

THE INNER MEANINGS OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

A PERSONAL SELECTION
OF GUIDANCE FOR THE WAYFARER



SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI



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Book Description

IN THIS COLLECTION of teachings on the inner meanings of worship in Islam, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri brings together the most profound guidance for those who journey along this path – from the Qur'an, the Prophet's traditions, narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt, and seminal works from the Ahl al-Tasawwuf of all schools. The essential elements of belief and practice are presented according to three levels of meaning: *shari`ah* (the revealed law), *tariqah* (the path of discipline) and *haqiqah* (the transcendent truth), following the timeless habit of the Prophet (S) of combining the outer practice with the inner meaning.

The Inner Meanings of Worship in Islam will inspire the serious seeker of enlightenment to progress along the path, to purify themselves, their intentions, and their expectations at all stages of the journey. Ultimately all aspects and practices of the *shari`ah* impact upon the process of grooming and refining the character of the practitioner.

By sharing these most transformative teachings from the world of Islam, the author hopes to make available the spiritual nourishment that has sustained and propelled him personally in his own quest for sublime knowledge and true freedom.

About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Acknowledgements

Originally written in Arabic some fifteen years ago, this English version of *The Inner Meanings of Worship in Islam* has come about through the hard work and commitment of several people whom I thank most sincerely, especially Muna Bilgrami who has edited and prepared the text for publication, and Abbas Bilgrami for seeing it through to publication.

Editor's Note

Please note that it is customary to invoke blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, whenever his name is mentioned, even though such invocations have not been inserted consistently into the present text.

The transliteration system used in this book is based on the American Library of Congress, but with some modifications. No diacritic marks have been incorporated for ease of typesetting and the terms *shari`ah*, *tariqah*, and *haqiqah* have not been italicized throughout due to their frequent usage, other than when they first appear. It was decided to retain these terms in transliteration as no single word exists for any of them in English that would convey the fullness of their respective meanings. Not all the transliterated terms within the text appear in the glossary, only those deemed more important. Regarding footnotes, as no page references were supplied in the Arabic, no attempt has been made to include them in the English.

Preface

As a child growing up in the Holy city of Karbala, Iraq, I often used to wonder about the practical and personal implications of our main Islamic practices. It was quite obvious to me that *salat* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting) and other key practices bring about very useful personal discipline. It was not until much later, however, that I began to see the *tawhid* of our *Din* (pronounced *deen*). As I began to be exposed to the rich heritage of *`irfan* (inner knowledge) from the school of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt and the great Sufi masters of North Africa, India, Turkey and elsewhere, belonging to other schools of theology, the direct and personal benefits of our practices and rituals brought about a noticeable transformation in my conduct and outlook on life.

Our *Din* is indeed the pathway to the realization of Allah's absolute dominance, presence, control and mercy. The interchange between the physical and the spiritual – the Seen/Unseen, *shari`ah/haqiqah*, in time/beyond time, information/transformation, branches/roots, and indeed all such interplays – are connected by our *Din* to the Divine Source and Essence.

The times we are living in are dominated by outer reasoning, intellectuality, and by the general disintegration of society. Because of this I gathered what was of relevance to my own progress in revealing and emphasizing the inner meaning and benefit of the Prophetically prescribed practices. Personal illumination is the first step out of what we experience outwardly as general chaos and confusion.

This book is an attempt to share with the committed Muslim seeker the keys to inner transformation and awareness of the One, All-Encompassing Creator. It is not intended for the general public for it is a specialist's book, the use of which can only be realized in the application of the appropriate teachings. Originally gathered in Arabic, the material was compiled some twenty years ago and was personally selected from the teachings of enlightened beings from across the Muslim world and from different schools of thought and Sufi Tariqas, all of whom have influenced and inspired me. All streams lead to the same ocean and have emanated from the same merciful rain-bearing clouds. Allah's light illumines the known and the

unknown, the inner and the outer, and this life and the next. There is no light except His and He is the All-Encompassing Power and Truth.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

July 2001, White River

South Africa

CHAPTER ONE: The Stages and Degrees of Knowledge

Without a doubt, the Creator is closer to man than his own jugular vein. He is near and responds to the supplications of those who truly call upon Him. Most people, however, are unaware of this. People experience various stages in the development of knowledge and awareness. One's knowledge directly corresponds to one's sincerity, trust, and certainty, and ultimately to the degree of one's nearness to Allah. These matters cannot be specifically defined except for general descriptive and explanatory purposes.

I have found in my research that various terms and descriptions have been used to indicate the stations and degrees which people have attained in this knowledge. Terms like *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* will be familiar to readers who have sought higher knowledge through the path of Islam. One important description is given by Sayyid Haydar al-`Amuli¹ (d.719 AH/1319 CE), who states that *shari`ah* is a name applied to a divinely revealed system of laws consisting of basic tenets (*usul*) and their various branches of knowledge (*furu`*); and that *tariqah* consists of adhering to them in a most prudent, careful and consistent manner; and *haqiqah* is the confirmation of the ultimate Truth behind existence by way of illumination and witnessing, or through attaining certain spiritual states.

