



FROM FAITH TO THE
INTERNALIZATION OF FAITH

*The Journey of Seeking
The Truth*

OSMAN NÛRİ TOPBAŞ

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THE JOURNEY OF SEEKING THE TRUTH
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FOREWORD

The friends of the Truth said that “The purpose of life is to gain perfection and to reach viewing the manifestation of divine perfection.” In other words, they subtly stated the necessity of striving on the path to become a person who has reached perfection (*al-insan al-kamil*) and that seeing the manifestation of divine perfection is the ultimate goal.

Allah, the Exalted, who created the human being in the best form (*ahsan al-taqwim*) amongst all other beings, wants that the deeds, morals, and the acts of worship filling the life of His servant and the journey of going to the eternal world takes place in the best manner. This is because our Lord desires for the human being, whom He created as His vicegerent on earth, to live a life appropriate to this high honor and wishes to reward him with His beauty and Paradise, which is the place of eternal union.

Attaining such happiness can only be possible by reaching the auspicious state of the people of Paradise,



while still being in this world, which requires spiritual training. All the prophets, Sufi masters, and devout scholars have manifested the epic determination of saving the human being from the enslavement of the inordinate self and raise him to the exalted honor of being the true servant of Allah. In other words, these group of leaders have established an exceptional educational system which is based on the Qur'an and our Prophet –peace and blessings be upon him-, “the excellent exemplar,” and comes to this day by gradually flourishing throughout the centuries in order to “bring about an elegant, delicate, and perfect human from an immature one.” This structure was systemized after the period of the Companions and gained its fame with the name “Tasawwuf or Sufism.”

The Sufi training has established various methods and etiquette in order to have a servant reach Allah and make him His friend and due to this it requires its followers to carefully observe these methods and manners. Many gifted servants, who have duly fulfilled what is necessary, have reached the friendship of Allah and joined the group of the fortunate due to the aid and blessing of our Almighty Lord.

It is considered necessary for every one of the travelers seeking the Truth, who wish to reach such a success as the above mentioned fortunate ones, to observe the following principles:



- To correct the creed (faith) in accordance with the creedal principles of the people who adhered to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*),

- To learn the religious rulings, such as what is obligatory, necessary, Sunnah, recommended, permissible, prohibited, reprehensible, and doubtful acts, in other words, the rules of Islamic law and basic principles of the acts of worship as much as they are required,

- To practice what has been learned,

- To resolve upon adhering to the path of Sufism, and purifying the self and the heart.

This is a reference book written by our respected master Osman Nuri Topbaş about the significance and the nature of the remembrance of Allah; this reflection and contemplation are among the most important principles of spiritual development. Even though some of the articles in this book have been published in various other books written by the author, they have been reorganized in this books due to the significance of the issue.

While we hereby ask our Lord to bestow our estimable master health and well-being, we also bid our readers success on the journey towards seeking the Truth.

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TASAWWUF AND SPIRITUAL TRAINING

The object of religion is to introduce the human being to his Creator, to inform him about his duties and responsibilities towards Him, and to establish human relations based upon justice, equity, peace, and tranquility on the path that was laid down by the Qur'an, and the Sunnah of our Prophet-peace and blessings be upon him-. Likewise, the purpose of religion is to raise elegant, polite, fine, and spiritually purified people. In other words, its aim is to prepare the believer for the friendship of Allah in Paradise.

The target of Sufism, on the other hand, is to raise the believer to the spiritual state that would enable him to realize all these objectives. Its aim is to create mutual harmony in our actions performed by our physical being and our heart.

Sufism, which is expressed through the terms of *taqwa* and *tazkiya* in the Qur'an, and through *zuhd* and *Ihsan* in the traditions of the Prophet -peace and



blessings be upon him-, is also defined by the *phrase fiqh al-batin* (the science of heart).¹

Sufism essentially means to transform our spiritual world into such a pure state that we can get our share from the knowledge of Allah (*ma'rifatullah*) and realize our love for Allah (*muhabbatullah*) and as a result achieve a state that can be a means to the divine union.

Sufism as a scholarly discipline, that can be felt and understood through one's practice in life, is hard

1. **Taqwa:** means to protect the heart by fastidiously carrying out the divine commands and prohibitions with the feeling of responsibility towards Allah, the Almighty. In other words, it means to eliminate the lower desires of the inner self and to develop its spiritual abilities.

Tazkiya: linguistically denotes several meanings such as to clean and to purify as well as to increase, to develop, to bless, and to make abundant. In this context, the term *tazkiya* essentially refers to the whole process of spiritual training. *Tazkiya al-Nafs* means purifying the soul primarily from disbelief, ignorance, evil feelings, false beliefs, and bad morals. That is to purify it from all kinds of creedal, moral, and practical wrongness conflicting with *Sharia*. It means to train and adorn the soul with pious characteristics such as faith, knowledge, wisdom, and good feelings and to fill it out with spirituality after purifying and protecting it from error.

Zuhd: means to make *masiwa*, i.e. everything other than Allah, the Almighty loses its importance in the heart.

Ihsan: means that the believer feels himself always under divine observance and continues his actions in this manner. It is stated in a hadith that *ihsan* means "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and even if you cannot see Him, He certainly can see you." (al-Bukhari, Iman, 37; Muslim, Iman, 1) In other words, *ihsan* means that the soul turns the state of observance of Allah, the Almighty, into a continuous cognizance.



to explain in a perfect manner by means of the limited power of words. This is the reason for why the friends of Allah have given different definitions of Sufism by taking into consideration the aspect they see in the gemstone of Sufism, each section which emits different lights. By looking into these definitions, we can have a general idea about the nature of Sufism. We can list some of these definitions as follows:

- Sufism means good morality and manners.
- Sufism means purification of the soul and clarifying the heart.
- Sufism is a spiritual battle with no truce. It is the great battle against the inner self.
- Sufism is sincerity.
- Sufism means being on the straight path.
- Sufism means contentedness and submission.

Sufism is the mirror of the heart that assists reflection for all the ages and generations that will come until the end of the world on the blessed life of the Prophet Muhammad -peace and blessings be upon him -. In other words, it means to be outwardly and inwardly united with his blessed life and to be unified with it through an endless love. It means to get a share from the spirituality of the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him - and to be spiritually united with him. It means to strive to reach a similar life style as



the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- in worship, obedience, morality and daily transactions with the intention to realize the message of the following hadith “*Everyone will be with those whom he loves.*”²

- Sufism is faith combined with love, worship performed with ecstasy and beauty that arises from conduct.
- Sufism is the art of reaching the *taqwa* of Allah.
- Sufism is the art of being able to establish friendship with Allah.
- Sufism is the art of maintaining the balance in the face of ups and downs of life.
- Sufism is the art of being able to be content with Allah under the changing circumstances of life.
- Sufism is the art of being able to forget complaining.
- Sufism is the art of being able to achieve a good character.
- Sufism is a sacred and blessed way of training.
- For a believer who has been spiritually realized, Sufism means to turn to the creation with mercy and compassion and to correct his deficiencies.



- Sufism is a path that gets the servant closer to Allah.
- Sufism means to feel the Qur'an and Sunnah deep inside the heart and live in accordance with them with delight.
- In short, Sufism means the art of reaching genuine love.

The attainment of Sufi training and education means the ability to live out the above-mentioned good characteristics as one's character and personality.



It should be well known that the foundations that Sufism is based upon are the rules of the Qur'an, and the Sunnah of our master, Allah's Messenger. In this respect, to practice the rules of the Qur'an and Sunnah in all aspects of life and to manifest a Muslim identity is the first principle of this spiritual path.

It is essential to base our faith on the creed of the people of Sunnah (*ahl al-Sunnah*) and base our worship, morality, and daily transactions on the Holy Sharia's rules related to these areas. How related to Islam is our life, the life of our family and our children? Such a self-account should become an action that we repeat regularly in our lives. We should not forget Islam in any aspect of our lives and should not allow the increase of any distance between us and



Allah Almighty and His Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him-.

To observe the boundaries of lawful and unlawful carefully, to stay away from the doubtful things, to fulfill the rights of other people upon us, to make observing the regular rules a habit rather than practicing the permissible rulings for extraordinary circumstances, and to get ourselves closer to Allah by performing supererogatory acts of worship are very important to advance the spiritual state of our hearts. In this context, consuming lawful food also has great significance.

Acts of worship can be performed by means of not only the spiritual nourishments feeding the soul but also the strength and power acquired by the body from material food. The human constitution gains spirituality and enlightenment from lawful food, while it gathers gloominess, uneasiness, and heedlessness from unlawful and doubtful food.

The hearts in obedience, submission to and contentedness with the commands of Allah become the ways to achieve wisdom, goodness, and enlightenment. In contrast, the hearts and bodies not protected from unlawful and doubtful things will turn into the refuge of evil and the abode of immorality.

Abdulqadir al-Jilani -may Allah sanctify his secret- points out the significance of lawful nourishments in the purification of heart as follows:



“Listen my child! Consuming unlawful food kills the heart. There are some morsels that enlighten the heart, while there are morsels that suffocate it in the darkness. There are some morsels that keep you occupied with this world, while there are others that keep you busy with the Hereafter. There are some morsels that make you a devotee of both worlds. There are morsels that direct you the Creator of this world and the Hereafter. Consuming unlawful food will keep you busy with this world and make your sins pleasant to you. Eating permissible food will keep you busy with the Hereafter and help you love the acts of obedience. Whereas eating lawful food will draw you closer to Allah, the Almighty.”

Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret- said, “a few morsels of doubtful food that find their way in the stomach block the way to spiritual enlightenment” and thus pointed towards the fact that we should be cautious about not only the material but also the spiritual state of the nourishment we acquire.

The second principle of spiritual training is to pay attention to “*Awrâd wa adhkâr*” which is formed through asking for forgiveness from Allah, to pray to Him and remember Him, and recite litanies (tasbihât) of praise of Him. “*Awrâd wa adhkâr*” becomes the means to turn the consciousness of



internalization of faith (*ihsân*) into a perception of the heart.

“*Awrâd wa adhkâr*” occupies an important place in purifying the self, cleansing the heart, performing the outwardly acts of worship and observances with great sincerity, reverence, and rapture as well as having our acts and behaviors gain elegance and grace. This has surely been one of the training methods of the prophets and friends of Allah throughout history.

The third principle is “*sohbah*” which becomes the means to get spiritually immersed and reflect the spiritual state (*insibagh* and *inikas*) of the Sufi master (*murshid al-kâmil*).

Sohbah essentially means to get together. The conditions of peoples’ spiritual state have the ability to influence each other. Being together with the people of the heart, the wise and the righteous enable a person to be like them in time. *Sohbah* is the method of the Prophet –peace and blessings be upon him- of training his Companions. Shah Naqshiband -may Allah sanctify his secret- placed *sohbah* at the center of spiritual training by saying “Our path is the path of *sohbah*.”

Sohbah does not mean just to gather together to read books or preach to each other. It is a spiritual gathering where divine abundance, mercy, and serenity descend. In such gatherings, hearts get softened and feel the spiritual pleasure in being with Allah, the



Almighty. Everyone receives a spiritual prescription in accordance with his or her need. The zest felt from continuing to attend *sohbahs* with similar emotions like performing an act of worship cannot be defined by words.

“Sincerity (*ikhlas*)” is the most basic factor that renders a *sohbah* influential. The transmission of the meanings of the words to the heart and achieving maturity in a person’s character and its reflection in his behaviors is only possible by means of sincerity.

The fourth principle in Sufi training (*sayr suluk*) is to regard the merciful and compassionate service to the servants of Allah and even to the entire creation as a duty.

Everybody has to feel the responsibility of service in their hearts in accordance with their abilities and potentials. An acceptable service means seeking Allah’s pleasure by sincerely, mercifully, and self-sacrificingly turning towards the creation.

Service occupies a very important place on the path to gain the divine pleasure. In this respect, the people of service should be thankful to the person whom they serve for he becomes a means for them to gain Allah’s pleasure instead of expecting anything, material or spiritual, in return from him.

Moreover, service is one of the most important tools of spiritual training. Many good moral character-



istics such as familiarity, helping others, modesty, giving generously, and self-sacrifice can turn into inseparable parts of one's character only by means of service. Serving others has a very significant place in keeping a person's feet firmly on the path of seeking the Truth and letting divine aid come to the help of a servant.



There are many other principles and manners to which attention should be paid on the path of spiritual development. Below we will deal with some of these foremost principles and manners.



I. THE SECRET OF NIGHT AND THE TIME OF PRE-DAWN

Immeasurable is the value Allah, the Almighty, has ascribed to the time of night and countless are the mysteries He has implanted therein. The mysteries that lie behind His avowal of the night in the verse **“And the night and that which it drives on...”** (al-Inshiqaq, 84: 17) is like a divine window opening to our hearts and understanding.

Divine revelations were usually sent during the night hours. Truthful dreams which were the first heralds of prophethood took place spiritually during inspiring nights. Truthful dreams called *Rahmani Dreams*, which are like divine presents to us and glitters reflecting from the Protected Tablet (*Lawh-i Mahfuz*) to the future are from the wisdoms manifesting themselves in the hours of the night. The event of “*Isra*” was a night journey, a part of the event of *Miraj* (Ascension to Heavens), when the Beloved of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- for whose sake all humankind was created was admitted to the



divine presence and reached the reality of eternal and ultimate union.

Mature believers look upon the time of the night as an exceptional treasure due to the serenity and spiritual enlightenment concealed in its chest. Those who can properly appreciate the value of this treasure find, especially after midnight at a time when most have resigned to rest, the most inspiring ground for turning to the Lord with heartfelt prayers and sincere deeds of worship.

This is because everything reaches serenity at night; the universe inclines from multiplicity to unity. In other words, the servant is saved from the disorder of preoccupations of the daytime and focuses his attention instead towards his journey towards the Truth. In this respect, those moments are excellent opportunities for those who would like to reach unity and ultimate union.

The moments of pre-dawn are special times for the invitation of Allah, the Almighty to His servants. The servant should regard this invitation coming from his Lord, as a blessing and an opportunity to praise Him. Enlivening the times of the pre-dawn is an expression of the servant's love and reverence to his Lord.



having feared Him by remaining awake at night and daybreak, the Almighty reveals:

“They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness.” (al-Dhariyat, 51: 17-18)

“And they who pass the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing” (al-Furqan, 25: 64)

Awaking for prayer and praising Allah at night is virtually like meeting up with the Beloved Almighty. Moments of pre-dawn should be invigorated in such rapture that it can spread its spirituality and abundance throughout the day. To be awake when everyone else is in deep sleep is to be favored among the privileged servants of Allah, glory unto Him, and to be admitted into the courtroom of His mercy, love and knowledge.

If a believer uses the night purposefully and properly deriving the spiritual benefit of the remembrance of Allah at dawn, his nights will become spiritually more light and valuable than his days. However, a night spent without purpose, imprisoned to sleep alone, is a loss almost irrecoverable, like raindrops that fall on rocks, the sea and the desert and perish at the instant.

The attraction and secrets of the esthetic scene of night will be manifested to those who spend it with obedience and contemplation. The spiritual worlds



of those who reach such secrets will expand as much as the earth and heavens and will become a place of reflection for the divine manifestations and will be clothed by the knowledge of Allah.

Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- said,

"There is an hour during the night in which no Muslim individual will ask Allah for good in this world and the next without Him giving it to him; and that applies to every night." (Muslim, Musafirin, 166)

Hasan al-Basri was asked:

"Why are the faces of those who observe night prayer beautiful and radiating?"

