this world is but amusement and play. It is the life to come that is the only true life, if they but knew it’. (29: 64)

This first life which we live is no more than an hour of sleep when compared with the next life. All that we have mentioned of the journey towards Allah and its stages, the conditions of those undertaking the journey, as well as their known and secret worship are mere preparation for the next life which is the true life. Let us remember again the Prophet’s comparison of the two lives, as he says: ‘Compared to the Hereafter, all this world is like any of you putting this finger – pointing to his index finger – into the sea. Look, how much does it bring?’<sup>113</sup>

Another description of it suggests that as the second life breathed, the present life was a mere one breath. Some people inhaled a breath of happiness and they work hard benefiting by it, while others inhaled a breath of its suffering and they work accordingly.

Since the present life of the people of faith and good deeds is a goodly life, how much better will be the period in between the two lives for them, as they would have been released of the confinement and narrowness of this world? And how far superior will their life be in the abode of everlasting and never ending happiness, where they will be seeing their Lord’s face and listening to His words morning and evening?

A question may be asked: Why do people not aim for this life and make no effort to achieve it? Why do they concentrate on this present and transitory life which is no more than a dream? Are they prone to misconception? Do they not believe in the future life? Or is it that there is something wrong with their minds? Or is it merely a preference for the present which they see all around them to the future which they can only know through faith, or in other words a preference for what seems

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113 Related by Muslim, 2,858.

to them to be a reality to an abstract? The answer is that it is due to a host of reasons based on all the above. The most important reason is the lack of strong faith. Faith represents the driving force for people's actions and the motivator to seek the best deeds and refrain from the bad ones. The stronger a person's faith, the more forceful motive it is and the better is a person's compliance.

The second reason is that a cloud of oblivion covers a person's heart, sending it into slumber. Hence, we see many people who are physically awake, but actually in deep sleep. To look at them, you would think that they are awake, when they are really asleep.

Such a state of oblivion refers to the heart turning away from seeking this future life. It is a screen blocking his vision. He can remove the screen by Allah's remembrance; otherwise, it will thicken until it becomes a screen of idle play and busying oneself with what gives no benefit. If a person does not remove the screen at this stage, it will continue to thicken until it becomes a screen of minor sinful actions which keeps him away from Allah. It then progresses and thickens further until it becomes a screen of major sins that incur Allah's dislike, wrath and curse. A person needs to take a serious step to remove this screen, or else it will continue to thicken and become one made of deviant practices into which a person puts much effort but they bring him no benefit. If this continues, it develops into a thicker screen of deviant concepts and beliefs that include false attributions to Allah and His Messenger, and disbelief in the truth preached by Allah's Messenger.

A person who gets to this stage should hasten to remove this screen, otherwise it becomes a screen of doubt and disbelief. It will undermine his belief in the five essentials of faith, which are to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers and the meeting with Him. Very thick and black as this screen is, it makes him unable to see the truth of faith. He will be easy prey for Satan, who will hold out plenty of promises to him and fill him with vain desires. As man's soul incites to evil, it will raise its desires. The force of habit within him will have

outstripped the force of faith, if not totally vanquished it. Satan will also have used the forces of desire, closed the door of alertness and guarded it with oblivion. In short, the person in this situation is surrounded by Satan's forces and troops from all sides.

When all these are doing their work against a person who is weak in faith, having little support, and neglecting the remembrance of Allah, preferring to associate with friends of similar leanings, and giving little thought to the shortness of life, he will inevitably prefer what is available now to what is promised after the end of life. He now writes with his own hand his miserable end. It is to Allah alone we turn for help and protection, and in Him alone we place our trust.



## THE STAGE OF KNOWLEDGE

**Referring** to knowledge, al-Harawī quotes the following verse: ‘When they listen to what has been revealed to Allah’s Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of the Truth they recognize’. (5: 83) He adds: ‘Knowledge means getting to know something as it truly is’.

### THE SIGNS AND EFFECTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Ahmad ibn ‘Āṣim said: ‘Whoever knows Allah best fears Him most’. This is evidenced by the Qur’anic verse that says: “It is those of His servants who are endowed with knowledge that truly stand in awe of Allah”. (35: 28) The Prophet also says: “By Allah, I am the one among you who knows Allah best and fears Him most”<sup>114</sup>. A scholar of insight is distinguished by certain characteristics including that he does not demand, dispute or remonstrate. He does not think that anyone owes him a favour, or that he has a claim against anyone. He is not sorry for whatever he has missed and is not delighted with what may come, because he looks at everything as they are bound to perish, and that in reality they are no more than shadows. Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh said: ‘A scholar of insight leaves this life feeling that he has not attained satisfaction in two things: weeping for himself and praising his Lord’. These are fine words, as they point out that such a scholar is fully aware of his own flaws and errors, and he knows his Lord, and his superior attributes of perfection and majesty. Therefore, he seriously blames himself for his faults and always praises his Lord.