The People of *shari`ah* (those who abide by the revealed laws) are those who have attained a degree of knowledge in Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), that is, the *faqih* and others of that caliber. The People of *Tariqah* (those on a strict path) are those who possess knowledge and wisdom, for example, the *`alim* and the *hakim*. The People of *Haqiqah* (those seeking the ultimate truth) are those who possess an inner knowledge based upon their own witnessing, that is, the enlightened master (*`arif*). It is related that Imam `Ali said:

¹*Asrar al-shari`ah wa Atwar al-Tariqah wa Anwar al-Haqiqah* (The Secrets of the *shari`ah*, the Stages of *Tariqah* and the Illuminations of *Haqiqah*).

The shari`ah is a river and haqiqah a sea: thus the *faqih* makes his way through the river and the *hakim* dives into the sea for pearls, but the *`arif* moves along [the sea] aboard the ship of salvation.

In this same vein the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said:

The shari`ah is my words, tariqah my actions, and haqiqah is my state. Understanding is my capital, reason (*`aql*) is the basis of my way of life (*din*), and love my foundation; longing my mount, fear my companion, and knowledge my weapon; forbearance my master, trust in Allah my helper, and contentment my treasure; truthfulness my stopping place, certainty my shelter, poverty my pride, and by it I am honored over all Prophets and Messengers.

It is likewise said that prayer (*salat*) as prescribed by the shari`ah consists of service, nearness, and the reunion of lovers. The service is the shari`ah, the nearness is the tariqah, and the reunion is the haqiqah, while the word *salat* is a general term used for all three.

The other descriptive terms often used to describe the levels of people's knowledge of Allah are the following: The Common People (*al-`am*) – this term refers to the general class of believers who adhere to the shari`ah of Islam and whose understanding of the Islamic way of life is centered around it; the Elect (*al-khas*) – these are the learned men (*al-`ulama'*), the men of wisdom (*al-hukama'*) and the ones with the knowledge which enables them to make legal decisions; the Chosen Few of the Elect (*khas al-khawas*) refers to those who possess a deeper knowledge, i.e. the master (*`arif*) or gnostic who has awakened to the all-encompassing Divine Unity and knowledge.

The master Khwaja `Abdullah Ansari² divided the stages of the knowledge of the Unity or Oneness of Allah (*tawhid*) into three divisions: 1) Unity (*tawhid*) of the Common People; 2)

² Khwajah `Abdullah Ansari (d. 481 AH/1089 CE), author of the books: *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Majid* (Commentary of the Qur'an) and *Manazil al-Sa'irin* (Stations of the Wayfarers).

Unity of the Elect; 3) Unity of the Chosen Few among the Elect. Similarly, Al-Naraq³ divided the act of fasting into three degrees: 1) Fasting of the Common People. 2) Fasting of the Elect. 3) Fasting of the Chosen Few among the Elect.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF REVEALED LAW TO REASONING

It is said that reasoning (*`aql*) will never be guided except by way of the shari`ah and that the shari`ah will never be clearly understood except by way of reasoning. The shari`ah and reasoning need each other like the soul needs the body. The shari`ah may be thought of as a building with reasoning as its foundation. Thus the foundation is of no use without the building and, similarly, the building will not stand without a foundation.

It is also said that reasoning is like eyesight and that the shari`ah is like beams of light. Eyesight is useless unless it comes into contact with these beams from the outside. These beams likewise are useless if they cannot be utilized to give sight. One of the interpretations of Allah's words '...light upon light...' ⁴ is that they refer to the light of the shari`ah upon the light of reasoning, because reasoning will not be illuminated except by the light of the shari`ah. If a speck of the dust of this world falls upon the pupil of a man's eye his vision will be marred. What clarity can there be if one is attached to the entire world and thus veiled by it?

The traveler upon this path who possesses reasoning will be rightly guided by it to adhere to shari`ah and thereby progress towards illumination. This cannot be achieved, however, except by way of harnessing the various forces, both physical and spiritual, and directing them in a way which will ultimately be the most beneficial and useful.

Reasoning is what gives us guidance to follow those who possess a higher degree of both knowledge and action. These are the ones whom Allah sends with the shari`ah, that is, the Prophets and Messengers, as well as their heirs, those whom Allah has befriended (the *`awliya'*), the Masters and the Mujtahids.

³ Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi al-Naraq³ in his book *Jamî` al-Sa`adat* ('The Compendium of Joys').

⁴ Qur'an 24:35.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE SHARI`AH

Allah created man in order that he might know Him and worship Him according to His due. The attainment of this goal will be proportionate to the degree attained of the knowledge of Allah, as well as to the level of true worship. The task of the Prophet is to present the perfect shari`ah which deals with all matters concerning the human being throughout his worldly existence and his journey towards his death. Allah has said the following concerning this:

...As We have sent among you a Messenger to recite Our signs to you and to purify you and to instruct you in the Book and in wisdom and to instruct you in what you do not know. (Qur'an 2:151)

Do you not see that everything within the heavens and the earth prostrate before Allah, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the beasts as well as many among men. (Qur'an 22:18)

There is nothing that does not glorify His praise but you do not perceive their glorification. (Qur'an 17:44)

All these verses (*ayat*) indicate that everything is commanded and bears a responsibility according to its capacity and ability. The prostration (*sajdah*) and prayer represent, respectively, the slave's state of being and deep spiritual knowledge. Similarly, included within this is the glorification (*tasbih*). The reference here is not to what is commonly thought of as glorification, because Allah said:

...but you do not perceive their glorification (*tasbih*). (Qur'an 17:44)

However, every creature's prayer and prostration before Him is what is most suitable for its station, as He says:

Say: Each acts in the manner of its own kind. (Qur'an 17:84)

Just as there are always two aspects to every created thing, there are two aspects to each of the rules and responsibilities of the shari`ah, that is, an outward act and an inward meaning, one which is perceived through the senses and one which is hidden or unseen.