He replied:

"Because they were alone with Allah, the Merciful..."

Due to this unity with Allah, devotees lose track of time at night and reach the morning in a state of increased love and longing.

Bayazid al-Bistami expressed this value of nights in respect to the revelation of divine mysteries and truth with the following words,

"Nothing revealed to me until the nights have become days to me."



Likewise, Hasan al-Basri said regarding the reason for the deprivation of the acts of worship at night:

“Waking up for night prayer is hard for those who are crushed under sins.”



The people of heart who have realized the spiritual mysteries of night know that those who neglect the benefits from the blessings of night will wake up tired and inert and be deprived of the bounties of the day. It is not possible to imagine the goodness of the day for those people who do not appreciate the value of the blessing of nights. Therefore, every person who would like to attain the safety of the day has to utilize his nights purposefully in order to enter the climate of the divine and spiritual scenes.

In this respect, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- said,

“The most virtuous prayer after the obligatory ones is the one performed at night.” (Muslim, Siyam, 202-203; al-Tirmidhi, Mawaqit, 207)

Another time, Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- said,

“Gabriel came and said, ‘... Certainly the honor (value) of a believer is in the pre-dawn (tahajjud) prayer.” (Jam’ al-Fawaid, I, 335)



‘Amr b. ‘Abasah narrated: “I said, “O Messenger of Allah, is there any moment which brings one close to Allah than another, or any moment that should be sought out for remembering Allah?”

He said, “*Yes, the closest that the Lord is to His slave is in the middle of the last part of the night, so if you can be among those who remember Allah at that time, then do so. For prayer (performed in that hour) is attended and witnessed (by the angels)...*” (al-Nasai, Mawaqit al-Salah, 35)

Seeing life according to the phases of day and night is another gift of divine magnificence and a divine lesson. For a believer, spending the whole night in sleep, being deprived of its divine blessings and spirituality, and sacrificing the night to sleep as if one was inanimate like a sculpture, is a great disappointment because we are the travelers of the Hereafter whose mortal pleasures will be taken away. If the life in this world, which passes like the clouds of a summer, is lived without any concerns about the afterlife, it is no different than regarding a day to exist without a night.



Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- asked his whole ummah to perform the pre-dawn prayer (*tahajjud*) sensitively, which is one of the most important means of spiritual advancement. He began his inculcation in this regard with the people that were closest to him. One night, he knocked on the



door of Ali and Fatima –may Allah be pleased with them– and advised them to benefit from the spiritual blessings of the night by saying:

“Aren’t you going to perform prayer?”

Likewise, he exhorted his Companions to be awake at dawns by saying,

“Be attentive to worshipping at night, for it is the custom of the righteous before you. Waking up to worship at night is no doubt a means to get closer to Allah. It protects one from sins, atones for mistakes and rids the body of distress.” (al-Tirmidhi, Daawat, 101/3549)

The following information provided by Qadi Baydawi –may Allah have mercy on him– shows how the Companions of the Prophet utilized the night:

“Once the five daily prayers became obligatory and the night prayer became voluntary (Sunnah), the Noble Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- set out from his chamber at night to inspect the Companions. He found out that their houses were humming like beehives with the sounds of the Quran, remembrance of Allah and *tasbih*.”³

In regards to voluntary acts of worship, Allah, the Almighty, has bestowed various blessings to His servants. One such blessing is this: If a person does not perform an act, which he has made a habit due to an

3. *Anwar al-Tanzil*, IV, 111



excuse, Allah, the Almighty, rewards His servant as if he had performed that act.

Indeed, it is stated in a hadith,

“When a person cannot perform an act because he falls ill or sets out for a journey (of fighting for the sake of Allah or doing a good deed), then he will get reward similar to that he gets for those deeds practiced at home when in good health.” (al-Bukhari, Jihad, 134; Ahmad, IV, 410, 418)

The following verse expresses the same meaning:

“Except such as believe and do righteous deeds: For they shall have a reward unfailing.” (al-Tin, 95: 6)

Muslim commentators understood the following meaning from this verse:

If a believer consistently continues his supererogatory acts of worship, our Almighty Lord will give him the similar reward even when he could not perform them at times of hardship, disease or old age. When his body reaches a state that cannot perform the acts of worship, and even after his death, his rewards continues until eternity as a divine favor.



Nights are the times when one devotes oneself for the sake of Allah by leaving the soft and warm bed to present oneself in the divine presence solely due to love and fondness. Therefore, prayers performed at



night, even though they are not obligatory, have great significance in respect to having closeness to Allah. In this respect, the stronger the love of the divine is in the heart so stronger the inclination is to observe the night prayer.

Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- would perform prayer throughout the night until his feet swelled. He was asked:

“O Messenger of Allah! Even though Allah, the Almighty, informs us in the chapter al-Fath that you are completely forgiven, why do you tire yourself so much?”

He -peace and blessings be upon him- said,

“Should not I be a thanking servant?” (al-Bukhari, Tahajjud, 6)

This is because enlivening the nights is not easy and it is necessary to observe certain guidelines. What is necessary on this path is to have a light dinner as much as possible and go to bed early in addition to have the desire to observe the night prayer. In fact,

“Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- disliked to sleep before night ('isha) prayer and talk after it.” (al-Bukhari, Mawaqit al-Salah, 23)

The only exception for going to bed early is to serve the path of Allah and similar valid reasons which would not prevent the observation of acts of



worship at night. This subtlety is to eliminate the difficulty to wake up in the middle of the night and to be determined to undo the ties of heedlessness knotted by Satan on our necks. This notion is expressed in a hadith,

“Satan puts three knots at the back of the head of any of you when he goes to sleep. On every knot he reads and exhales the following words,

‘The night is long, so stay asleep.’ When one wakes up and remembers Allah, one knot is undone; and when one performs ablution, the second knot is undone, and when one prays the third knot is undone and one gets up energetic with a good heart in the morning; otherwise one gets up lazy and with a mischievous heart.”
(al-Bukhari, Tahajjud, 12)

A man said to Ibrahim b. Adham,

“I cannot wake up to observe prayer at night. Teach me the cure for my problem.” Ibrahim b. Adham replied,

“Do not rebel against Allah in the morning; He will raise you up to His presence at night. Being in His presence at night is a great honor. Sinners do not deserve to have this honor.”



and continues with wrapping oneself in spirituality of the Oneness of Allah (*tawhid*), praising the Prophet (*salawat al-sharifa*), and remembering Allah (*dhikr*). Remembering Allah before dawn, in other words the servant's meeting with his Master, is a golden opportunity for reviving the heart and recognizing that is not possible to disregard it because our souls needs spiritual nourishment just as our bodies needs material food. Allah, the Almighty, values the remembrance of Allah at times before dawn more than the ones offered at other times of the day.



II. AWRAD AND ADHKAR

Repetition of the portions from the Qur'an (*wird* pl. *awrâd*) and patterned remembrances of Allah (*dhikr* pl. *adhkâr*) at Dawn, in other words keeping one's heart with Allah, is very important for the revival of the heart. The friends of Allah said, "**One who does not have a *wird* would not have *wârid* (inspiration of spiritual mysteries).**" In other words, there would not be any spiritual and sudden inspirations bestowed to the hearts of those who do not regularly remember Allah.

The most important *wird* upon which all *awrâd* and *adhkâr* have been built is to have sound faith, to live a devotional life based on pious reverence, and to follow the life of the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- who was presented to us as the perfect exemplar (the best role model).

Allah Almighty has introduced Himself to all His creation, both animate and inanimate, and charged them with the duty of the continuous remembrance



of Him. This is because all beings in accordance with their own creation know and remember their Lord in a way peculiar to their state.

Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi – may Allah sanctify his soul – says in this respect,

“All creation remembers Allah in a way peculiar to them. However, the creation is in various levels in this regard:

The ones that are farthest away from heedlessness from among the creation are the inanimate beings because they are free from needs such as eating, drinking, or breathing. In this regard, plants come second to the inanimate beings because needs begin with them because they mix the nutrition they get from the soil, the water, and the sun and thus produce flowers, leaves, and fruits in various colors. Animals come after the plants because all vital functions of animals are more developed than the plants so they have more needs. Their sensuality is stronger. As for the needs of human beings, they are infinite. Conceit, selfish ambitions and worldly desires continuously lead them to heedlessness.”

To be able to fully apprehend the mysteries and wisdom in the pages of the universe is a matter that can be realized by gaining depth in the spiritual realm. A believer who can observe the earth and the heavens through the eyes of his heart realizes that his heart is filled with a different spiritual feeling. It is expressed



in the Qur'an that everything on earth and in heavens remembers and extols the Creator of everything from the smallest particle to the world. In fact, the Qur'an states in the following below verses that the heavens, earth, mountains, trees, grass, the sun, the stars, and the lightning, animals, rolling stones, and even shadows turning to the right and the left prostrate themselves day and night:

“Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to Allah (Acknowledging subjection), with good-will or in spite of themselves: so do their shadows in the morning and evenings.” (al-Ra'd, 13: 15)

“Do they not look at Allah's creation, (even) among (inanimate) things, how their (very) shadows turn round, from the right and the left, prostrating themselves to Allah, and that in the humblest manner?” (al-Nahl, 16: 48)

The verses of the Qur'an present an eminently splendid scene before us. In that scene, the prostrations are in double form together with the prostrations of the shadows. In other words, there are two prostrations at the same time, one done by the being itself and one done by its shadow... Every particle in universe prostrates itself, willingly or unwillingly, before the Lord of the worlds to worship Him and dedicates itself to fulfill its duties in the presence of the Creator...



The heedless ones who worship idols other than Allah do not know that all beings including the one they worship and even its shadow surrender to the order established by the Lord in the universe and turn towards Him whom those heedless people deny. What a great illusion and loss this is!

In like manner, a scene consisting of shadows, things, living beings, and angels is depicted in the verses. They all fulfill their tasks with the feeling of worship and submission to Allah. The despondency of refraining from worshipping Allah and opposing His commands is a condition that exists only with people that are confused and heedless. The verses of the Qur'an ironically throw the fact that all creation and even their shadows submit themselves to their Lord into the faces of those heedless people.

Indeed, if we observe our environment with a cautious eye and taking lessons from it, we can see what a strange state of prostration occurs when the skies extend deep into the horizon and spread over the mountains. How beautifully the shadows of trees, flowers, plants, animals and people, which fall to the ground from the right and the left, manifest the state of their prostration! The earth is like the prayer rug of all beings and their shadows. The event of rain is like a heavenly cry and the thunders following the lighting are like the sincere roars coming from the heart of the skies.



What an effective guidance the states of beings existing on earth and in heavens present for a sensitive heart! Everything from the remembrances of Allah in the heart of a bug like the tip of a needle to the roars of the greatest and most magnificent animals is a different manifestation of divine power.

How beautiful is the praise of the melodious sound coming from the heart of the nightingale, the “hu, hu” sounds of doves, the “lak, lak” sounds of storks for the hearts that are receptive! Allah Almighty says in a verse,

“Do you not see that to Allah bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars; the hills, the trees, the animals ...” (al-Hajj, 22: 18)

As seen above, all beings, even the inanimate ones are in a continuous state of praising and remembering Allah. Unfortunately, due to their heedlessness of the remembrance of Allah, some people will be subjected to torment. Indeed, everything from the smallest particles in the world to the greatest beings are aware of their Creator, the birds know how to worship and say their prayers, and the mountains and the streams continue to chant the remembrances and praises of Allah. That being the case, despite the magnificent remembrances, praises, and worship of the universe, people’s heedlessness, unawareness, and ignorance from the remembrance of Allah by not taking any lessons from



this magnificent scene is a sad loss, which does not accord with the dignity of human beings.

Of course, the path of familiarity with the divine requires the servant to not forget his Lord. No matter what direction they look towards and no matter what they listen to, the prudent believers hear all these same melodies praising Allah.

The more we remember our Lord in this world, the closer we get to meeting with Him in the Hereafter. Living with a clean conscience, passing away in faith and thus reaching eternal peace and tranquility will occur by not forgetting the Lord because as expressed in a verse, **“...without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.”** (al-Ra‘d, 13: 28)

The life of the one who forgets his Lord is wasted in the whirlpools of heedlessness. The person wakes up from that heedlessness only when he dies. However, at that point everything worldly ends and a great disappointment is experienced by death.

It is stated in a verse,

“And be you not like those who forgot Allah; and He made them forget their own souls! Such are the rebellious transgressors!” (al-Hashr, 59: 19)



Dhikrullah or remembering Allah does not mean only repeating the word “Allah” as a phrase. Dhikr



(Remembrance of Allah) may help the improvement of intentions and behaviors only if it finds a place in the heart, which is the center of the aptitude of sensation. Such a *dhikr* means the servant's faithfulness to the covenant "Yes! You are our Lord," (al-A'raf, 7: 172) given on the day of his creation (*bazm alast*) and never forgetting his Lord by demonstrating this loyalty.

According to Waqid, who was a servant of the Messenger of Allah, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- said,

"Whosoever obeys Allah, Lord of Majesty and Bounty, and properly follows His commands and prohibitions fulfills the task of remembering Him even if he does not perform so many (supererogatory) prayers, observe (voluntary) fasting, or recite the Qur'an much.

Whosoever disobeys Allah (does not give up committing sins) does not fulfill the task of remembering Allah even if he performs so many (supererogatory) prayers, observe so much (voluntary) fasting, or recite the Qur'an much." (al-Haythami, II, 258)

Due to the great danger existing in heedlessness from remembering Allah, He has warned us in this regard on several occasions. **Because the path to save the believing hearts from the hardness of heedlessness and help them to attain the contentedness of Allah passes through the perpetual remembrance of Him. This can be possible only by carrying the consciousness of *dhikrullah* not just for a while or for a**



season but for an entire lifetime and in every breath we inhale and exhale. For only then can a person truly realize spiritual awareness.

In this respect, we should enter the climate of endless love for our Lord Almighty and strive to reach such a spiritual vigilance that cannot be destroyed by worldly ambitions and temporary desires. After all, those who love permanently carry their beloved in their hearts and never forget the one whom they love.

In a *hadith al-qudsi* on the value of gathering for *dhikr*, the Noble Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- said:

“Allah says: ‘I am just as My slave thinks I am, (i.e. I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him) and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than they; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.’” (al-Bukhari, Tawhid, 15)

One day, as he was addressing his Companions, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- asked:

“-Should I not inform you of the best of your deed, and the purest of them with your Master, and the highest



of them in your ranks, and what is better for you than spending gold and silver, and better for you than meeting your enemy and striking their necks, and they strike your necks?"

"Please do, Messenger of Allah", they replied, whereupon the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- said:

"It is the remembrance of Allah". (al-Tirmidhi, Daawat, 6)

Dhikrullah, or the remembrance of Allah, glory unto Him, can be done individually, as well as in a group. Mu'awiya -may Allah be pleased with him- came to a group sitting in circle in the mosque and asked,

"-What makes you sit here?"

They said, "We are sitting here in order to remember Allah."

Mu'awiya asked again, *"I adjure you by Allah to tell me whether you are sitting here for this very purpose?"*

They said, "-By Allah, we are sitting here for this very purpose."

Thereupon, he said: "I have not demanded you to take an oath, because of any allegation against you and none of my rank in the eyes of Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- is the narrator of



so few hadiths as I am. The fact is that Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- went out to the circle of his Companions and asked:

“– *What makes you sit here?*”

“– We are sitting here in order to remember Allah and to praise Him for He guided us to the path of Islam and He conferred favors upon us.”