<sup>114</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 6,101; Muslim, 2,356.

Ibn ‘Aṭā’ said: ‘Knowledge is based on three pillars: awe, modesty and feeling the Lord’s company’. It is also said that ‘a scholar of insight is the child of the present moment’. This is one of the best and shortest definitions. He is busy with what he has assigned for himself as his duty for the present moment. He is not looking at the past which is no longer available, nor at the future which has not come into existence yet. He is preoccupied with making the best use of his present time, which is the substance of his remaining life.

His distinctive characteristics include that he feels the pleasure of his Lord’s company, turning away from anyone who disrupts that feeling. Hence it is said that such a person of insight is the one who feels Allah’s company, a stranger with other people; he stands in need of Allah, and Allah leaves him in no need of people; he humiliates himself before Allah, and Allah gives him dignity among people; Allah is sufficient for him and He makes them in need of him. An early scholar said: ‘A person of insight is alert when he sleeps. His breath is a glorification of Allah. His sleeping is superior to a prayer by one who is oblivious’.

It is said that the company of a person of insight takes you from six situations to their opposites: it takes you from doubt to certainty; from hypocrisy to sincerity; from heedlessness to remembrance; from the desire of life’s comforts to the desire of the life to come; from arrogance to humility; and from ill intention to giving good counsel.

No person will establish himself in knowledge, nor indeed in faith, until he has believed in Allah’s attributes and has known them to an extent that removes him from being ignorant of his Lord. To know and believe in Allah’s attributes is the essence and basis of Islam and faith, and it is the fine fruit of the higher degree of *ihsān*. Whoever denies Allah’s attributes undermines the foundation of Islamic faith altogether. Needless to say, he cannot belong to the people of knowledge.

All Allah’s messengers, from the first to the last one (peace be upon them all), were sent to advocate belief in Allah, show the way that leads

to Him, and explain the state of those who are addressed by the message when they meet Him. These are the three necessary principles preached by every messenger in all divine faiths.

The first principle gives a clear and detailed explanation of Allah in whom people should believe, clearly stating His names and attributes and explaining His deeds and actions. All this is given in full clarity as if people are seeing Him and looking at Him as He is established on His throne. They see Him speaking to His angels, conducting the affairs of the universe, listening to His creation, seeing their actions and movements, knowing their secrets as well as what they do in public. They realize that He commands and forbids, is pleased or displeased, loves and hates, laughs at their despair, answers the supplication of the one in need, helps through an emergency, gives assistance, relieves calamity, enriches the one who is poor, causes death and gives life, bestows in abundance and withholds, grants dominion to whom He will and takes dominion away from whom He will, exalts whom He will and abases whom He will. In His hand is all that is good. He is able to do all things. Every day He manifests Himself in some wonderful way: he forgives a sin, relieves distress, removes affliction, supports a sufferer of injustice, strikes an oppressor, bestows mercy, His will is done on time and as He determines. He puts forward or delays as He wills. All matters are in His hand and all affairs are run by Him. This is the purpose of the divine faith and the import of the divine message.

The second principle is to show the way that leads to Him, which is the straight path which He has marked out for His messengers and their followers. It is the way of doing His bidding and refraining from what He forbids, and believing in His promise and warnings.

The third principle is to explain the outcome at the end. This is what occurs on the Day of Judgement of reckoning deeds, crossing the path and the two ultimate destinations of Heaven or Hell.

As such, to know and believe in Allah's attributes, confirm their truth,

feel them at heart represent the beginning, middle and end of the road. This is what drives those who undertake the journey, renews their determination when they slacken and urges them to continue until they reach their goal.



## THE STAGE OF Allah's ONENESS

**Allah** says: ‘Allah Himself bears witness, and so do the angels and men of knowledge, that there is no deity other than Him, the executor of Justice. There is no deity save Him, the Almighty, the Wise’. (3: 18) The belief in Allah’s oneness is the first principle advocated by Allah’s messengers, the first stage on the way, and the first position which the believer undertaking the journey towards Allah takes. Allah says: ‘Indeed, We have raised a messenger in every community, [who said to them]: ‘Worship Allah and shun the Evil One’. (16: 36)

Belief in Allah’s oneness is the key of the prophets’ message. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) sent Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, he gave him the following instructions: ‘You shall come upon people who have scriptures. The first thing that you should call upon them to do is to worship Allah, the Mighty and Exalted. When they have clear knowledge of Allah, tell them that Allah has made it obligatory on them to pray five times during their day and night. When they have done this, tell them that Allah has made it obligatory on them to pay zakat, which is taken from their properties and paid to their poor. If they accept this, take from them and steer away from the best of their property’.<sup>115</sup>

Belief in Allah’s oneness is the first thing a person does to embrace Islam and it is the last thing to say before one departs this life. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Whoever dies and the last thing he says is, “there is no deity other than Allah”, will be in Heaven’.<sup>116</sup> It is the first duty and the last duty, the beginning and the end.