The responsibilities of the shari`ah outwardly require that one must either arrive at proper legal decisions (*ijtihad*), or, in the absence of this knowledge, that one follows someone who does possess this knowledge. This second process is referred to as *taqlid*. The sources of this knowledge are the Messengers and Imams whom Allah has sent to guide mankind. It is related that Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq said:

Allah does not allow anything to exist without a reason: thus He made a reason for everything and He made an explanation for every reason; He gave knowledge for every explanation and He made a door for every knowledge. Those who know this know it; those who are ignorant of it are ignorant of it. The Messenger of Allah and the Imams are doors that speak and relate these knowledges.

Thus the task of correct guidance and sound leadership lies with the men of knowledge who are the heirs to the Prophets. It is related that Imam Zayn al-`Abidin said:

He who does not have a wise man to guide him correctly will perish.

It is also related that Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq said:

He who acts without insight is like the one who chases after a mirage in the desert: his haste will only increase him in distance.

Imam `Ali is quoted in the book *Nahj al-Balaghah* ('The Peak of Eloquence') as having said:

He who acts without knowledge is like the one who travels off the path. The distance he travels away from the path will only increase his distance from the goal.

In a supplication Imam `Ali says:

O Allah! Illuminate my exterior with my obedience to You, my interior with Your love, my heart with the witnessing of You, my soul with the most profound knowledge of You, and my innermost essence with the contemplation of Your divine presence, O You Who are the Possessor of glory and noble generosity!

Our responsibility with regard to the shari`ah is not merely a restricted observance of the area of the various branches of the faith (*furu`al-din*), but rather it encompasses the pathways of the heart and the internal state of the believer in order that the remedy for the self (*nafs*) be complete and that both the sensory and subtler veils may be removed. It is related that the Prophet said:

And I arrived at the veils of my Lord, the veils of might and power, of splendor and graciousness, of greatness and magnificence, of light and darkness, of reverence and perfection...until I reached the veil of glory.⁵

In respect of this Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 338 AH/950 CE) said:

You possess a veil originating from your self which covers you from your self in addition to the clothing which covers your body, so attempt to lift that veil and you will then witness and no longer inquire about what you are. If you witness affliction then misery will be upon you and if you are at peace then blessed are you. You will see that your self and you are located within your body as if you were not actually there within your physical body but, rather, as if you were in the most subtle and divine regions, and you will see what no eye has seen and hear what no ear has heard and witness what has not occurred to the heart of any mortal.⁶

The traveler of this path is responsible, by his very nature, by way of his reasoning and by his actions, to know the various states of his own self as well as the basics (*usul*) and the branches

⁵ Quoted from the book, *Al-Fusus al-Hikam*. ('The Pearls or Bezels of Wisdom') by Shaykh Muhyi al-Din ibn `Abdullah ibn `Arabi al-Hatimi, d. 638 AH/ 1240CE.

⁶ In the book, *al-Mabda' wa al-Mi`ad* (The Beginning and the Return).

(*furu`*) of the acts of devotion (*`ibadah*) in order to attain the results for which man was created, namely, to attain the most profound knowledge (*ma`rifah*) of his Lord. This path relates exclusively to the footsteps of the Prophets and the Messengers and those who follow their guidance.

STAGES AND LEVELS OF DEVOTION

The purpose of verbal confirmation and remembrance (*dhikr*) is to awaken the heart, in that while one repeats with the tongue, the heart will gradually take over and become the one who is in remembrance. Likewise, the remembrance of the heart will in turn spur the tongue on to *dhikr*. Thus the outer will aid the inner and the inner will enhance the outer.

The high degree attained when there is complete Presence of the Heart while one is engaged in acts of meditation occurs when the heart is in a state of complete awareness throughout the act, aware of the attributes of the Truth, of Allah, and of how to call out to Him and by His Grace and Mercy.

The Enlightened ones have categorized four levels or groups of worshippers:

1. *The first group*: They understand the performance of the prayer and the physical or mechanical aspects, and they might even understand the meanings of the words which they utter. The Presence of the Heart, as far as they are concerned, is to pay attention during the actual remembrance or recitations and to conceptualize them in their heart while they are actually in prayer. This group equates the inner truths with the traditional meanings only.

2. *The second group*: They understand the inner truths and meanings of the various forms of acts of devotion and remembrance, both intellectually and conceptually. They know and understand that everything which is praiseworthy is attributable only to Allah. The Presence of the Heart for them is when their heart is focused in the remembrance of these truths.

3. *The third group*: They perceive these truths conceptually and intellectually and inscribe them with the pen of reasoning upon the tablet of their hearts. They have come to have a deep and

profound knowledge of these truths. There is a great difference between the degree of faith one attains in the heart and the mere perception of it by reasoning. Often, man has an intellectual understanding of something, which is confirmed by much evidence, yet his belief in it does not reach the level of faith in his heart.