Thereupon Allah's Messenger adjured by Allah and asked if that only was the purpose of their sitting there.

They said: By Allah, we are not sitting here but for this very purpose, whereupon he (the Messenger) said: “*I am not asking you to take an oath because of any allegation against you but for the fact that Gabriel came to me and he informed me that Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, was talking to the angels about your magnificence.*” (Muslim, Dhikr, 40)

The Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- used to instruct his Companions with different forms of *dhikr* dependent on their individual capabilities. A wonderful example of this is his advice to his cousin Umm Hani -may Allah be pleased with her-, the daughter of Abu Talib.

Umm Hani -may Allah be pleased with her-, the daughter of Abu Talib, came to the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- and asked,



“I have become old and weak, Messenger of Allah”, she said. “Can you recommend me a deed of worship that I can do as I sit?” The Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- said:

“Proclaim the greatness of Allah (say Allahu Akbar) one hundred times, praise Allah (say al-Hamdu Lillah) one hundred times, and glorify Allah (say Subhan-Allah) one hundred times. (That is) better than one hundred horses bridled and saddled for the sake of Allah, better than one hundred sacrificial camels, and better than (freeing) one hundred slaves.” (Ibn Majah, Adab, 56; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, VI, 344)

As much as our body needs material nourishment, our soul also needs spiritual nourishment in order to know its Creator and to carry out its servitude towards Him. Just like the material nourishments spreads even through capillary vessels and keeps the body alive, it is necessary to establish and spread the remembrance of Allah, which is the spiritual nourishment of the soul, in all subtle centers of the consciousness of the body (*lata'if*). Indeed, the path to die in faith and to achieve spiritual mysteries and pleasures passes through the perpetual remembrance of Allah.

Carrying out *dhikr* by pure conscience is also very important. Due to this reality, the friends of Allah usually begin *awrâd* and *adhkâr* by repentance (*tawbah*) and asking forgiveness from Allah (*istighfâr*).



a. Repentance (*Tawbah*) and Asking Forgiveness from Allah (*Istighfâr*)

Repentance (*tawbah*) means to turn to the Truth. It means that a servant who forgets the Truth or becomes heedless of Him realizes his wrong path and turns his heart to his Lord and begs for His forgiveness. Such a servant's heart burns with regret and by shedding warm tears, he opens his heart to his Lord. This burning and regret is called "*tawbah*" while the utterances coming from the heart to express regret and beg forgiveness from Allah are called "*istighfâr*."

All friends, righteous and truthful servants of Allah, especially His prophets always sought refuge with Allah in their happiness and sadness, in their difficult and easy times, and were in a constant state of worship to Him. It is not possible to imagine a servant who is not in need of praying and begging forgiveness from Allah because praying and asking forgiveness from Allah consists of real regret and seeking refuge with Allah; they are the most important ways of coming closer to Allah.

Even if we do not commit any sin, expressing our gratitude properly for the blessings bestowed upon us is beyond our power. In this respect, feeling our weakness and asking forgiveness from Allah is a requirement of being His servant. When we observe the world through the eye of our hearts it is observable that all creation express their weakness before express-



ing their gratitude for the bounties given to them. Therefore, praying and asking forgiveness from Allah is the first step to get closer to Allah for the children of Adam who has free will, but it is not possible for him to be free from erring in the absolute sense while employing his free will.

Ibn ‘Umar –may Allah be pleased with both of them – says,

“We counted that the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- would say a hundred times during a meeting:

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَتُبْ عَلَيَّ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

“My Lord, forgive me and pardon me; You are the Pardoning and forgiving One.” (Abu Dawud, Witr, 26/1516; al-Tirmidhi, Da’awat, 38/3434)

Istighfâr which occupies a significant place in getting closer to Allah and having the heart attain higher states is also the most important instrument to be cleansed from spiritual impurities. An acceptable repentance removes the curtains between the servant and his Lord and helps him gain His love. In fact, Allah Almighty says in the Qur’an,

“...Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.” (al-Baqara, 2: 222)



Just like the fact that the sun rises after dawn and removes the darkness, praying and asking forgiveness in times of dawn helps us to erase our sins and to reach the lights of mercy.

When one makes a mistake and commits a sin due to the weakness of being a human, he should immediately express his regret and beg for forgiveness by turning to Allah. This is because Allah Almighty describes His servants who fears Him after doing something wrong as follows,

“And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring Allah to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins, and who can forgive sins except Allah? and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done.” (Al ‘Imran, 3: 135)

“They were in the habit of sleeping but little by night, and in the hour of early dawn, they (were found) praying for forgiveness;” (al-Zariyat, 51: 17-18)

An expression of how the heart, darkened from sins, is lit up through repentance is the meaningful below hadith of the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him:-

“Verily, when the slave of Allah commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. When he refrains from it, seeks forgiveness and repents, his heart is polished clean. But if he returns, it increases until it covers his



entire heart. And that is the 'Ran' which Allah mentioned: 'Nay, but on their hearts is the Ran which they used to earn.'

This is exactly what Allah Almighty refers to when He says:

'Nay! Rather, what they used to do has become like rust upon their hearts.' (al-Mutaffifin, 83: 14) (al-Tirmidhi, Tafsir, 83/3334)

In another hadith, Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- states the benefits of begging for forgiveness from Allah as follows,

"If anyone continually asks pardon, Allah will appoint for him a way out of every distress, and a relief from every anxiety, and will provide for him from where he did not reckon." (Abu Dawud, Witr, 26/1518; Ibn Majah, Adab, 57)

On the other hand, repentance and asking forgiveness from Allah will be the means of reaching salvation in the Hereafter. In this regard, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- says,

"Allah sent down two guarantees of safety for the benefit of my Ummah:

1. But Allah was not going to send them a penalty while you were amongst them;

2. Or was He going to send it whilst they could ask for pardon. (al-Anfal, 8: 33)



So when I pass, I leave seeking forgiveness (which is the second guarantee) among them until the Day of Resurrection.” (al-Tirmidhi, Tafsir, 8/3082)

The time of dawn is the moments of the day when the blessings and mercy of Allah pours upon His servants. Indeed, Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- expresses this matter as follows,

“Our Lord, the Blessed and the Exalted, descends every night to the lowest heaven when one-third of the latter part of the night is left, and says:

“Who supplicates Me so that I may answer him? Who asks Me so that I may give to him? Who asks Me forgiveness so that I may forgive him?” (Muslim, Musafirin, 168-170)

In order to have the repentance gain a certain level, one should pay attention to the following matters:

The first thing that comes out of the heart of the repentant person should be the confession of **“ajziyya or weakness.”** Even if we have tiniest piece left from our wretched **“self”** found inside us, then this means our repentance and prayers have not reached their goals. What is requested by repentance and asking forgiveness is divine mercy and blessings. By repenting for our sins, we actually ask Allah, the Owner of endless mercy, to show mercy to us and increase His blessings upon us. In other words, asking Allah’s



forgiveness is not an act of verbally uttering certain phrases of repentance at certain times. It is an act of asking forgiveness accompanied by endless contemplation and feeling.

As in every good deed, sincerity is also a condition in repentance. So much so that many friends of Allah repent for the poor repentances that they uttered in the past. In other words, one should seek refuge with Allah from the past repentances that need repentance and try to reach the level of “*tawbatan nasuha* (sincere repentance)” (al-Tahrim, 66: 8) specified in the Qur’an. For when Satan and the inner self cannot find a way to lead the person astray, they pretend to appear sincere and pretend to be masters advising goodness. In this way, they lead the servant to fall into their traps and cause his repentance to be ineffective.

For the reason that repentance is a way of asking forgiveness it should be based on sincere regret and the person should be determined not to commit the sin again for which he is currently repenting for to his Lord.

In this respect, Allah Almighty warns His servants as follows,

“...nor let the chief deceiver (Satan) deceive you about Allah (by making you trust too much the forgiveness of Allah).” (Luqman, 31: 33)



This is because repentance and asking forgiveness from Allah are very important and in all paths of Sufi tradition the servant begins his *awrâd* and *adhkâr* at dawn by asking forgiveness from Allah.

The sentence,

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ الْعَظِيمَ

“I seek forgiveness of Allah the Mighty” is the most succinct expression of asking forgiveness from Allah.

Great Tawbah

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ، أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ، أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ الْعَظِيمَ
الْكَرِيمَ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ؛ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ
وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ. وَنَسَلُهُ التَّوْبَةَ وَالْمَغْفِرَةَ وَالْهُدَايَةَ
لَنَا، إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ؛ تَوْبَةَ عَبْدٍ ظَالِمٍ
لِنَفْسِهِ، لَا يَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِهِ مَوْتًا وَلَا حَيَاةً وَلَا
نُشُورًا.

O Allah! I beg for Your forgiveness! O Lord!
I beg for Your mercy! O my Master! Please forgive
and cleanse me from my mistakes and sins.



(As a weak servant, I) I seek the forgiveness of Allah, I seek the forgiveness of Allah, I seek the forgiveness of Allah the Mighty and the Most Generous whom there is none worthy of worship except Him, the Living, the Self-Subsisting and Supporter of all, and I turn to Him in repentance. We ask from Him forgiveness, mercy, guidance for us. He is the Most forgiving and the Most Merciful. (We repent as) the repentance of a slave who has oppressed himself, who neither has power over his death, nor his life, nor his resurrection.

By means of the statement “*astaghfirullah* (I seek the forgiveness of Allah),” the servant realizes his weakness and asks Allah to be forgiven while being in a state of feeling his own *nothingness*. As for the invocation called “*sayyid al-istighfâr*” transmitted from the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him-, the servant reiterates his promise to be a good servant to his Lord. In other words, he renews his covenant that he gave to his Lord on the day of his creation (*bazm alast*).

a. Sayyid al-Istighfâr (*The Master of the Invocations of Istighfâr*)

اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ رَبِّي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ خَلَقْتَنِي وَأَنَا عَبْدُكَ وَأَنَا عَلَى عَهْدِكَ وَوَعْدِكَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ،



أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا صَنَعْتُ، أَبُوءُ لَكَ بِنِعْمَتِكَ
عَلَيَّ وَأَبُوءُ بِذَنْبِي؛ فَاعْفِرْ لِي ذُنُوبِي فَإِنَّهُ لَا
يَعْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ.

“O Allah, You are my Lord, none has the right to be worshiped except You. You created me and I am Your servant. and I abide to Your covenant and promise [to honor it] as best I can. O Allah! I take refuge in You from the evil of which I committed. I acknowledge Your favor upon me. and I acknowledge my sin, so forgive me, for verily none can forgive sins except You.” (al-Bukhari, Da’awat, 2, 16)

b. Kalima al-Tawhid (*The Word Expressing the Oneness of Allah*)

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِينُ.

“There is none worthy of worship but Almighty Allah, the only rightful king.

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَادِقُ الْوَعْدِ الْأَمِينُ.

Muhammad -peace and blessings be upon him- is the messenger of Allah and he is one who fulfills his promises and is trustworthy



Kalimat al-tawhid is a declaration that there is no being that deserves to be worshipped but Allah. In a way, it means to enter the transience, to reach the consciousness and comprehend the fact that Allah is the only “Everlasting One.”

According to a narration transmitted by Abu Hurayra –may Allah be pleased with him–, one day Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- told his Companions,

“*Renew your faith!*”

The Companions asked, “O Messenger of Allah! How can we renew our faith?”

He -peace and blessings be upon him- said, “*Say the statement of ‘La ilaha illa Allah’ frequently.*” (Ahmad, II, 359; Hakim, IV, 285/7657)

Kalimat al-tawhid should not remain as words uttered by one’s tongue, but rather should be located in the heart. The divine Oneness and Unity (*Wahdaniyyat al-Ilahiyya*) should fully penetrate into the heart through extensive contemplation and deep consciousness. The belief in the Oneness and Unity of Allah must not be impaired by false considerations because if the heart gets occupied by selfishness, then the perception of the Oneness and Unity of Allah will also be damaged. In this context, the heart must be protected against the evil and indecencies of the inner self.



The meaning and content of the statement of *kalimat al-tawhid* repeated at dawn should be transmitted throughout the day. How much does a person mold himself in the meaning of **La ilaha** and keeps himself away from everything other than Allah? How much does he enter the content of the statement **illa Allah** and thus achieve unity with Allah Almighty? For sake of doing justice to the meaning of the statement “**Muhammadun Rasulullah,**” how much do we take as an example and apply the life of the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- in our lives? This is the state that *kalimat al-tawhid* should create in our hearts.

Allah Almighty wants us to live through the *kalimat al-tawhid* and love His divine Being. In order to realize this, by saying “**la ilaha**” one needs to refuse everything, especially the ones that start to be idolized in the heart, and empty the heart completely from such things. For our Lord commands us not to worship ourselves or other beings, in other words purify ourselves from all, both internal and external, kinds of idolatry. By saying “**illa Allah,**” our Lord reminds us the necessity to reserve our hearts only to Him.

The consequence of living *kalimat al-tawhid* in the perfect sense is the manifestation of the good attributes of our Lord within us.

If Allah’s name “al-Rahman” (the Beneficent), for example, manifests itself within us, our mercy



becomes general and comprehensive. In other words, we gain the disposition of looking at the creation through the sight of the Creator and show mercy and compassion not only to ourselves and those who are close to us but to all creation.

If Allah's name "al-Afuw" (the Most Forgiving) manifests itself within us, it becomes easy for us to forgive other people's faults and mistakes that they carry out against us. There can be no feeling of revenge and enmity left in our hearts against the believers.

If Allah's name "al-Wadûd" (the Most Affectionate) manifests itself within us, we begin to feel love for everybody and everything except the obvious enemies of Allah.

In short, if the spirituality of *kalimat al-tawhid* uttered during the times of dawn covers first our heart and then our day and night, then thanks to the spirituality of *kalimat al-tawhid* our last breath, i.e. the moment that we bid farewell to everything in this world, will turn into *sheb-i arus* (the Wedding Night) - if Allah wills it.

c. Salawat al-Sharifa

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ
وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَبَارِكْ وَسَلِّمْ.



“O Allah! Send Your Blessings upon our Master Muhammad and his folk and his Companions and bestow (upon them) Your blessings and peace.”

By saying in the Qur'an, **“He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah...”** (al-Nisa, 4: 80) our Almighty Lord not only points out the distinguished place of His Beloved Messenger in His presence but also commands His servants to show complete obedience and submission to His Messenger.

Within our human abilities and power, it is impossible to grasp fully our Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- who was the manifestation of the perfect human being created by Allah. Impressions attained from this world are not enough to explain and comprehend him. Just like the impossibility of fitting the water of an ocean into a glass, it is not possible to fully comprehend the reality of our Prophet Muhammad -peace and blessings be upon him-.

In this regard, it is stated in the Qur'an,

“Allah and His angels send blessings on the Prophet: O you that believe! Send your blessings on him, and salute him with all respect.” (al-Ahzab, 33: 56)

In accordance with the divine decree expressed in this verse, it is obligatory to send blessings and peace upon our Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-. This is part of the etiquettes commanded by Allah Almighty for the Muslim *ummah* to fulfill towards



His Messenger. It is a requirement of faith to try to be close to the virtues and the perfection of the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- for whom Allah Almighty and His numerous angels send their blessings. For our Lord states in the Qur'an,

“(O My Messenger) Say: “If you do love Allah, Follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”” (Al ‘Imran, 3: 31)

Of course, when a believer senses the divine tremble, has the suitable feelings of etiquettes, and then empties his heart and soul from all manifestations of selfishness in the presence of his love for the Messenger of Allah-peace and blessings be upon him-, he commences his journey towards gaining shares from the Prophet's love and exemplary personality. For Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- is the only “*uswa al-hasana* (the quintessential example)” from whom examples can be taken for the whole of humanity. Every believer can find a solution to his problems in the Prophet's personality provided he know his Prophet thoroughly and get a share from the world of his heart.