115 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,458 & 1,496; Muslim, 19.

116 Related by Ahmad, 22,034; 22,127.

The principle of Allah's oneness advocated by Allah's messengers and explained in Allah's books is of two types: one of knowledge and confirmation, and one of requirement and objective.

The first type confirms the truth of Allah, His names, attributes, deeds, sublimity and establishment on His throne above all heavens, His speech contained in His books and His address to whomever He wishes of His servants. It also confirms His general judgement, will and decree. The Qur'an explains this type very clearly.

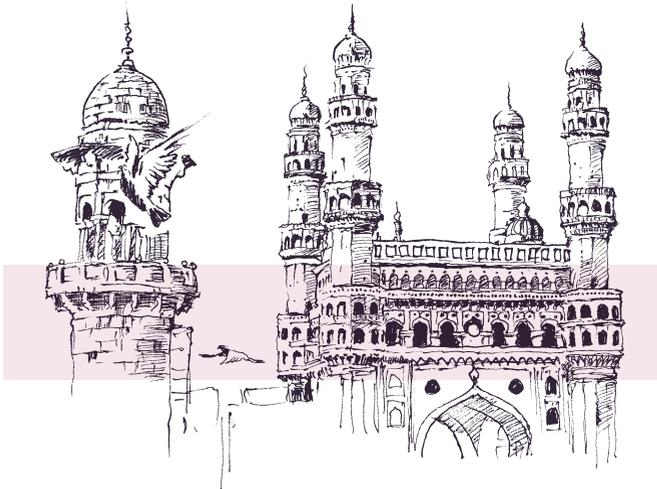
The other type is what is stated in Surah 109 which says: 'Say: "Unbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship. You have your own religion and I have mine"'. (109: 1-6) It is also stated in the Qur'anic verse that says: 'Say: People of earlier revelations. Let us come to an agreement which is equitable between you and us: that we shall worship none but Allah, that we shall associate no partners with Him, and that we shall not take one another for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves to Allah'. (3: 64) Most surahs of the Qur'an, and indeed every surah incorporates both types of Allah's oneness.

We go further than this and say absolutely that every verse in the Qur'an testifies to Allah's oneness and calls on mankind to believe in it. What the Qur'an says is one of the following:

- Information about Allah, His names, attributes and actions; and this is the informative aspect of belief in Allah's oneness.
- A call on people to worship Allah alone, associating no partners with Him and discarding whatever else is worshipped apart from Him. This is the aspect of requirement.
- Orders giving commands or prohibitions, with the binding commitment to obey every order of His. This aspect states what is due as a complement to belief in Allah's oneness.

- Information about Allah’s reward granted to those who believe in His oneness and obey Him: what He gives them in the present life and what He will give them in the life to come. This is the reward for believing in His oneness.
- Information about the people who associate partners with Allah, and the affliction meted out to them in this present life and the suffering they have to endure in the life to come. It is the requital of rejecting Allah’s oneness.







## POSTSCRIPT

‘Limitless in His glory is your Lord, the Lord of almightiness, above all what people attribute to Him. And peace be upon all His messengers. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.’ (37: 180-182)

We quote these verses to end this book, praising Allah as He deserves to be praised and as He has stated His praise.

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds: a goodly and blessed praise, as our Lord loves and is pleased with, and as is due to His noble face and great majesty. Nothing is sufficient to offer to Him. None departs from Him and none can do without His bounty.

We pray to Him to grant us that we will be grateful for the blessings which He has bestowed on us, to guide us to fulfil what is due to Him, help us to remember and thank Him and to worship Him well. We pray to make our purpose in publishing this book, and others, a deed sincerely offered to His majesty and as a sincere advice to His servants.

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. Peace and Allah’s blessings be upon Muhammad, the last of Allah’s messengers, and all members of his household.





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The book takes the form of a journey which should be undertaken by believers who want to ensure for themselves the best outcome in their future lives. Its destination is to be with Allah. In other words, it is a lifelong journey towards Allah. The book divides the journey into stages, but these are not consecutive stages. Some extend throughout the journey itself, such as the stages of repentance, patience and truthfulness. Others are completed and the traveller progresses onto another stage. Ultimately, the traveller arrives at a stage of life accompanied by the stage of Allah's oneness, which is the last aspect addressed by the book. All in all, it is a pleasant journey that helps to produce the best in man.

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