4. *The fourth group*: They have combined these truths and brought them to the level of the heart and thus have reached the station of serenity and contentment.

The first stage of Presence of the Heart for the traveler along this path is that he knows that this universe is a place where Divine Lordship is supreme. He sees his outward acts of devotion and all his inner and outer movement as emanating from the essence of this Presence of the Heart; and he knows that it is the foundation of Unity (*tawhid*).

The second stage of Presence of the Heart is in actual unveiling. Whoever remembers his Beloved both secretly within himself and openly, and in the secret supplications of his own pure essence that are whispered in solitude, will attain the level of faith (*iman*) and serenity, which will enable him to cross over from the stage of serenity and profound knowledge to the stage of actual witnessing. He will then reach the limits of all possibilities and depart from the world of phenomena.

Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (known as Mulla Sadra, d. 1050 AH/1640 CE) divides men according to the levels of discipline of the soul (*nafs*)⁷:

1. *The first division*: Those who discipline themselves outwardly by way of the revealed laws, the shari`ah and by performing the night prayers, fasting, giving alms in charity, making sacrifices, observing religious celebrations and various congregational activities, and so forth.

2. *The second division*: Those who discipline the heart and purify it of impurities.

⁷*Al-Hikam al-Muta' aliyah fi Asfar al-`Aqliyah al-Arba`ah*, commonly known as, *Al-Asfar al-Arba`ah* (The Four Journeys).

3. *The third division:* Those who dissolve themselves into the Eternal Attributes.

4. *The fourth division:* Those whose self has vanished and whose very being has been annihilated, whose wandering has finished and whose sights are fixed only upon the Lord and nothing else.

OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

Quieting the limbs, humbling the body and controlling the senses are necessary for the ascent of the heart and soul to the Divine Presence (*hadrah*) and Light (*nur*). There is no doubt that the repetition of the actions and duties of worship and the attainment of the proper state of consciousness require good character and proper behavior. We call this pattern appropriate obedience.

Adhering to obedience and refraining from disobedience are among the most important disciplines which enable the self to be prepared to take on what is suitable for it of knowledge and the states of knowledge of Allah, which is the desired goal.

The greatest of worldly activities is connected with teaching and guidance. After that comes those related to the preservation of the physical body, then those related to the preservation of one's livelihood and wealth. Thus the stages of obedience and disobedience should primarily correspond directly to one's knowledge of Allah, then secondarily to the knowledge of whatever is related to the life of the soul, and finally to whatever is related to one's way of life by which the life of the soul is able to continue.

The first type of disobedience refers to whatever hinders one from attaining the knowledge of Allah and the knowledge of His Messenger. This is unbelief and rejection (*kufr*), and no error is worse than denial and rejection of Reality. The veil, which lies between man and Allah, is illusion and ignorance while the means for drawing one close to Allah is knowledge. The deeper the knowledge and understanding one attains of the Attributes of Allah, His Actions, His Books, His Messenger, and the Last Day, the closer one is to enlightenment.

Ignorance distorts the truths of faith, inducing in one a false sense of security and despair of His Mercy. He who has a deep and profound knowledge of Allah will never assume he is untouched by Allah's ways, nor will he ever despair of Allah's Mercy.

The second type of disobedience relates to destroying the self because its continued existence is what stands in the way of attaining this profound knowledge. This major deviation is referred to as 'the cutting off of the way'. Among other similar actions are adultery and homosexuality because these actions result in confusion concerning lineage and inheritance and natural generations are broken off. It is for these reasons that adultery and homosexuality are not permitted.

The third type of disobedience is with reference to livelihood and behavior. It is not permitted to rule over a people while subjecting them to oppression, tyranny, theft, or other abuses. Protection of the people is actually protection of their souls. Major abuses, which fall into this category, are theft, bearing false testimony, bribery, usury, taking interest, and any act in which there is no mutual agreement.

The purpose of the shari`ah is to make the path to Allah smooth. The acts of devotion represent the journey of the seeker to Allah. The obligatory actions actually draw all who perform them towards Allah, to the expectation of His Generosity, to the all inclusiveness of His Kindness and to the pervasiveness of His Mercy. If He had left the matter up to individuals without them having an understanding of the law they would have fought, argued, and disagreed, which would have distracted them from the Journey to the Creator. Such actions would only bring them to destruction.

The divine shari`ah, then, came with the necessary instructions concerning acts of devotion and all mankind's transactions with his surroundings. It likewise established retribution to prevent the destruction of the soul and body. It provides for the proper punishment of crime to prevent harm to property and person and confusion over the matter of paternity or genealogy, which could affect successful reproduction of the species. The remainder of the shari`ah deals with the struggle (*jihad*) against those who reject the Truth, or the struggle against those who transgress,

or other special situations. Its purpose is to protect the limits which Allah has set and revealed to the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds.