In *kalimat al-tawhid*, the phrase “*Muhammadun Rasulullah*” comes after the phrase “*la ilaha illa Allah*.” Every *kalimat al-tawhid*, and every *salawat al-sharifa* constitute the capital of the love for Allah. The life of happiness in this world and in the Hereafter and all



spiritual conquests can be attained by means of this capital, which is the love for Allah.

Repeating *salawat-u sharifa*, at all times and places but in particular at dawn, is of immense importance in allowing the grace of divine inspiration to leave its impression on the heart, to reinforce the bond with the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- and allow one to imitate him spiritually.

Sending peace and blessings to the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- is such an important deed that our Lord allows and even commands us to send blessings and peace upon His beloved Messenger during ritual prayer, which is an act of worship reserved only to Allah Almighty Himself. Indeed, we say while reciting the supplication of *al-tahiyyat* during the performance of ritual prayer, “*al-salamu alayka ayyuha al-nabiyyu wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu* (Peace be upon you, Oh Prophet, and Allah’s mercy and blessings),” but this does not nullify our prayer. Whereas if we say *salam* (Peace be upon you) to somebody else during prayer, we are required to re-perform our prayer.

The righteous, revitalized by the reality of the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-, have enumerated the benefits of saluting the Noble Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- and thereby gaining closeness to Allah, glory unto Him, as follows:



1- A person will have complied with the divine Command and at the same time complemented the *salawat* of the angels. It goes without saying that there is a difference of meaning between the Almighty's salutation of the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- and the angels' salutation of him, as well as ours. The *salawat* of the Almighty is for Him to show mercy to His Messenger and elevate him. The *salawat* of the angels is for them to pray for his forgiveness. Our *salawat*, the *salawat* of his *ummah*, in contrast, is to pray for the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-.

2. It is a means of being forgiven for sins.

The Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- avows, "*Whosoever salutes me once, Allah salutes him ten times, erases ten of his sins and elevates him ten degrees.*" (al-Nasai, Sahw, 55)

One day, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- came to his Companions smiling and told them that Gabriel had given him the following good news,

"*Will it not please you, O Muhammad, (to know) that no one of your Ummah will send blessings upon you but I will send blessings upon him tenfold, and no one will send greetings upon you but I will send greetings upon him tenfold?*" (al-Nasai, Sahw, 55/1293)



3. It is a means for drawing closer to the Noble Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- on the Day of Judgment.

“The closest to me on the Day of Judgment”, says the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-, “are those bless and salute me the most.” (al-Tirmidhi, Witr, 21)

4. The Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- personally responds to a person who sends him *salawat*. He has said:

“If any one of you greets me, Allah returns my soul to me and I respond to the greeting.” (Abu Dawud, Manasik, 96/2041. See also Ahmad, II, 527)

Considering the fact that receiving greetings from someone who is in a higher position, it would not be difficult to imagine how much joy the greetings coming from Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- would create in the hearts of the believers.

5. The name of each person who sends a blessing is presented to the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him. Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- says,

“Allah has angels, who journey around the earth. They deliver to me the greetings from my *ummah* at the instant.” (al-Nasai, Sahw, 46)



“...But invoke blessings on me, for your blessings reach me wherever you may be.” (Abu Dawud, Manasik, 96-97/2042)

6. Since a person who sends *salawat* has effectively preferred the love of Allah and the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- over any other love, has in effect also taken a great step towards embodying his conduct and eventually will be able to attain virtue by shedding his bad habits.

7. Not only does the Prophet's -peace and blessings be upon him- love for such a person increase, his love for the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- is also preserved and continues to grow.

8. In spite of the incalculable blessings that Allah, glory unto Him, has bestowed upon us through the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- and the impossibility for us of ever repaying that, we will have at least showed our appreciation and taken a humble step towards giving thanks by means of sending *salawat al-sharifa*.

9. It is a means for the appearance, upon us, of the mercy of Allah, glory unto Him. The Beloved Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- said:

“Whosoever salutes me once, Allah will show mercy on him ten times the amount.” (Muslim, Salat, 70)

10. It becomes a cause to recollect the word that has been forgotten.



11. It is a means for the acceptance of prayers.

Indeed, the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- once saw a man who, after offering ritual prayer, began supplicating without thanking Allah, glory unto Him, and saluting His Messenger.

“The man was too hasty”, the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- remarked, before calling the man next to him and saying,

“Should one of you intend on performing a prayer, let him begin with thanking and glorifying Allah and then proceed by blessing and saluting me. He can then pray in whichever manner he pleases.” (al-Tirmidhi, Da’awat, 64)

And in another hadith: *“A prayer does not reach its destination until the person making the prayer sends a salawat to the Prophet.”* (al-Munziri, *al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib*, III, 165)

12. It protects one from divine reproach. Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- says,

“May the man before whom I am mentioned - and he does not send Salat upon me - be humiliated. And may a man upon whom Ramadan enters and then passes, before he is forgiven, be humiliated. And may a man whose parents reach old age in his presence, and they are not a cause for his entrance to Paradise, be humiliated.” (al-Tirmidhi, Da’awat, 100/3545)



"The stingy person is the one before whom I am mentioned, and he does not send Salat upon me." (al-Tirmidhi, Da'awat, 100/3546. See also Ahmad, I, 201)

"Whosoever forgets to send peace and blessings upon me, then he has missed the road to Paradise." (Ibn Majah, Iqamah, 25)

13. The Almighty will suffice for a person who has made a habit of saluting and sending blessings to the Beloved Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- in all his affairs, and will disperse his sorrow both here and in the Hereafter. Ubay ibn Qa'b –may Allah be pleased with him- recounts:

I one day asked, 'I send you lots of *salawat al-sharifa*, Messenger of Allah. How often should I do it?.

'As much as you wish' he replied.

I again inquired, 'Would it be right if I spared a quarter of my prayer for it?.'

'Spare as much from it as you wish', he advised. *'But it will be better for you if you spared more.'*

I proposed, 'Then I will spare half'.

'As you wish...But better if you spared more', said he.

'How about I spared two-thirds then?'

'As you wish... But better if you spared more.'



I then asked, ‘How would it be then if I send *salawat al-sharifa* during the entire time I spare for prayer?’

‘If you do’, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- replied, ‘*then Allah will rid you of all your troubles and forgive your sins.*’” (al-Tirmidhi, Qiyamah, 23)

Salawat al-sharifa enables us to have contact with the spirituality of the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- and an opportunity to become illuminated with his light. Still, the reward of each *salawat* is proportionate with one’s sincerity and love for the Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-.

Our task is to permeate ourselves with the spirituality of *salawat al-sharifa*, and try to be a believer worthy to be among the *ummah* of our Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- by demonstrating complete submission to him.



III. *TAFAKKUR* (CONTEMPLATION)

Contemplation or thought process is a vital ability bestowed upon not only humans but also all of creation. Every being employs this ability within its own realm and in accordance with its creation. The center of gravity of most life is mostly related to physical and sensual realms. Eating, drinking, having a better and more comfortable life, and needing to maintain their progeny are the most prominent ones among them. Hence, the thought process of a predatory being is directed to chase its prey down and to fill its stomach. In addition to this, it does not have any other thoughts and worries about life, universe, and future. The ability of thought process given to an animal is adequate only to do this, nothing more.

However, what about human beings? Their situation is different since human beings have been created as the most honorable and precious creation among all beings; their responsibility and tasks are much greater



than other creation. Accordingly, they have been given the ability of extensive contemplation.

Since the human being does not gain his dignity and honorable state because of its contemplation of sensual matters related to eating, drinking, having a better and more comfortable life, and needing to continue their progeny, which resembles other creation, but rather through his spiritual contemplation, which will improve him in this life and help him attain Paradise and the beauty of Allah. However, if a human being does not improve his spiritual structure, then he unfortunately destroy his ability to contemplate the truth in the whirlpool of sensual desires.

A spiritual intellectual who reached the depths of spiritual contemplation summarizes this reality with the following words,

“This world is a sayr al-badai (the place of viewing and contemplating the divine art) for the astute ones, while a place of eating and lust for the fools.”

Therefore, the feature that makes a person human is the depth of his spiritual contemplation that helps him improve in the realm of consciousness. Allah Almighty commands His servants to manifest both their faith and worship at a high level of consciousness and cognizance. This can be achieved only by contemplating the manifestations of divine majesty and power.



Deepening in contemplation and thus developing the spirit of the human being is one of the most important responsibilities of the servant. For to be able to reach reverence in worship, tenderness in heart, politeness in daily transactions, and perfection in conduct is only possible by contemplation that would develop the spirit.

When we observe life and the universe through cautious eyes, we face many such questions whose answers are hidden in the depths of our soul:

Why did we come to this world? Why were we created? What truly is the world? To who does this earth belong where we reside? How should we live? How should we contemplate? Where are we going? What is the reality of this temporary life? How can we solve the mystery of the reality of death? How can we get ready for death? and so on...

With the help of the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah, these and other similar thoughts lead the servant to understand his nothingness and how he pales compared to the divine power and majesty. These thoughts remind the human being, who was created out of naught, what a great error it is to make claims of an existence and ego.

Strong enlightenment and spirituality takes place in the life of servitude and worship of a believer who reaches a high spiritual level through contemplation.



The soul that develops by contemplation perceives that,

“The Ka‘bah is the direction of body in worship, while Allah Almighty is the direction of the soul in every breath.”

This was because Ali -may Allah be pleased with him- said,

“Benefit and enlightenment decreases in worship which is without knowledge and in the recitation of the Qur‘an which is without contemplation.”

Abu al-Darda -may Allah be pleased with him- said,

“One-hour contemplation is superior to forty-year voluntary worship.” (al-Daylami, II, 70-71, no: 2397, 2400)

Indeed, such contemplation makes the acts of worship easier by deepening the spiritual perception and increases the state of reverence and gratitude.

As it is required to have complete faith in living the religion, it is also required to observe the acts of worship. However, what makes the acts of worship satisfactory is to perform them in a climate of contemplation that permeates the heart and that which creates spiritual attentiveness, finesse, and grace. In this way, the servant gets closer to his Lord. The most important characteristics of the righteous believers and the Com-



panions of the Prophet –peace and blessings be upon him- were to have this consistency in the heart.

Our Lord commands us to contemplate His power and majesty, the mystery and wisdom of the great order in universe, and His numerous bounties to His servants. As a result of this contemplation, our Lord wants us to perceive the temporariness of this world and the fact that the real life is in the Hereafter, to become a good servant in humility, feeling of nothingness, and fear of Allah.

Bishr b. Harith al-Hafi – says,

“If people contemplate the majesty of Allah, they could not rebel against Him and commit sins.” (Ibn Kathir, I, 448, in the exegesis of chapter Al ‘Imran 3/190)

Our Almighty Lord emphasizes the necessity to contemplate deeply on the verses of the Qur’an as well as contemplating on the numerous signs found in universe as follows,

“Had We sent down this Qur’an on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of Allah. Such are the similitudes which We propound to men that they may reflect.” (al-Hashr, 59: 21)

On the other hand, He describes those who are devoid of contemplation on the Qur’an in the following verse,



“Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur’an, or are their hearts locked up by them?”

(Muhammad, 47: 24)

The exemplary life of our Prophet –peace and blessings be upon him- clearly presents how necessary contemplation is for the spiritual development that our Lord would like to see in His servants. After all, Allah’s Messenger –peace and blessings be upon him- continued to offer prayer and servitude in tears at night so much that his feet would swell. Even if his eyes slept, his heart did not and he did not stay away from remembrance of Allah, and contemplation even for a single moment.

A’isha – may Allah be pleased with her – presents us with the following example about the tenderness of our Prophet’s heart and level of contemplation,

“One night, Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- said to me,

‘O A’isha! If you let me, I would like to spend the night by worshipping my Lord.’

I said, “By Allah! I love to be in your company, but I love more the things that make you happy.”

He -peace and blessings be upon him- then stood up, performed ablution nicely, and started to perform ritual prayer. He was crying... He cried so much that his beard, clothes, and even the ground where he prostrated were soaked with his tears.



Then Bilal -may Allah be pleased with him- came to pronounce the call for prayer and found the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- in that situation. When he saw that the Prophet was crying, he wondered what had made him cry so much and asked,

“O Messenger of Allah! What causes you to weep, when Allah has forgiven you your past and future sins?” To this, he -peace and blessings be upon him- replied,

“Should I not be a thankful servant? By Allah! Tonight Allah Almighty and Glorious has sent down to me such verses that shame those who do not contemplate them.” He then began to recite the following verses,

“Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed Signs for men of understanding,

Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (With the thought):

“Our Lord! Not for naught have You created (all) this! Glory to You! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire.”“ (Al ‘Imran, 190-191)” (Ibn Hibban, II, 386; al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma‘ani*, IV, 157)



be upon him- cried until dawn. The tears shed by the believers who contemplate on divine power and majesty will become the adornment of their temporary nights, illumination in their graves, and dews of the gardens of Paradise.

Allah's Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- submitted himself to the divine command about contemplation even before starting his mission of prophethood by retreating to seclusion and contemplating in the Cave of Hira. His worship in the Cave of Hira was in the form of contemplation and taking heed from the *malakût* (divine power and majesty found beyond the perceivable universe) of the heavens and the earth as his ancestor Abraham -upon him peace- did.⁴ Just as in those days, the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- was always sorrowful and in contemplation throughout the rest of his life. His speeches were about the remembrance of Allah and even in his silence there was contemplation. Indeed, he stated this in one of his *hadiths* as follows,

“My Lord commanded me to make my silence contemplation (and I advise you the same thing).”⁵

4. al-Ayni, *Umdat al-Qari Sharhu Sahih al-Bukhari*, Beirut, Idarat al-Tiba'at al-Muniriyya, nd, I, 61; XXIV, 128.

5. For the rest of the hadith see Ibrahim Canan, *Hadis Ansiklopedisi*, XVI, 252, hadith no: 5838.



“Contemplate on the creation of Allah...” (al-Daylami, II, 56; al-Haythami, I, 81)

“There is no act of worship like contemplation.” (Ali al-Muttaqi, XVI, 121)

In conclusion, in order to become believers worthy to the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-, whose *ummah* we feel honored to be a part of, we need to contemplate about the deep wisdom mysteries manifested in life and universe. For it is necessary for us to strengthen our spirituality by observing everything that takes place in this universe through the window of faith. Consequently, the glows of divine wisdom hidden in the essence of incidents will flow into the heart with the permission of Allah.

The core of *Tasawwuf* or Sufism that has trained many distinguished individuals throughout history actually consists of such a training of blessings and spirituality. In this respect, Sufism is the path of getting closer to Allah by deepening oneself with wisdom. It means neither giving up this world completely, or wrapping oneself up with a wool cloth and headgear as expressed by great Turkish Sufi Yunus Emre, nor confining oneself to the repetition of certain *awrâd* and *adhkâr*.