THE REMEDY FOR THE SELF

In the same way that a doctor or physician treats the body, the Prophets, masters, and gnostic teachers are the physicians of the self. Thus, just as the medical doctor knows the method of removing an illness by way of treatment and medication, the physicians of the self know how to recognize and remove the causes of illnesses related to the self. In the same way that a person who is physically sick should not object to what has been given to him by his physician, it is not correct for the sick self to object to the guidance and instruction received from a spiritual teacher or master. This objection will only delay or prevent the remedy from taking effect and the illness will only worsen. The objections of the person whose self is ill may cause his teacher to become discontented and discontinue his remedy. A knowledgeable jeweler cannot place a precious necklace around the neck of a swine. This is the meaning of Allah's words:

...in their hearts there is an illness and Allah increases them in illness... (Qur'an 2:10)

THE PROPELLING FORCES OF THE SELF

The basis of the power and strength of the self are the forces of attraction (manifesting as desires) and repulsion (often manifesting as anger). These two forces are behind every agitation and attachment and the constant disturbance that results. Once these energy drives are brought under control, however, these natural forces will assist one along the spiritual path to the final goal of awakening to the original source and purpose behind life's forces.

The following characteristics spring from the force of repulsion or anger: cowardliness, pride, fear, lack of determination, weakness of spirit, rage, and other similar traits. Likewise, the following traits originate from attraction or desire: love of the world, greed, avarice, miserliness, treachery, and the like. However, when these two forces of anger and desire are brought under control and the heart is brought in line with its true original nature, then the force of anger will

lead to bravery, spiritual strength, determination, forbearance, steadfastness, and the like. When the force of desire is harnessed it produces kindness, modesty, patience, generosity, contentment, reverence, restraint, and so on.

The main objective, then, is to know the nature of the self, guarding over it with vigilance, holding it to account and treating it with the proper remedies. Progress in directing one's conduct and actions towards noble traits will result in greater awareness of the self and awakening to ever-increasing insights and knowledges.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND ITS REFINEMENT

Allah says in the Qur'an:

...Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it.
(Qur'an 91:8)

It is usual that the self will not follow reasoning but will instead follow its own desires and whims opening itself to the disruptive influences of anger, which originally was given to man to protect himself from harm. The lowest level of the self, the commanding self (*al-nafs al-ammarah*) falls prey to these two forces from which it finds no rest.

Once the self is disciplined and subdued it begins to see these two forces as attributes of divine wisdom to be used for progressing through the various stages of refined behavior and conduct. When the self is groomed and purified success on the path of *tawhid* (Divine Unity) is assured as Allah declares:

He will be successful who purifies it, (Qur'an 91:9)

If the self is not watched and disciplined it becomes as dangerous and unpredictable as a wild beast. Otherwise, the self is the means by which one makes the spiritual journey and crosses over the desert of darkness onto the plain of light and tranquility. The self then is the means by which one fails and perishes, or is elevated and liberated from the veils of this transient world.

It is related that the Messenger of Allah said:

The human form is the greatest gift of Allah in His creation. It is the Book which He has inscribed with His own hand, it is the totality of all of the forms of the universe, it is the sum total of the preserved tablets [cf. Qur'an 85:22], it is the testimony to all that is unseen, it is the Straight Path to all spiritual knowledge, it is the bridge which is extended between the Garden and the Fire and the banner of Unity, it is the basis of all knowledges and the foundation of the knowledge of the Hereafter.⁸

As we have explained, the purpose of all divinely revealed laws which follow the intended natural patterns of life are to direct man towards Divine Light, and to enable him to know the joy of contented submission, and to ascend from the degradation of the self to the summit of perfection in abandonment. It saves him from falling into the gross material realms and transports him to the realms of exalted spiritual illumination. All of this leads to the knowledge of Allah through His Attributes, and the belief in His Angels, His Messengers, His Books, and the Last Day. And all this will lead to the primal and natural state of beingness.

When man acts after having attained this profound spiritual knowledge, the Prophet's words take on real significance:

Whoever knows his self knows his Lord.

If one does not know the nature of the lower self and bring it to complete and utter servitude before Allah, then one knows neither one's self nor one's Lord. As long as he does not know his Lord as his Lord and Master, then he will likewise never know the nature of his Lord or the nature of his own self. By witnessing one's meanness, for example, one seeks the cure in Divine Generosity. By witnessing one's weakness one seeks cover under Divine Power. By recognizing one's impatience, one seeks refuge in Allah's infinite patience. By realizing how base the self is,

⁸ Mulla Hadi Sabzivari (1295 AH/1878 CE), in his book *Hidayat al-Talibin* ('Guidance of the Seekers').

one realizes how glorious Allah is. Once the lower nature of the slave is constantly witnessed, then the Lord's High State can be constantly contemplated.

The meaning of the saying of the Prophet: 'This world is the sowing field of the Hereafter', is that the reason behind Creation and the purpose of the shari`ah is to know and be with Allah. The evolution of the self depends upon the realization that its nature is base and humble and that it is completely subjugated to worldly existence, and that it cannot progress from imperfection to full realization without movement, time, and the proper blend of material matter.

It is related that the Prophet said:

The worst of your enemies is your own self within you.⁹

He also said:

The self is the greatest of idols.

Likewise:

I take refuge in Allah from subtle association [*shirk*: seeing other than Allah].

The seeker on this path will come to recognize the deep meanings of these traditions only after self-knowledge and transcendence of his lower nature.

The hidden ailments of the self cannot be treated except by continuous vigil over it and seeking the help of a master who has had experience in these matters and has succeeded. Upon examining the ailments of the self, we find that there are those which are so subtle and hidden that they exert their influence upon the seeker without his knowledge. Among the most important of these are caprice and pride in their various forms. It is related that Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq said:

⁹ From *Risalat al-Sayr wa al-Suluk* ('Treatise on the Journey and the [Appropriate] Conduct'), by Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-`Ulum.