In other words, *Tasawwuf* means to contemplate about our responsibilities, to hold ourselves in account for our actions, and to be able to advance on the path of perception. In short, it means to save our-



selves from all kinds of sensual thoughts, to deepen in spiritual contemplation, and to reach the ultimate eternal ascension by gradually advancing through contemplation.



IV. TAFAKKUR AL-MAWT (CONTEMPLATING DEATH)

In life, the human being finds himself constantly wavering between two stark opposites, the joy of life and the dread of death. Without comprehending the true meaning of the ever-flowing life and death, it is not possible to grasp the mystery and wisdom of creation and the true nature of the human being.

Death, the inevitable that will seize each wayfarer on Earth, is an inescapable enigma that all beings with the power of understanding are called upon to solve.

It is declared in the second ayah of al-Mulk:

“He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: and He is the Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.”

Similarly, in the thirty-fifth ayah of al-Anbiya, Allah declares:



“Every soul shall have a taste of death: and We test you by evil and by good by way of trial to us must ye return...”

If Earth is a divine school for testing *iman*, death is a necessary law of transition. For this reason Mawlana Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret- says:

“Die in order to be revived!”

The revival of the heart is possible only through abandoning the egocentric self. The Blessed Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- urges:

“Frequently remember death, which destroys all pleasures from their root.” (Tirmidhi, Qiyamah, 26)

Contemplating death is to reflect on death before it arrives and thereby consciously prepare to meet the Lord by abandoning all that is egocentric. This is a contemplation and consciousness anchored in *iman*. The human being’s insatiable, never-ending worldly ambitions, passing hopes and comforts are like autumn leaves that drop on the grave by the second.

One day Hasan al-Basri -may Allah sanctify his secret- attended a funeral ceremony. After the completion of the acts of burial, he asked a man standing next to him,

“-Do you think the deceased would want to return to this world and increase his good deeds, the



remembrance of Allah, and be able to repent more for his sins?”

The man said, “-Of course, he would.”

Upon this Hasan al-Basri -may Allah sanctify his secret- said, “-Then what is wrong with us that we do not think and wish as this deceased man does?” (Ibn al-Jawzi, al-Hasan al-Basri)

The human being’s endless worldly desires and ambitions, temporary hopes and consolations are like the leaves falling upon the soil of their graves.

Graveyards are home of parents, who have exhausted their time on Earth, to children, friends and relatives and loved ones. The grave is the final stop of all the meandering roads of life, whether it is spent on a haystack or in a palace. There is no dimension of time or space that can escape it. The Quran accentuates this with the following verses:

“Say: “The Death from which you flee will truly overtake you: then will you be sent back to the Knower of things secret and open: and He will tell you (the truth of) the things that you did!”” (al-Jum’a, 62: 8)

“And the stupor of death will bring Truth (before his eyes): “This was the thing which you were trying to escape!”” (Qaf, 50: 19)



Still these words are faint in comparison to the magnitude of the horror of death. The clearest contemplation of death is hidden in the silence tied to the purple lips of the deceased. Every gravestone wrapped by the silence of death is an advisor speaking through its appearance. All answers coming from the world would only be cries and tears in the presence of the eloquence of the death's advice.

In a sense, the reason behind the traditional structure of placing graveyards inside towns, by the side of roads or in the courtyards of mosques has been to keep the contemplation of death alive and to regulate the affairs of the world accordingly.

The world is a deceitful reverie, the Hereafter a reality without death. More often than most, the human being is a slave to the lies that reflect the mirror of life in its thousands of alluring images. What then is life, which continues spinning its web of lies and disloyalty, but a place of deceit?

Does not the human being take a lesson from the fact that the mill of time relentlessly grinds the youth and vivacity of all mortal beings?

How great a deception it is to lead a life that is oblivious to the reality of the Hereafter, allured by ego provoking glitters of the world, carried away childishly playing with toys without reality! Playing during childhood, lust during youth, carelessness during maturity and hankering, with a deep set of remorse, at



old age after things gone by; this is all a neglectful life amounts to at the end.

Death is one's personal Day of Judgment. We must wake up before our Day of Judgment lest we become one of those who are filled with remorse. That each mortal being will encounter the Angel of Death, at a place and time unknown, is inevitable. There is no place to flee from death. Without wasting the least amount of time, the human being must therefore heed the following verse,

“Hasten you then (at once) to Allah...” (al-Dhariyat, 51: 50) and acknowledge that the one and only refuge is the mercy of the Lord.

How eloquently the following verses depict the deception of those who trust their tomorrows,

“O you who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, the loss is their own.

And spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you and he should say, “O my Lord! Why did You not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of good.”



acquainted with (all) that you do.” (al-Munafiqun, 63: 9-11)

How strange it is that the human being is so prone to fooling himself on Earth on which he remains only for a handful of days as a guest. In spite of witnessing funerals almost every day, he thinks he is far removed from death. He lulls himself into supposing that he is the owner of what he possesses, things he could easily lose at any second. Still, the human being is destined for death as early as the moment his spirit is clad in flesh and ushered through a door to enter life on Earth. Although the door leads to a training road for the ultimate path, more often than not, he remains ignorant of it.

Then a day comes when his spirit is stripped of the flesh and he is provided with the opportunity to say his farewell to the grave, and enter the door of the Hereafter, a journey with no return.

Each moment that ticks takes us closer to the dawn of truth, as eloquently expressed in the verse:

“If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature: (making him go back to weakness after strength) **Will they not then understand?** (Will they not contemplate about this cautionary life?)” (Ya Sin, 36: 68)

This verse advises the human being in the most beautiful manner imaginable. The most discernible



feature of the world is that it is disloyal. It hastily takes back what it reluctantly gives. It raises a person one day, only to throw him in a pit the next. It is like a shade that flees each time one tries to catch it. Yet, the more one runs away from it, the more it pursues him. Carried away in thinking that it is only a matter of time before one grabs hold of what he had been pursuing all along, he is suddenly interrupted by the irreversible call of death. Fall in love with the world it becomes a shrewd hag, capriciously slapping one across the face at will, whose nagging and complaining is almost ceaseless. It quickly sells out those who are attached to it.

A man from among the Ansar came to the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- and said:

“O Messenger of Allah, which of the believers is the wisest?” He said,

“The one who remembers death the most and is best in preparing for the life coming after it. Those are the real wise ones...” (Ibn Majah, Zuhd, 31)

Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- said,

“Remember death and the trial after it, and whoever intends the Hereafter, he leaves the adornments of the world.” (al-Tirmidhi, Qiyamah, 24)



Abdullah ibn Umar -may Allah be pleased with him- recounts how the Noble Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- held him by the arm one day and advised: "Behave like a stranger, a wayfarer even, on Earth! Count yourself among the dead, the dwellers of the grave." (al-Bukhari, Riqaq, 3; al-Tirmidhi, Zuhd, 25)

Mujahid ibn Jabr -may Allah be pleased with him- a prominent scholar of the Tabiun generation, said, "Once Ibn Umar -may Allah be pleased with him- completed narrating this hadith, he advised me with the following words:

"Do not think of night, Mujahid, once you reach morning! And do not think of morning once you reach night! Make the most of your health before illness and life before death! For you, servant of Allah, do not know which condition (dead or alive) you will be the next day!" (al-Tirmidhi, Zuhd, 25)

Anas ibn Malik -may Allah be pleased with him- elucidated by saying, "The earth exclaims ten advises to man each day:

Son of Adam!

1. You walk on me, yet your return is to me.
2. You commit all kinds of sins on me, yet you will be punished in me.
3. You laugh and have fun on me, yet you will cry in me.



4. You take pleasure on me, yet you will grieve in me.

5. You hoard wealth on me yet will feel remorse in me.

6. You feed on haram on me, yet maggots will feed on you in me.

7. You act arrogantly on me, yet will be lowered and despised in me.

8. You joyously walk on me, yet you will be immersed in sorrow in me.

9. You walk under daylight on me yet will be left in the dark in me.

10. You walk among crowds on me, yet will enter me all alone.” (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Munabbihat*, 37)

Death, the final curtain of the play of life, is like a mirror that shall reveal each person’s own destiny. For a person who lives under the domination of his ego, with the world his only purpose, the grave appears as a dark labyrinth. Even the remembrance of death afflicts him with a pain incomparable to anything else.

However, if the human being is able surmount the obstacle that is the ego and through the contemplation of death, covers the distance towards attaining an angelic nature, a capability hidden in his spirit, death then becomes a necessary stage of reaching Allah, glory unto Him, the Almighty and the Unimaginable.



And death, which often sends cold shivers down the spines of ordinary human beings, thereby instantly turns to an excitement of reuniting with the beloved.

In the words of the Sufi great Mawlana Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret-; a death of the kind is a *shab-i arus*, a groom's night. This is a path that beautifies even the most dreadful thing the human being can experience, death. To beautify death, it is necessary to attain a spiritual perfection through repentance, piety, and trust in the Lord, contentedness, divine remembrance and patience.

In terms of its influence, it wields the ability to purify the heart; the contemplation of death is second to none. Rabi ibn Husayn said in this regard:

"I Fear my heart would become corrupted should it abandon the remembrance of death. I would have sat in the graveyard until my very last breath, had I been certain that I would not have defied the practices of my predecessors by doing so." (al-Bayhaqi, Kitab al-Zuhd, p. 212)

The heart quivers amid the convulsions of the spirit and the ego until death. Death is a necessary prelude to the journey of the afterlife. Before setting out on this journey, preparing the heart for death through *ma'rifatullah*, imparting unto it a spiritual health and serenity that would secure it from the anxiety and fear of death, are tasks one cannot afford to neglect.





If successful, the underlying mystery to 'die before death' becomes unraveled, whereby the human being replaces the forlorn dominance of his ego with the love of and obedience to Allah, glory unto Him, in the most perfect sense of the term.



V. *RABITA*

Literally, *rabita* denotes ties and interest. In this respect, there is not a single being in the universe detached from *rabita*. Everything is interconnected. On another level, *rabita* is the manifestation of love that forms the core of existence. It is the perpetuation of the vivacity and sparkle of love.

There are three kinds of *rabita*:

1. Natural *Rabita*

This is the natural love felt by a person towards whom he considers close. It is an outcome of the human's natural predisposition, like the love a mother feels for her child, and so forth.

2. Base *Rabita*

This is to become attached to the forbidden, devilish tendencies; like the gambler whose heart is ever



hungry with the desire to gamble to the point where he even forgets about the livelihood of his own family.

3. Sublime *Rabita*

Motivated by the loftiest of feelings, this is the *rabita* that steers one towards means that will eventually deliver him to the Lord.

A method of Sufi training, *rabita* comes in various names and ways of practice in each *tariqa*. Generally, however, it entails the disciple to call his Sufi master to mind, right in front of his eyes and amid sublime emotions to try to become one with him, by recalling his spiritual state of mind and behavior. Keeping the love and respect for the Sufi master ever alive in this manner gives the disciple a spiritual vivacity.

The human being is always exposed to influences. As is the case with many diseases, inner conditions or states of mind are also contagious. The transaction that takes place between spirits is an incontestable fact of life. Especially, the strong spiritual characteristics shown by active and influential figures transmit to these towards others in varying degrees. This transmission does not depend on whether the 'transmitter' exudes a positive or negative character. It takes place regardless so long as there exist a mutual bond of love and affinity between the two concerned.



The mindsets of utterly compassionate and selfless people, for instance, wield an influence on the people by whom they are surrounded. *Rabita*, a manifestation of love, seeks to increase and accelerate these spiritual transactions of a positive, moral nature and transform them into concrete moral behavior in the recipient. Each Muslim with a right mind must therefore nurture love towards the pious and establish affinity with them and thereby maximize the reflection of their beautiful mindsets onto their own characters.

How strange it is that a batch of mud that splashes onto a pair of clean clothes causes a person greater discomfort than bad habits invading a heart remote from the guiding light of *wahy* and thus darkened in such a way that it is beyond recognition from sin. Since he is numbed by the delusive whispers, both egocentric and devilish, he does not even become aware of his spiritual plight. At the face of what can rightly be called the ‘transmission of character’, it is true that the human being has been left free to choose from among either positive or negative examples. Regardless, the Almighty has informed us of the right choice in the Qur’an as follows:

“O you who believe! Be careful of your duty to Allah and be with the righteous...” (al-Tawba, 9: 119)

One thing that deserves attention in the above verse is that the Lord does not command His servants



to 'be righteous' but to 'be with the righteous', in order for them to safeguard their piety. The first step on the way of becoming righteous is indeed to accompany the righteous and to enter a loving affinity with them. Righteousness is the natural outcome of this connection. After all, one naturally takes after the other.

Ubaydallah Ahrar -may Allah sanctify his secrets- says when interpreting this verse

"The expression 'be with' in the command of the Qur'an 'to fear Allah and be with the righteous', means a perpetual accompaniment. Since it has been mentioned in an absolute sense, 'being with' has two aspects, one practical and the other legal. Practical or physical accompaniment is to be physically present in the assembly of the righteous, while legal accompaniment is to evoke their mindsets in their absence."

In reigning in the ego accompanying the pious and their righteous acts is like radiation, impossible to witness yet unquestionably effective. Being near the righteous, witnessing moment by moment their conduct and behavior and even just looking at their lit faces, are all included in this regard. It is for that reason having the opportunity to be in the presence of spiritual elders is considered a great blessing; the transmission of mindsets. The smell of roses is bound to permeate the clothes of a person who hangs around a rose garden. An assembly of the righteous, similarly, is like a bazaar of spiritual transaction.



Showing the same respect and love in the absence of the Sufi master as they are shown in his presence has been referred to as *fana fi's-sheikh*, annihilation in the sheikh. Human perception does not easily work with abstract concepts unless they are compared with material things or shapes. Knowledge is manifested in a scholar, art in an artist, and love in a lover. Presenting an abstract notion without manifesting it in a material thing is unmanageable.

The spiritual enlightenment in the heart of the Sufi master is transferred to the heart of the disciple through *rabita* and *sohbah*.

Hence, as necessary it is to maintain sublime feelings whilst physically being in the presence of the righteous, one must also continue this accompaniment in the heart in their absence. For physically accompanying the righteous may not always be possible.

In fact, the transmission of the spiritual states takes place in the extent of love and intimacy. It is necessary to be with the righteous and good people, in other words to love them and to be close to them, in order to become a perfect believer and in order to strengthen the transmission of their spiritual states and to achieve the desired consequences.

Metaphorical love begins the moment the disciple pledges loving affinity to his *Murshid*. This love, too, is metaphorical. Since in its nature the heart is reserved to Allah, glory unto Him, alone, it cannot have any



other beloved than the Lord. Things, other than Him, to which one becomes attached, are like steps on this ladder, exercises acclimatizing the heart to divine Love. Overall, this is the attempt to reach the *Mawla*, or the Lord, through *Layla*, if one may lightly use the expression. The most inspirational stage in this attempt is to encounter a true *murshid-i kamil* and to experience the spiritual excitement of love and affinity with him and the most auspicious manifestation of this is *rabita*. *Rabita* is the very intensification of love where it can no longer be compared to ordinary trivial attachments.

A dervish once appealed to Bayazid Bistami -may Allah sanctify his secret- to recommend to him a deed that would bring him closer to Allah, glory unto Him. Bayazid Bistami -may Allah sanctify his secret- said,

“-Love the righteous servants of Allah! Love them so that they return your love. Try and find a way inside their heart, for Allah, gazes at the heart of the wise three-hundred-and-sixty times a day. Let Him locate you there during those gazes!”

It is for no other reason that Sufi training demands a continuous practice of *rabita*, to ensure that the *murid*, or the disciple, keeps his love for the righteous, with whom he is affined, ever alive.

Proportionate with the intensity of love, *rabita* establishes a spiritual power line, highly charged with spiritual sensing and feeling. A spiritual transaction



thereupon begins between the two persons on the opposite ends of this line, conducive to an unification. The spiritual unification is similar to the combined vessels in physics.

Sheikh Sadi Shirazi explains the transmission of *hal*, the spiritual mindset, with the following words:

“It was because it remained steadfast by the side of the righteous that the dog of the Sleepers of the Cave earned a lofty honor by being mentioned in the Qur’an. Prophet Lot’s (peace be upon him) wife, on the other hand, brought shame upon herself by remaining by the side of the perverse.”

In his *Gulistan*, Sheikh Sadi uses a parable to explain the transmission of the spiritual mindset that takes place through befriending the pious and the righteous and the consequent ‘identification’:

“A man goes to the baths. There, one of his friends hands him a beautifully scented earthen to clean himself with. The earthen gives off an exquisite scent that enchants his soul. The man asks the earthen:

‘—You delightful thing...I am enchanted by your wonderful scent. So tell me, are you of musk or amber?’

‘I am of neither musk nor amber’, replies the earthen. ‘I am simply of ordinary soil that you know so well. Yet, I was standing under the sapling of a rose, moistened every day from the dews that would



drop onto me from the rosebud. The scent you smell belongs to no other than that rose.”

As implied at by the inner meaning of the parable, those who open their hearts to the righteous with sincerity, submission and humbleness, gradually begin to reflect the beauty they are striving to attain. Just like the side of the moon that reflects the rays of light that radiate from the sun, thereby becoming a part of the sun itself despite having no light of its own, people of such caliber virtually act like candles, lighting up the pitch dark nights of humankind, blackened from the dust of oppression.

The heart of a *Murshid* that has become annihilated in the Lord is spiritually enlightened by the manifestation of divine names. Thus, the heart of a *Murshid* is like virtually a lens that has gathered beams of light onto a single spot. The blessings of these manifestations burn all negativity to ash. Through *rabita*, the disciple seeks to benefit from these blessings. Egocentric and selfish feelings thereby disappear from the heart and are replaced by the spiritual mindset of that model character. All things that until then had invaded the heart are banished and incarcerated where they truly belong.

The training of *Tasawwuf* does not approve of a physical accompaniment that is ineffectual and vain. There is many a person who is within a whisker, so



to speak, of a Sufi master, yet unable to reap his due spiritual share owing to their own ignorance.

In contrast, there are many a disciple in a land faraway that becomes blessed with exceptional spiritual gifts, inspirations and emotions, thanks to the deep respect, longing, love and attachment he feels towards his Sufi master. The saying, as expressed by spiritual elders, that 'the one in Yemen is nearby, while the one nearby is in Yemen' articulates just that. The important thing, therefore, is not to lose the feeling of the heart, wherever one may be at the time.

On the other hand, although spiritually competent people exercise a maximum power in correcting the mindsets of those around them; this on its own is not enough. The transmission of the mindset, in *Tasawwuf*, is a spiritual flow of such a nature that deriving the maximum benefit of its flow depends on as much as on the spiritual aptitude of the disciple and his intensity of love as it does on the competence of the Sufi master. Thus, not every disciple can attain the same level simply because he is a disciple.

Rather the difference of spiritual level between one disciple and another stems from the level of aptitude and intensity of love in each. To illustrate this through an example may be telling; there is essentially no difference whether a person, intent on filling his bucket with water, dips it into a lake or a boundless ocean; in both cases, he will only obtain as much water



as his bucket allows. The disciple must therefore be apt and more importantly be eager to realize the full potential of his aptitude.

Yunus Emre expresses this beautifully:

*Should you place your cup,
By the tap to fill,
Even if left for a thousand years
Not by itself it will.*

The ability of the transmission that is characteristic of positive qualities is valid also for negative qualities. In fact, Pharaoh's subordinate men like Haman and others turned into pharaohs because of their relationship with him.

In fact, it is stated in hadiths,

"One is with whom he loves". (al-Bukhari, Adab, 96)

"He who imitates any people is one of them." (Abu Dawud, Libas, 4/4031)

In conclusion, it needs to be understood that the sum of the definition of *rabita* is the effort of keeping love fresh. Going beyond this meaning and attributing sacredness to any human being based on various considerations is a grave mistake and it means overstepping the boundaries. This –may Allah forbid– means opening a gate to associating partners with Allah. This is the point that makes



many people go astray. The person to who *rabita* is made, i.e. *murshid al-kamil*, is not a third person between Allah and the servant because there is no place for priesthood in Islam. Sufi master is just an exemplary personality presented to the disciple or a role model to be followed. Just like the vehicle we get on for a journey is not the goal but a means to reach that goal, the Sufi master is just a friend of Allah giving the disciple spiritual training and adorning his inner world with the character of the Messenger of Allah –peace and blessings be upon him-. Sacredness belongs only to Allah; there is no power and no strength except with Allah. No matter at which stage and degree he is, the servant is always feeble and needs Allah.



VI. LATAIF and DHIKRULLAH

As we mentioned before, “*dhikrullah* or remembering Allah” is one of the most important terms used in Sufi training. The friends of Allah have adopted many ways and methods to transform the remembrance of Allah into a constant state of the heart and to make the human being lost in the remembrance of Allah and annihilated in Allah. One of these methods is to determine certain spiritual centers in the human body called *latâif* and try to reach complete remembrance (*dhikr kulli*) by means of them.

Just as we need our organs like heart, liver, lungs, brain etc. to work healthily in order to have a healthy physical body, we need to have these spiritual centers in our body and help them to work properly in order to awaken our spiritual world and make it more sensitive. Through experience or spiritual inspirations, the friends of Allah have determined some spiritual centers/*latâif* in human body. Even though there are some different views in this regard, according to the



generally accepted view, these spiritual centers can be briefly listed as follows,

Heart (*Qalb*): It is the spiritual center that is located deep within the piece of meat in the shape of a pine cone and is found two fingers below our left chest, i.e. our heart. It is the center of our feelings.

Soul (*Nafs*): It is its spiritual center located two fingers below our right chest.

Secret (*Sir*): It is its spiritual center located two fingers above our left chest.

Hidden (*Khafi*): It is its spiritual center located two fingers above our right chest.

Most Hidden (*Akhfa*): It is its spiritual center located right in the middle of our chest and at the center of the first four spiritual centers.

Rational Soul (*Nafs Natiqa*): It is the spiritual center located in the middle of our forehead. It is an upward vertical line between our eyebrows.

***Dhikr-i sultani/Dhikr kul*:** It is the state of spreading *dhikr* to all the particles of the body. In other words, it is the state of accustoming all the particles of the body to the remembrance of Allah and turning them into spiritual centers just like the above mentioned spiritual centers.

The friends of Allah who are the instructors of the hearts have stated that the realities of these spiritu-



al centers are not from the created realm but secrets of the spiritual world from the realm of commands. This state that is certain for the people who have reached the knowledge of Allah (*ahl al-mukashafa*) is very difficult to explain by means of mere words.

Sufi masters who firmly believe in the necessity of the remembrance of Allah for the purification of soul and heart have stated that *dhikr* can be performed in two ways as both 'out loud' (*jahri* is done loud by tongue) and 'silently' (*khafi* without employing words).

The *dhikr* done by the spiritual centers (*latâif*) of the body is the latter type or *dhikr-i khafi* not *dhikr-i jahri*. The following verse refers to this type of *dhikr*,

“And do you! Bring your Lord to remembrance in your (very) soul, with humility and in reverence, without loudness in words, in the mornings and evenings; and be not you of those who are unheedful.”
(al-A'raf, 7: 205)

Spiritual centers of the body can be awakened only by performing much *dhikr*. Mahmud Sâmî -may Allah sanctify his secret-, one of the great Sufis of recent history, says in this regard,

“Continuous remembrance of Allah (*dhikr-i daimi*) is the first condition to soften and purify the heart because Allah, the Almighty says, **“O you who believe! Remember God with unceasing remem-**



brance.” (al-Ahzab, 33: 41) Since less remembrance cannot be enough to soften the heart. The heart can be softened only by a lot of *dhikr*. Nothing should prevent this. The honor of people manifests itself by the continuous remembrance of Allah and the body is illuminated and purified by this.”⁶

Mûsâ Topbaş -may Allah sanctify his secret-expresses the significance of remembering Allah in spiritual training as follows,

“*Dhikr* is an important measure of love and faith. One who loves remembers much the one whom he loves. He cannot help remembering his beloved every day, every night, every hour, and every moment. One who reaches *dhikrullah* attains everything, while one who lacks *dhikrullah* loses everything. *Dhikrullah* is the light of the heart, the tranquility of the soul, the polish of the heart, and the measure of the mind. The heart of those who continue *dhikr* thrives, their acts and character beautifies, and their souls become happy.

When divine love enters a heart, nothing but the remembrance of Allah remains in that heart. Everything, even metaphorical loves experienced in the past, disappears.

6. Mahmud Sâmî Ramazanoğlu, *Bayram Sohbetleri*, Erkam Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p. 44-45.



One should keep the heart busy with the remembrance of Allah, try to awaken the heart and make it work with the remembrance of Allah. If one works hard, remembrance of Allah spreads through all the spiritual centers, first to the soul and then to the body.”⁷

In regards to their body, people are earthly, in other words they come from earth and will eventually return to earth. In regards to their souls, they are sparks of the divine and the soul is immortal. On the Day of Judgment when resurrection will take place, the soul will be placed in a new body. The state of the body manifests itself as lightness or darkness in accordance with the spiritual level that the soul reaches in this world. Indeed, it is stated in a verse,

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ
اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكْفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا
الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿106﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ
ابْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا
خَالِدُونَ ﴿107﴾

“On the Day when some faces will be (lit up with) white, and some faces will be (in the gloom of) black: To those whose faces will be black, (will be said): ‘Did ye reject Faith after accepting it? Taste then the penalty for rejecting Faith.’ But those whose faces will be (lit with) white, they will be in (the light of) Allah’s mercy: therein to dwell (forever).”
(Al ‘Imran, 3: 106-107)

The illumination of the spiritual centers of our body and even the illumination of our whole spiritual world in this world is the most effective means for the illumination of our faces in the Hereafter. In this respect, it is obligatory for us to endeavor to be illuminated before passing on.



VII. NAFY AND ISBÂT

Another type of *dhikr* called “*nafy u isbat*”, which is the repetition of *kalima tawhid*, is especially performed by the masters of Naqshbandiyya Order.

What is aimed for by this type of *dhikr* is the elimination of everything that distracts the heart away from Allah (*masiwa*) (*nafy*) and then to establish our servitude only to Allah (*isbât*). It means to make Allah’s contentedness the highest goal in all of our thoughts, actions, and behaviors. It denotes reducing the goals and objects to one and to see all existing beings as one relative being which may exist only due to Him, and to perceive that Allah is the only and greatest Truth.

Special attention is paid to this type of *dhikr* since it constitutes the basis for contemplation (*muraqaba*). For this type of *dhikr*, which is performed with intense concentration, is a special method based on experience in order to purify the heart from unnecessary thoughts.



VIII. MURAQABAS (CONTEMPLATIONS)

The word *murâqaba* lexically means “supervision, inspection.” It is the state of the servant’s ability to not forget Allah at any time or at any place, firmly feeling Allah’s unity and divinity, making the thought of being with Allah a permanent perception in his heart, and finally annihilating himself in Allah’s love and then be revived through Him.

In order to reach the feeling of *murâqaba*, one needs to prepare the ground for it by purifying the heart and to enter the state expressed in the following verse, “**Truly he succeeds that purifies it.**” (al-Shams, 91: 9) In order to achieve this, the following are the most important things that attention needs to be paid towards,

- To be careful and meticulous about lawful food,
- To be careful about other people’s and creations’ rights,



- To revive the times of Dawn by worship,
- To obey in reverence to the commands and prohibitions of Allah Almighty,
- To rush towards social services,
- To give in charity, in other words, to spend wealth willingly for the sake of Allah,
- To be with the righteous,
- To have an emotional connection with the Qur'an and to serve by the Qur'an,
- To establish the Qur'an in the heart,
- To avoid bad moral characteristics such as backbiting, selfishness, extravagance, lying, jealousy, ambitions, hypocrisy, love for ranks and position, and tale bearing,
- *Tafakkur al-mawt*, in other words to contemplate death and to try to spend every breath until the last one in awareness.



In order to develop the state of *murâqaba*, the friends of Allah advised us to especially contemplate on the following verses employing certain distinct methods,



1. Muraqaba of Ahadiyya (Oneness) (*Muraqaba al-ahadiyya*)

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾ لَمْ يَلِدْ
وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ﴿٤﴾

Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him.” (al-Ikhlās, 112: 1-4)

2. Muraqaba of Ma‘iyya (Togetherness) (*Muraqaba al-ma‘iyya*)

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

“...And He is with you wherever you may be...”

(al-Hadid, 57: 4)

3. Muraqaba of Aqrabiyya (Closeness) (*Muraqaba al-aqrabiyya*)

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“...We are nearer to him than his life-vein.” (Qaf,

50: 16)

4. Muraqaba of Muhabba (Love) (*Muraqaba al-muhabba*)

يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ

“...a people whom He (Allah) will love as they will love Him.” (al-Ma‘ida, 5: 54)



The disciples who reach the level of *muraqaba* in spiritual training in regards to their *awrâd* and *adhkâr* also ascend in their spiritual state (*hâl*). **It should not be forgotten that the level of one's spiritual training is whatever his level of spiritual and moral state.** Actions and behaviors are the measures showing the person's spiritual state. In other words, our behaviors, morality and character display the graphs of our spiritual heart.

Our spiritual training can be at the level of *muraqaba* in appearance, but how much are we truly in the state of *muraqaba*? In other words, are we just stuck with the verbal patterns of the phrases or are we really partaking in their meaning? The disciple should know how to question himself by these and other similar questions.

For example what does *muraqaba al-ahadiyya* truly mean?

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

He is the One God with His Divine being, Majesty and Might, His unique and incomparable names and attributes. He is the only One who is worthy of worship. Our worship is only to Him. His existence is "*wajib al-wujûd*," i.e. He does not need the existence of any other being. It is not possible to speak about the true existence of any other being compared to His existence because all other beings exist through His existence; they do not exist as he does in reality. Due



to this truth, the more the disciple advances, the more the feeling of “nothingness” should dominate him.

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

“Allah is Samad” He is the One on Whom all depend, but He does not need His creation. Everything from the smallest particles to the greatest beings depends on Allah in order to both exist and to continue their existence. He is the only resort of all verbal and actual prayers.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

“He begets not, nor is He begotten.” In other words, Allah is neither the father nor the mother of any other being, nor is He an offspring of parents. In this respect, the attribution of divinity to Mary and Jesus – peace be upon him- by the Christians is one of the greatest sins committed against Allah Almighty. This statement also draws attention to the fact that Allah Almighty does not resemble any created being (*mukhalafat li al-hawadis*), which means He is Exalted and transcendental beyond all human perception. In other words, His being is beyond any and all thoughts and perceptions that humans may think of in their minds and imaginations.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ



“And none is like Him.” There is not, will never be, any being equal or comparable to Him neither in His being nor in His attributes and actions.