Whoever allows pride to enter within him shall perish.

The Prophet said:

There are three things that will bring destruction: greed to which one submits, a desire which is followed, and a man's pride in himself.

Imam `Ali said:

Whoever does not take his own self to account daily is not one of us. Thus if he does good then he praises Allah, and if he commits evil he seeks Allah's forgiveness.

The basis of hidden *shirk* is when a man sees his self and says 'I' and thus remains continuously lost in the illusion of his own independent existence. The words of the testimony of faith (*shahadah*), '*La ilaha illa Allah*' (there is no deity but Allah) in this instance will remain unrealized. The Prophet said:

There is nothing between them and their Lord, which prevents them from seeing Him but the veil of pride.

THE REALMS OF THE SELF

There are three realms in which the self interacts: the first is that of the senses, the second is of visions and insights with which one perceives the unseen and the spiritual regions, and the last realm is of reason or intellect (*`aql*), which exists for the purpose of comprehending the realm of Lordship and Power.

Allah created the realm of the senses, physical entities, form and material substance so that it might act as a simile representing the unseen world of the Hereafter (*akhirah*), and to further indicate the spiritual realities within the realm of reasoning. Thus the names are many and varied in their meanings yet one in their true essence, descending from the realm of reasoning and the realm of absolute Power (*Jabarut*), into the realm of spiritual form. From here, there is a movement to the realm of the senses, and the material realm. Just as the descent from the loftiest

beginnings is accomplished in this manner, so too does the return or ascent to the loftiest Truth also follow this pattern.

The senses, therefore, are like a stairway by which the seeker advances to the point of witnessing within the realm of reasoning. By knowing the nature of the senses it becomes easier for the seeker to withdraw and abstain from their influence in order to discover the world of meaning which lies behind them. Whoever does not have knowledge of Allah will not be able to seek Him out, nor will he be inclined to do so. Similarly, whoever does not know the nature of the world and the baseness of its origins will be unable to reject it and go beyond. For this reason the men of knowledge and wisdom have concerned themselves with the study of the material realm and the conditions of the senses in order to proceed from them to what lies further ahead.

The knowledge of the material world and its shortcomings is the beginning of the knowledge of the spiritual realm and its wealth. It is said that as long as the self remains within this world it is like a passenger aboard a ship; that is, the self utilizes the body to make the journey from one world to the next, witnessing and experiencing various conditions over the seas until it reaches the shore of peace and awakening. The ship (the body) has fulfilled its duty when it brings the self to its goal and returns it to its original elements.

The men of knowledge have warned of laxity and frivolity or of giving in to ever-increasing sensual desires and thereby being deceived by one's own emotions and whims. Allah says:

KNOW that the life of this world is but a play and a passing delight,
and a beautiful show, and [the cause of] your boastful vying with one
another, and [of your] greed for more and more riches and children.
Its parable is that of [life-giving] rain: the herbage which it causes
to grow delights the tillers of the soil; but then it withers, and
you can see it turn yellow; and in the end it crumbles into dust....
(Qur'an 57:20)

The material realm has been created so that one may come to know what lies beyond it in the spiritual realm. The former acts as an allegory for one who has not witnessed the latter. For this reason we find that men of knowledge encourage the seeker to hasten in his quest for

annihilation of the self and to make use of this human body before the termination of its allotted time.

It is said that death represents the manifestation of Allah before the Moses of the heart. Thus the ‘mountain’ of the body disintegrates because it belongs to the material realm, and He becomes manifest before the self within the spiritual realm after the gross material has been stripped from it. This world and the next are opposites which, therefore, cannot manifest together or co-exist. The self is disinclined to physical death due to its fear of annihilation and non-existence because it has a goal and a purpose, which is to seek its state of eternity in the Hereafter and to reach the realm of non-time and non-space. By its very nature the self loves existence and abhors and fears non-existence.

Concerning this al-Razi has said:

Death of the body in this physical existence is life to the soul in the existence of the Hereafter. The soul has a natural inclination toward the transition into the realm of the Hereafter. Its disinclination is because the beginning of the growth of the soul occurs simultaneously with the physical growth of the body and the physical senses predominate over the soul as long as the connection between the body and the soul remains. Because of this connection the soul experiences pain and injury by whatever it is that causes pain and injury to the body. Everything which gives contentment and ease to the body is derived from health and favorable physical circumstances.¹⁰

There is also another reason for the self’s disinclination towards death and its desire to preserve the body. It is that the body may serve as a vehicle by which the soul comes to know the Hereafter, and thus realize its own potential perfection. Thus sensory perceptions such as pain and fear are experienced by the animal self to encourage the self to care for the body. The body, in essence, has no feelings and no potential of its own that could prevent or ward off harm. If it were not for the existence of pain and fear within the self, it would have neglected the body and

¹⁰ Abu `Ali Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ya`qub al-Razi, d.421 AH/1088 CE in *Tahdhib al- Akhlaq wa Ta`thir al-A`raq*.

left it to perish before it had fulfilled its mission, which is to nourish and awaken the self, to rise from the physical to the spiritual.