The disciple who practices this *muraqaba* should contemplate these and other meanings of chapter al-Ikhlâs and should attempt to annihilate all existence, including himself, in the sea of nothingness and nonexistence in the presence of that Exalted *Wajib al-Wujûd*. The disciple then should be able to feel the unique delight of seeing that “One” in everything. The person whose state reaches the reality of this level of *muraqaba* begins to observe the Divine Majesty, power and Oneness in everything and to feel the delight of “*fana fillah* (annihilation in Allah).”



The feeling of “*ihsan*” is the essence of *Muraqaba al-maiyya* and *aqrabiyya*. “*Ihsan*” means as articulated by the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him:-

“That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don’t see Him, He, verily, sees you.” (Muslim, Iman, 1, 5; al-Bukhari, Iman, 37)

Based on this prophetic statement it can be said that *muraqaba of ma’iyya* and *aqrabiyya* means turning the fact that Allah is with us everywhere and at all-time into a consciousness and perception



within the heart. In *muraqaba* of *ma'iyya*, one feels the existence of Allah with him in all places and at all time. In the *muraqaba* of *aqrabiyya*, which is the next step of *muraqaba* of *ma'iyya*, one concentrates on the feeling of the existence of Allah beyond one's own perception and accept Allah to be even closer to him than himself. This is such closeness that one reaches the consciousness that Almighty Lord is between him and his heart and even that he knows his intentions and everything he thinks better than His servant does. Only the servants with this kind of consciousness are able to pay true attention to their worship, transactions, feelings, in short every behavior encompassing their lives. They live every breath in accordance with the meaning of the verse “**...We are nearer to him than his life-vein.**” (Qaf, 50: 16)

This spiritual state is like a shield against sins because how can a servant commit a sin while feeling himself in the divine presence and while his heart is with Allah saying “O Lord”?

In this respect, the important thing is to be able to live by being aware of the constant supervision of Allah. It is stated in a verse,

“...And He is with you wherever you may be...”

(al-Hadid, 57: 4)

The following hadith emphasizing the necessity of being in constant remembrance of Allah and in

awareness of *muraqaba* should also attract similar attention,

“Do not talk too much without the remembrance of Allah. Indeed excessive talking without remembrance of Allah hardens the heart. And indeed the furthest of people from Allah is the harsh-hearted.” (al-Tirmidhi, Zuhd, 62)

One day, one of the Companions asked,

“– O Messenger of Allah! What does purification of the soul mean?”

Allah’s Messenger -and blessings be upon him- replied,

“–Knowing that Allah is with him wherever he is.” (al-Tabarani, Saghir, I, 334/555; al-Bayhaqi, Shu’ab, III, 187)

In like manner, Allah’s Messenger – peace and blessings be upon him- said,

“Knowing that Allah Almighty is with him wherever he is, comes from the superiority of one’s faith.” (al-Bayhaqi, Shu’ab, I, 470)

In the light of this truth, what we need to do in regards to *Ihsan* and *muraqaba* is to first perceive Allah’s constant supervision on us and then shape our lives in accordance with the guidance of the exemplary life of the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him-. How was his patience, how is ours? How was his generosity, his loyalty, and how is



ours? How was his ritual prayer, fast, pilgrimage, alms, manifestation of faith, and how is ours? How was his service on the path of Allah, his determination, justice, and mercy, how is ours? In short, just like these, we should bring all of our behaviors and characteristics encompassing our lives into account because he is the only practical criterion, *uswa al-hasana*, in other words, the quintessential example until the end of this world. He is our witness and intercessor in both worlds.

Once a preacher was speaking about the states of the Judgment Day and Sheikh Shibli -may Allah sanctify his secret- was among the audience. Regarding the questions that Allah Almighty will ask in the Hereafter, the preacher delivered a long speech starting with,

“You will be questioned where you have employed your knowledge. You will be questioned where you have spent your wealth. You will be questioned how you have spent your life. You will be questioned about the state of your acts of worships. You will be questioned whether you have paid attention to the lawful and the prohibited... and after these you will be questioned about such and such things.”

After listening to the preacher's words, Sheikh Shibli -may Allah sanctify his secret- politely addressed the preacher,

“O preacher! You have forgotten one of the important questions. In short, Allah Almighty will ask,



“O My servant! I was with you. I was closer to you than your jugular vein, but whom were you with?”

The important thing in the servitude to Allah Almighty is to have this consciousness, perception, awareness, and state of heart. Our intentions are known by him. It should not be forgotten that on Judgment Day we will be taken into account in accordance with our intentions.

Allah Almighty is with us at all time and everywhere. The important thing is that we should be able to be with Him at all time and at every place. The contemplations of being with Allah all the time and at every place (*muraqaba of ma'iyya*) should cause a tremble in our hearts and ascend us to submission and contentedness. It means to annihilate our will power (*irada juz'iyya*) in the state of submission and contentedness in the face of the Absolute divine Will (*irada kulliyya*).

According to narrations, a rumor spread that Sheikh Muhammad Nur al-Arabi, a 19th century Sufi, was denying the existence of human willpower (or *irada al-juz'iyya*). The Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid then ordered the Sheikh to be present at one of the lessons of *huzur* and to be questioned about the truth of his case at the Palace. Thus, an edict was enacted and the Sheikh was invited to the lessons of *huzur* in the



Palace. When he was asked for an explanation about the rumors the sheikh said:

“I did not say that particular power of will does not exist in general, and that I deny it completely. However, I said it is as if it does not exist for some people because the prominent ones from the friends of Allah live with the perception that they are always in the presence of Allah, the chance for the manifestation of their particular will is so low that it almost does not exist. This is because they act not in accordance with their own will but by obeying the Will of Allah Almighty under whose dominion they live. Otherwise, they would act against good etiquette and commit an error.

For instance, we are all in the presence of the sultan now. When we are told to come, we come; when we are told to go, we go. It is not possible for us to employ our will power as we wish in spite of the sultan’s will. Whereas look at the obliviousness of all other creation outside the palace; they are quite free and independent in employing their will.”

The feeling of *Ihsan* should be reflected in action by taking root in the heart so that it can become a path to meeting with Allah. Otherwise, uttering the state of *muraqaba* or the feeling of *Ihsan* only by the tongue does not help the heart gain anything.



As for *muraqaba* of *muhabba*, it is the verification stage of having a friendship with Allah. The more a servant observes piousness in his acts and behaviors, the more he knows Allah, making the person radiate like the sun. The more the knowledge of Allah increases, the more divine love dominates the heart because knowing the perfection and beauty of Allah Almighty prompts the feelings of admiration and attraction.

The source of love is actually our Lord Almighty whose one name is al-Wadûd. The name “al-Wadûd” means “one who loves much and one who is loved much.” The servant should especially endeavor to adorn himself with beauties that would make him honored by his Lord’s love. Those who may be honored by His love are mentioned in various verses as follows,

“O you who believe! if any from among you turn back from his faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him, lowly with the believers, mighty against the rejecters, fighting in the way of Allah, and never afraid of the reproaches of such as find fault. That is the grace of Allah, which He will bestow on whom He pleases. And Allah encompasses all, and He knows all things.” (al-Maida, 5: 54)



sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Al ‘Imran, 3: 31)

“...Allah loves those who do good.” (al-Baqara, 2: 195)

“... Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.” (al-Baqara, 2: 222)

“...Allah loves those who are firm and steadfast.” (Al ‘Imran, 3: 146)

“...Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).” (Al ‘Imran, 3: 159)

“...Allah loves those who are fair (and just).” (al-Hujurat, 49: 9)

“...Allah loves the righteous.” (al-Tawba, 9: 4)

“Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure.” (al-Saff, 61: 4)

In a *hadith al-qudsi*, Allah Almighty says:

“I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a pious worshipper of Mine. And the most beloved things with which My slave comes nearer to Me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing nawafil (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which



he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My protection (Refuge), I will protect him; (i.e. give him My Refuge) and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him.” (al-Bukhari, Riqaq, 38; Ibn Maja, Fitan, 16)

Allah’s Messenger -peace and blessings be upon him- explained the qualities of the person who could be worthy of the love of Allah Almighty with the following statements,

“Allah loves the servant who is God-conscious, devotes himself to worship, avoids fame and glory, and is busy with amelioration of his self.” (Muslim, Zuhd, 11)

“Allah Almighty is Rafiq (Compassionate) and loves to act with rifq (compassion) in everything. He loves every sorrowful and merciful heart with pious reverence that teaches people goodness, and invites them to obedience to Allah. He dislikes every harsh, reckless, empty heart that does not remember Allah much, spends whole night in sleep even though it does not know whether its soul will be returned to it or not.” (al-Daylami, Musnad, I, 158)

“Allah loves the young who spends his youth in obedience to Allah.” (al-Suyuti, *al Jami al-Saghir*, I, 65)



“Allah Almighty loves to see His servant get tired in pursuit of the lawful.” (al-Suyuti, *al Jami al-Saghir*, I, 65)

“Allah loves His believing servant who is poor, but does not beg even though he has many children in need of care.” (Ibn Maja, *Zuhd*, 5)

“Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, loves the person who does his job nice and well.” (al-Daylami, *Musnad*, I, 157)

The more the servant adorns himself with the characteristics that would attract the love of Allah Almighty, the more the love of Allah Almighty increases for the servant. This love causes the emergence of divine love in the servant as well. In other words, first Allah loves His servant, and then the servant's love for Allah begins to increase. The servant's love increases so much that he becomes friends with almost all of creation except the obvious enemies of Allah. This is a natural consequence of the friendship of Allah.

Since such servants become illuminated centers of attraction, other people intentionally or unintentionally begin to love them because as Allah Almighty loves His righteous servants, He makes other servants love them in the extent of their abilities. It is stated in a verse,

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا



“On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow love.”

(Maryam, 19: 96)

Our Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- stated in one of his hadiths,

“When Allah loves a person, He calls Gabriel saying,

“I love so and-so; O Gabriel! Love him!”

Thus, Gabriel loves him and makes an announcement amongst the inhabitants of the Heaven,

“Allah loves so-and-so; therefore you should also love him!”

So all the inhabitants of the Heaven would love him, and then he is granted the pleasure of the people on earth.” (al-Bukhari, Bad‘ al-Khalq, 6)

The love for Allah (*muhabbatullah*) should be above all other loves in the heart of a servant. The believer should even transform the loves for other things in his heart into a means of getting closer to Allah and reaching His love and contentedness. For example, the believer should try to turn his affection for wealth into the intention of giving more charity for the cause of Allah, his love for his children into the effort of raising them as good and righteous believers, and his love for position and rank into an opportunity to serve further for the sake of Allah.



Love actually emerges from the common characteristics between the lover and the beloved. The more the divine names and attributes manifest themselves in the servant, the more his love for Allah increases. Eventually the state called by the friends of Allah as “*adorning oneself with the character of Allah*” is realized. The soundness and truth of *muraqaba* of *muhabba* can be known by the emergence of these signs. For example,

Al-Rahman: It means the Merciful and the Bestower of blessings to all of creation. It is one of the most frequently mentioned divine names in the Qur’an. If this name of Allah manifests itself in a servant, that servant opens his wings of mercy and compassion in a way that encompasses all beings both animate and inanimate. He begins to show his mercy and compassion not only to his kith and kin, but all of creation.

Al-Mu’min: It means the One who shines the light of faith in hearts, provides shelter to those who seek refuge with Him, the One who protects, consoles, gives confidence, and the One who is loyal to His promises. When this name manifests itself in a servant, not only does faith take root in his heart but also he becomes a trustworthy person. Others become safe from his hand and tongue. He does not betray other people’s trust in him.



Al-Bari: It means the One who creates everything on a sound measure without a sample, develops them, and creates their organs and tools in coherence with each other in the perfect form. When this divine name manifests itself in the servant he gains the spiritual state of contemplating manifestations of divine majesty and power. He develops the determination and sensitivity of doing everything he does fairly, properly and justly.

Al-Musawwir: It means the One who creates every creation in various forms by His eternal wisdom and gives them a special shape. The servants who get their share from this name look astonishingly at the rising sun, and colorful scenes of the lights in the horizon as divine manifestations. They even look at a snake through this vision captivated by the shape of skins of such creatures and their speedy movements despite having no feet. They observe the rose and its thorns, the hot and the sweet, the colorful flowers and fruit through the windows of wisdom and mindfulness.

Malik al-mulk: It means the only owner of whole universe and the only ruler of the world of existence. The servant who is honored with the manifestation of this name develops the consciousness of the fact that his wealth and property are just trusts to him. He attains the knowledge and wisdom of how to utilize his wealth and property. He purifies himself from bad



characteristics like stinginess and extravagance, while adorning himself with good features such as generosity, self-sacrifice, and giving in charity. His feelings of thankfulness for such blessings and reverence to the One who bestows these blessings increase.

Al-Razzaq: It means the Bestower of material and spiritual blessings to all beings He created. It is stated in the verses of the Qur'an,

“How many are the creatures that carry not their own sustenance? It is Allah who feeds (both) them and you: for He hears and knows (all things).”

(al-Ankabut, 29: 60)

“There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on Allah: He knows the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: All is in a clear Record.” (Hud, 11: 6)

The servant who receives his share from this divine name pursues not the blessings but the Bestower of blessings. Every blessing reminds him of its Bestower. He is astonished by the generosity of the Owner of countless blessings that are showered around the universe. When earning his share from these blessings, he never attempts to extend his hands to take the prohibited and the doubtful. He never treats people with unkindness by making them feel obliged or reminding them that he is the means through which they received their blessings.



Al-'Adl: It means the Just and the One who never does injustice. Justice means to give everyone what he is his right. The servant who is blessed by the manifestation of this name avoids all kinds of injustice. Even if it is against himself or against his relatives, he never backs down from justice. He prefers being a just servant of Allah in the distribution of rights to everything else in the world. For him, the greatest right that needs to be observed is the Sublime Sake of Allah. By this characteristic, he becomes a witness of Allah on earth.

Al-Ghafur: It means the One who covers the sins of His servants by forgiving them, pardons their mistakes and crimes, and the One with abundant mercy. The person in whom this divine name is manifested not only turns to repentance by his prayers and actions but also become a person that forgives all crimes and wrongs committed against himself. He carries the consciousness of forgiveness and that sometimes even ignoring an affront is a greater merit than responding through holding a grudge or a feeling of hostility.

Al-Afuw: It means the One whose forgiveness is high and who purifies and erases His servants' sins. The servant who is honored by the manifestation of this name not only begs forgiveness by looking at the abundance of his sins but also keeps himself away from all kinds of hopelessness. Moreover, he treats the servants of Allah who forgives him with utmost



forgiveness. He gains the awareness that one becomes worthy of being forgiven by forgiving others. He gains the consciousness that treating others with forgiveness instead of responding evil with evil is a great virtue because he knows that the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- treated those who had done him all kinds of tortures and oppression for some twenty years with clemency and forgiveness. Therefore, the servant believes in the necessity of getting a share of this great characteristic. He takes heed from the endless mercy and compassion of Hallaj al-Mansur's supplication to Allah for those who stoned him, "O Lord! They do not know; please forgive these servants of Yours before I forgive them."

Al-Sabur: It means the One who is very Patient and do not rush to punish His sinful servants. The servant who is honored by the manifestation of this name gains an important key to success, namely patience and resolution. Through this name there is no relaxation in his determination to live and let others live through the truth. He benefits from the blessing of patience through the best way in the performance of acts of worship, standing against the charm of unlawful things, and being in submission and contentedness with the divine Decree against all kinds of calamities and hardships to which he has been inflicted.

Al-Karim: It means the One who is Generous and abundantly bestows blessings. The servant who



is honored by the manifestation of this name is saved from all kinds of stinginess and reaches the spiritual level at which he shares everything bestowed to him by Allah with the other servants of Allah. He protects himself from all kinds of disgraceful acts which harm his personality. By reaching the consciousness that reverence in the presence of Allah can be only by *taqwa* of Allah, he feels the need of covering ground on this path.

Al-Wadud: It means One who loves and is loved so much. The servant who is honored by the manifestation of this name not only loves everybody and everything for the sake of Allah, but also everyone begins to love him. However, he neither loves nor wish to be loved by those who deserve Allah's wrath.



A believer whose heart is with Allah in this world does not waste his life for the ungainliness of his egocentrism. He does not spoil himself by dissipation and vileness. He does not go after useless pursuits. He does not keep himself busy with useless, false, and unruly acts and get deceived by empty aims. He does not respond to the ignorant when they tease him. He would not besmear his life with backbiting. He lives with the effort of keeping his friendship with Allah Almighty. If a heart, which is supposed to show gratitude, contentedness, submission, and thankfulness in the face of the ups and downs of life shows ingratitude,



complaint, objection, and ignorance, it means that it lost its sensitivity of *muraqaba*.

Those who are with Allah in their lives will be honored with this blessing at the last breath of their lives. *Muraqaba* means to live in the horizon of this wisdom. It refers to be able to reserve the heart for the One who is most worthy of it, i.e. to its Creator, by getting rid of the temporary desires, ambitions, and carnal attractions of this world. For if a heart is not kept busy with Allah it will be occupied with everything other than Allah.

The more the realm of the heart gets closer to the truth of *muraqaba*, the more it starts seeing the whole universe as the sign of the whole universe and reading it through a true way of reading. Only then does it become possible to act in accordance with the meaning of the verse,

اِقْرَأْ بِسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

“Read! In the name of your Lord and Cherisher, Who created!” (al-Alaq, 96: 1)

After that, it becomes obvious to the hearts that everything is a composition and manifestation of the beautiful names of Allah. The divine names manifest themselves upon the universe, the Qur’an, and the human beings and all begin to open up with great rapture, comprehension, and astonishment by the





spiritual inspirations and eventually the servant realizes his nothingness and feebleness in the presence of the Greatness and Majesty of the Lord of the worlds.



CONCLUSION

Sayr suluk in *Tasawwuf* does not mean words but states and actions. It means to get a share from the character and states of the friends of Allah. Those who are trapped by the use of words and who think that eloquent and fluent disputation is everything is woefully deceived. In similar manner, those whose aim is not to realize the good states but instead wish to attain inspirations (*kashf*) and miracles (*karamah*) are people who have been defeated by the snares of Satan and their inner selves. This is because the greatest miracle of all is to be on the straight path. Allah Almighty addressed His Messenger –peace and blessings be upon him- and those who walked with him to the Truth as follows,

“Therefore stand firm (in the straight Path) as you are commanded, you and those who with you turn (unto Allah); and transgress not (from the Path): for He sees well all that you do.” (Hud, 11: 112)



The greats of Islam were able to acquire their spiritual standing by embracing, not *karamah*, but uprightness as a standard. By showing *karamah*, they have said, one does not necessarily acquire a value more than that of a flying bird or a swimming fish; and that true *marifah* is not to imitate what, say, a bird or a fish can do with natural ease. **It is rather to lead a life of integrity and uprightness devoted to the pleasure of the Lord alone and stirred by an intense consciousness of servitude. This was what the spiritual greats underlined at every given opportunity and exhibited in their lives.**

Bayazid al-Bistami -may Allah sanctify his secret- said,

“If you see a man who can sit cross-legged in the air, do not believe what he manifests is a miracle until you see him obeying the commands and punishments of Allah Almighty, follow the Sunnah of the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him- and the law of Allah.”

For the friends of Allah are free from ostentation and they do not demonstrate miracles unless it is necessary. They appear before people with perfect characters to be taken as models.

The following advice of Hasan al-Basri -may Allah sanctify his secret- to one of his disciples is very remarkable:



“Do not be deceived by the high levels of your knowledge, state, and wisdom! Remember what happened to Bal‘am b. Baura after he reached the level of knowledge so that he could look at Lawh al-Mahfuz and read it.”

Bal‘am’s exemplary situation is expressed in the Qur’an as follows,

“...but he inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who reject Our signs; So relate the story; perchance they may reflect.” (al-A‘raf, 7: 176)

Mawlana Khalid al-Baghdadi -may Allah sanctify his secret- said,

“Being and endeavoring on the straight path is better than showing numerous mystical inspirations and miracles. Moreover, it should be known that if inspirations and miracles do not lead to strengthen one’s obedience to the commands of religion, they are nothing but troubles and mischiefs.”

The following warnings of Muhammed Es‘ad Efendi –may Allah show mercy to his soul- with regards to the significance of the straight path, especially to the leading figures, are as follows,



“Those who do not wear the headgear of the straight path would in the end disappear, no matter whether they are scholars or sheikhs.

If your back does not become bent under the weight of being on the straight path, how would your arrow of desire hit the target of being close to Allah?”

Even the hearts of the friends of Allah tremble with worries with regards to straight path; we should think how sensitive we should be in this matter.”

How cautionary the following advices of Khalid al-Baghdadi -may Allah sanctify his secret- to his disciples are,

“While people look at many a weak people with pity, they left this world by saving themselves in their last breath. Unfortunately, while many people of knowledge, wisdom, deeds, merits, ancestry, and perfection used to be the guides of their times, they fell into heedlessness and died without faith. Since last breath is what is essential on this path, what a great misery it is to be ostentatious, and prideful!

...By Allah Almighty! I do not think that since the day my mother bore me to this world, I have done one single good deed which is acceptable in the presence of Allah and which will not be taken into account. (However, I seek refuge in my Lord's mercy.)

If you do not see yourself bankrupted in all of your good deeds, this is the furthest point of ignorance...



...I advise you to be busy with things that will be necessary in the last breath, so do deeds in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet -peace and blessings be upon him-, do not incline towards the deceptive beauties of this temporary world, do not forget in your prayers to request for this poor servant (meaning oneself) success and to have a good end in this world (in other words to live in accordance with the commands of Allah and to die with faith).”

As the good exemplary characters of the righteous predecessors show, there is no such thing as completing the spiritual training in *sayr suluk* (Sufi training) because there is no end in life when it comes to devotion and piety. With the words of invocation of the Messenger of Allah –peace and blessings be upon him- being, “*O Lord! I could not know You properly, I could not become a servant to You properly*” that continued to be prayed till the end of his life, which other servant’s spiritual development can be completed? Nobody has a guarantee in this regard except the prophets and the people about whom the prophets gave good news. Everybody should be concerned about giving up his last breath in state of faith.

Therefore, those who say “my spiritual training has been completed” are the ones who leave themselves in the middle of the path. Mawlana Jalal al-Din



Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret- emphasizes this fact as follows,

“O Brother! Being closer to the Truth is an endless lodge. Do not linger around in that lodge no matter which destination you reach. Keep going for the sake of Allah.

I am the (devoted) slave of him who does not regard himself in every caravanserai (at every stage in his spiritual progress) as having attained (the privilege of sitting at) the table (of the union with God).”



By becoming increasingly purified and with the grace of Allah, glory unto Him, due to the spiritual exercises of *Tasawwuf*, the heart acquires such a nature at the end of the road that its possessor becomes angelic in spirit, despite continuing his physical existence. Some, who are of this acquired nature, are anonymous both to themselves and to others, much like a star among millions of others that are hidden from human gaze despite occupying observable space. Such persons are unidentifiable.

With that said, owing to the social responsibilities they have been entrusted with to carry out, certain other persons of the same kind are, to a certain degree, known. They thereby act as guiding lights not only during their lifetimes but also afterwards, even once they cease to exist physically, privileged with a share of



the secret of eternity. They comprehend the final cause that is the will of the Lord, concealed beneath the causal chain of natural events. Thus, they live within the peaceful presence and serenity of having tapped into wisdom and are protected from defects like haste and anxiety, that plague human beings.

For them, nothing is absurd. Proceeding on the path of spiritual progress from the principle to 'tolerate the created for the sake of the Creator', they begin to gaze at the entire universe with a sagacious eye, to take a lesson, with love and awe.

Since they gaze at creation with wisdom and love, these saintly figures are safe even from the attacks of feral animals; for love indeed acts like a radiating force in making the other succumb them. They have nothing of the general tendency of other human beings to view the wonders of the universe as ordinary. An ordinary man, who looks on impressed at manmade paintings, which after all are merely based on an imitation of nature, cannot feel the same way when gazing at the universe in connection with its Creator. Things that should evoke awe are for him just ordinary events.

The pious whose hearts are purified, on the other hand, have no business in acclaiming paintings made by artists with an interest of acquiring fame, and instead, they turn their interest and acclaim to the Real Artist and His masterpiece. They enjoy the zest of beholding the divine art embedded in the innumer-



able wonders of nature. They gaze at the multicolored flowers and leaves of plants, the inexhaustible difference of color, the smell and shape of each tree that has the unique taste of each fruit even though they all spring from the very same soil, and they look on admiringly at the wonderful patterns on the wings of a butterfly and appreciate the incredibility of the creation of humanity. They lend an ear to the mysterious words expressed through the silent language (*lisan'ul-hal*) of countless divine wonders like eyesight and understanding, seen by many as simply ordinary happenings.

For such people, the entire universe is like a book waiting to be read. Having surpassed knowledge of the written, they eye the knowledge of the heart; just like Mawlana Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret-who, as a scholar buried in his books and minding his own business in the Seljuk Madrasa, was suddenly ignited by the enlightening call of an enamored, mystic dervish named Shams, and soon found himself ablaze in the fire of love. Reborn in the atmosphere of love, it was the same Mawlana in whose sight the value of written books dropped to where they truly belong, as he began reading the mysterious patterns of the universe with his very own eye of the heart. It was only after this stage that the masterpiece that is the *Mathnawi*, a cry exposing the mysteries of the Quran, universe and human, came to be.



Internalizing this state of mind is possible only if a believer discovers the potential power and love embedded in his heart.

Becoming focal points to the Divine Gaze, hearts of these kinds of people reach their zenith. Perhaps because there is an element of human willpower involved in its becoming that prompted Mawlana Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret- to pay tribute to the value of the purified heart:

*“Kâbe bunyâd-ı Halîl-i Azer’est
Dil, nazargâh-ı Celîl-i Ekber’est”*

Meaning,

“By Khalil Ibrahim, the son of Azar, was the Ka’ba raised

But the heart is the focal point of the Almighty’s Gaze....

Frequent is the likening of the heart to the Ka’ba in Sufi hagiographic (*manaqib*) works. This stems from their conspicuous resemblance: the heart occupies a similar place in the human being, the essence of the universe (*zubda-i kainat*), to that of Ka’ba with respect to the universe. Both occupy a central place in being focal points of the Divine Gaze. They are where the Gaze becomes centralized. The style of these hagiographic accounts, which tend to give the heart preeminence over the Ka’ba, is partly due to the use of expression of an amorous style. However, more



importantly, it is with the aim of encouraging people through virtue to uplift the heart to this desired level where it becomes a focal point just like the Ka'ba.

On the subject of the heart becoming a focal point of the Divine Gaze, the words Ibn Umar –may Allah be pleased with him- pronounced while looking at the Ka'ba are significant to say the least:

“How great you are, Ka'ba! How mighty is your name! But the honor a true believer has in the Sight of Allah is even greater!” (al-Tirmidhi, Birr, 85)

The heart is the precinct of *iman*. That the heart of a mature believer is superior even to the Ka'ba are made clear by the words of Ibn Umar –may Allah be pleased with him-.

In essential confirmation of this fact, Mawlana Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret- said:

“If you have a glimmer of prudence, circumambulate the Ka'ba that is the heart! It is the heart that holds the true meaning of the Ka'ba, which you think is just made of earth.

The Lord has obliged you to circumambulate the Ka'ba, just so you acquire a heart cleansed of *masiwa*, a purified Ka'ba of the heart.



to the Ka'ba on foot will not compensate for the sin you will have reaped."

The condition of obtaining a heart of such caliber is concisely described by Abdulqadir Jilani -may Allah sanctify his secret- as:

"Only the heart of he who seeks *ma'rifatullah*, a heart that is cleansed of *masiwa*, becomes a Ka'ba."

Ismail Hakkı Bursawi offers similar words:

"He who finds a way inside a heart is superior to he who finds a way inside the Ka'ba. It is for that reason that it is common to ask the righteous and the pious to 'keep us in your heart' and a plea for spiritual enlightenment (*istimdad-i fayz*) and attention (*talab-i himma*)."

Imam Rabbani -may Allah sanctify his secret- expressed the fact that the human being is a minor universe in the following manner:

"The human being is a condensed summary of the universe. Whatever there is found in the universe, he thus carries a small specimen."

It is because of the crucial role it plays in ensuring the human being's happiness and salvation that all Sufis have regarded breaking the heart as a grave sin. This is echoed by the caution Mawlana Rumi -may Allah sanctify his secret- levels at heartbreakers:



“A broken heart which you value no more than a piece of straw is superior to the Throne... The Tablet and the Pen, just the same! Do not despise a heart, even if it be despicable! Even with its despicableness, it is supreme to all else. A broken heart is a being at which the Lord gazes. How sacred is he who mends it! Mending a heart shattered into two-hundred pieces is preferable in Divine Sight to many deeds of goodness! Be quiet! Even if each strand of your hair was to have two-hundred tongues, the heart would still remain indescribable!”

As is the case with all other activities, advancing in spiritual training is possible only through Allah, glory unto Him, complementing human endeavor with His aid, grace and benevolence. Although all human efforts and righteous deeds provide a spiritual base from which to embark, they are but means to attaining Divine grace and aid. Therefore, one who has entered this path must essentially rely on the benevolence and grace of Allah, glory unto Him. Since that ‘aid’ is bound to deliver the person somewhere better than where he presently is, at any rate, an improvement is certain. One must, however, strive to exert an effort that the Lord expects of him in return for the grace he anticipates.

There is an old saying: ‘One must not entirely forsake that which he cannot acquire completely. This is also the recommended approach to take on board in



spiritual training; one ought not to neglect acquiring at least that which is in his power.

There is also a widely known parable in *Tasawwuf*. A young man, aspiring to be a disciple, asks a sheikh, 'Himma father' and the sheikh replies, 'Ghayra (show effort) son!' A person anticipating the spiritual attention of his master must be ready to exert some effort. What the Lord expects from a servant in spiritual training is for him to realize his helplessness and nothingness before the Divine splendor and make some genuine effort towards tapping into the secret expressed in the principle 'he who knows himself knows his Lord'. On the road towards vanquishing the ego, effort comes from the servant, while success comes from the Lord.

Moreover, undoubtedly the Almighty will hold a servant responsible only in proportion with the divine blessings he has been granted in life. The important thing is for a person to align himself to the Truth, to the degree of the blessings he has been endowed with, allows him.

Lord...Light up the sparkles of Truth in the mirror that is our hearts in order to allow us to behold the keys to the mysteries and wisdoms of both worlds; and no less our hearts and eyes so that we are honored with Your Jamal in the Hereafter!

Amin!











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