THE BEGINNING AND THE RETURN

The word ‘beginning’ here is considered to mean the original natural state of the human being in which it was created by Allah. The word ‘return’ here signifies its return to that original state. Allah has said in the Qur’an:

The nature made by Allah in which He has made man; there is no altering of Allah’s creation. (Qur’an 30:30)

I have created from before when you were nothing. (Qur’an 19:9)

The original natural state (*fitrah*) was non-existent before Reality brought it into existence. There was Allah and there was nothing else with Him. That is to say, in the beginning Allah brought creation into existence from complete non-existence and in the end He will take it from the realm of this apparent existence and return it to non-existence (in terms of time and space). Thus, the end is a return to the beginning, and the goal we hope to reach was already present at our starting point, as Allah says:

As We began the creation thus will We cause it to return. (Qur’an 21:104)

The first state of existence for man was the garden in which Adam and Eve resided. The next stage was the fall from the paradise ‘state’ into this world of duality, of opposites, of time and space. The next state after this worldly existence is annihilation in the Oneness, which is the paradise of the people of Unity. Allah has said:

O tranquil Soul... enter My paradise, (Qur’an 89:27-30)

To come from the state of paradise into this world is to experience imperfection and constant change. The departure from this world to paradise is to go from imperfection to perfection and to

return to one's natural, originally desired state of unitive bliss. This represents the Return (*mi`ad*) of creation and its ascent to the Creator. The beginning is from Him and the end is with Him. And He is the First and He is the Last.

The physical world belongs to the material realm of the senses and the Hereafter belongs to the realm of meaning and attributes which is not perceived by the senses, for it lies behind the physical world. The Hereafter is perceived through reasoning, and insight is gained through reflection.

The true nature of man combines these three realms. If worldly attachments and sensual pleasures are predominant then he suffers disappointment and insecurity because worldly pleasures do not last. Sensual pleasures are symbolic and represent a minute example of a lasting attribute in another zone of existence. Thus, whoever is attached to or desires a state that by its very nature is transient and false, he will never be able to maintain the elusive situation and thus will only fail and be disillusioned. When reasoning predominates and one acts according to the spiritual path one refrains from anything that would deflect him from it. In this context Allah has said:

For the likes of this let those who would act, act. (Qur'an 37:61)

Let those who would compete, compete in this. (Qur'an 83:26)

The entanglement of the self with the external senses and powers of arousal prevent it from witnessing the inner realities. Those realities are much brighter and stronger and more durable than the outer ones, which are, perceived by way of the sense organs in the material world. The men of spiritual knowledge are those who have arrived, through the strength of certainty, at the perception of truths by way of reasoning and insights. The lifting of the veil at the time of death will not increase them in certainty and knowledge except in clarity and freedom.

WITHDRAWAL AND DRAWING NEAR

It is related in a divinely revealed tradition (*hadith qudsi*) from the Prophet that Allah said:

My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved than by way of the obligations which I have ordained for him. He may draw near to Me with additional actions (*nawafil*) if I love him. If I love him I become his hearing by which he hears and the sight by which he sees. I become the tongue by which he speaks and his hand with which he grasps. If he asks Me in prayer I will answer him, and if he beseeches Me I will grant it to him.

Drawing near to Allah is always accompanied by withdrawal of oneself from all else. Pre-eminent among the things which one turns to other than Allah is the self itself and its various spheres of influence, which are:

1. The sphere of the senses, that is, the material realm of nature.
2. The sphere of emotions and the realms of allegory and symbolism.
3. The sphere of reason and true essence; this realm is void of matter and form.

The true worshipper bypasses these three spheres in his prostration in imitation of the Prophet, about whom it has been related that once, in the middle of the month of Sha‘ban, during his customary prostration he said: ‘My black, my subtle, and my white are in prostration before you’.

The most important means used to withdraw from the world and to draw near to Allah is through the various forms of worship (*‘ibadah*), as Allah mentions;

And remember the name of your Lord and withdraw yourself and completely devote yourself to Him. (Qur’an 73:8)

When Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq was asked which was the best action that would draw one near to the Lord, he replied:

I know of nothing after knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) which is better than *salat*. Have you not seen that the righteous servant (of Allah), ‘Isa bin Maryam, said (in the Qur’an), “...and He admonished me to perform

salat and (to pay) the zakat as long as I remain alive. [Qur'an 19:31]?"

Thus the utmost in nearness and spiritual knowledge is the condition of the Master which Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq described, as it is related in the book, 'The Lantern of the Path':

His body is within the creation and his heart is with Allah. If his heart should become distracted from Allah for one instant it would perish because of its longing for Him. The Master is the guardian of Allah's Trust, the treasure house of His Secrets, the mine of His Light, the guide to His Mercy over His creation, the storehouse of His Knowledge, and the scales of His Abundance and Justice. He has become annihilated from the creation, desire, and the world and has no companion but Allah, no speech, no signs of indications, no self except in Allah, for Allah, from Allah, with Allah.

THE JOURNEY TO ALLAH

The soul of man is the means by which Allah has selected for him to ascend and return to His Divine Essence. Mulla Sadra described the stages of this journey of ascent, saying:

Know that the seeker among the masters and the 'awliya' has four journeys. The first journey is from Creation to the Truth. The second is the journey by Truth in Truth. The third journey is directly opposite to the first because it is from Truth to Creation by way of Truth. The fourth journey is the opposite of the second in that it is by Truth within Creation.

The First Journey is completed by the lifting of the veils of tranquility, which are connected with the self, as well as the lifting of the veils of illumination, which are connected with the heart and the soul. This is the ascension from the station of the self to the heart and to the soul; then one proceeds onward to the Highest Goal. The realms of the self, the heart, and the soul have within them veils that lie between the seeker and Divine Truth, so one must pass through all of these obstacles. After passing through these realms, the seeker reaches the station of spiritual knowledge and begins the second

journey of annihilation into the Names and Attributes of Allah so that he embodies the words: ...thus through Him (Allah) one hears and by Him one sees and by Him one walks and by His hand one grasps...¹¹

The First Journey, then, consists of traversing the material regions, the spiritual realms, and arriving at the realm of Essence. For this reason we find that the majority of the difficulties and pain which the seeker encounters occur within the first journey.

There are three stations in the Second Journey. The first is the station of the Innermost Secret, which is the Station of Annihilation into the Essence. The second station is referred to as the 'hidden one' and it is the Station of Annihilation into the Attributes and Names of Allah. The third is the Station of Utmost Abundance, which is Annihilation into the Essence and the Attributes. Describing this further Mulla Sadra has written:

If one wished, the secret of the annihilation of one's own essence could be described as being the end of the First Journey and the beginning of the Second Journey. The term 'Hidden' here, refers to annihilation within Divine Power, while the term 'Utmost Abundance' refers to the annihilation of both of these annihilations and completes the cycle of Perfection. The Second Journey is likewise completed, its annihilation perfected, and one begins the Third Journey.

Al-Hakim Mirza Hasan Nuri has further explained Mulla Sadra's meaning, saying that as long as man does not traverse the practical and theoretical Path of the Master, he will continue to see multiplicity and remain unaware of, and unable to see, Oneness. Multiplicity is the veil which conceals Unity. Multiplicity gradually begins to vanish when the seeker begins his search for the cause rather than the effect and to search for the Creator rather than what has been created. The seeker comes to the point where he does not see any duality or multiplicity and witnesses nothing but the One Ultimate Reality, the effulgent Truth. This condition is attained when Oneness cloaks all forms of multiplicity within its own light. At this stage the journey is from the creation to the Truth, from multiplicity to Oneness.

¹¹ In *Al-Hikam al-Muta`aliyah fi Asfar al-'Aqliyah al-Arba`ah*.

After arrival at the realm of Oneness and the vanishing of multiplicity, and after discerning the True Essence within the Names, Attributes and works from one level to the next, one is said to have completed the Second Journey, 'in Truth, by Truth'. Concerning this Mulla Sadra has said:

The words 'in Truth' refer to the journey within the Attributes of Allah, His Names, and His special traits. 'By Truth' refers to when the seeker has realized the true essence of Truth and has removed any sense of 'I-ness' from himself and likewise the illusion of all multiplicity. It is then that he realizes the essence of Allah, His Names, and His Attributes.

The Second Journey is the traversing of the Spiritual realms where one witnesses the Sublime Beauty of Oneness within its manifestations in the universe. Here the heart of the seeker is opened and made aware of Oneness within multiplicity and multiplicity within Oneness. He then stands between the two stations in that he has joined the two opposites. Thus, he is qualified to give guidance to sincere seekers.

The Third Journey is from Truth towards Creation 'by means of the truth'. This is called the Station of Refinement of Behavior (*suluk*). It is the station of witnessing the Realms of Power (*jabarut*), the Spiritual Realms (*malakut*), and the Material Realm (*nasut* or *mulk*), and illumination by way of the knowledges from the Essence, from the Attributes and from Actions.

The Fourth Journey is 'by Truth' within Creation. This is the highest, most subtle, most complete, and most perfect of the stages discussed. The Master is himself veiled by the multiplicity of creation while he is simultaneously immersed within Oneness.

The four stages resemble the ritual of pilgrimage in Islam: the first, going towards the cave – `Arafah; the second, being in `Arafah with Truth, by Truth; the third, returning, testing one's *suluk* by sacrifice; and the fourth, returning to Creation.

The prayer of Shaykh `Abd al-Salam Ibn al-Mashish, the well known North African gnostic, is an example of a prayer made by a master who has reached the highest stage:

O Allah! Let me be immersed within the Sea of Oneness, deliver me from the mires of *tawhid*, and drown me in the sea of Unity until I see nothing, hear nothing, perceive nothing, feel nothing except through it. Make the Greatest Veil of my soul and its spirit the secret of my reality and its reality the sum total of my existence, by way of the confirmation of the Primal Truth.

The Master al-Sabziwari has discussed the journey to Allah and added that the journey consists of focusing and directing the heart to Divine Reality¹². The four journeys he mentions are: The first journey is ‘to Allah’ from the regions of the self until one arrives at the clear horizons, which are the furthest extremity of the station of the Heart and the beginning of the heavenly manifestations. The second is the journey ‘in Allah’ by merging with His Attributes and realizing His Names, then travelling to the ‘loftiest horizons’¹³ and the furthestmost extreme of Unified Oneness (*Wahdaniyah*). The third journey is the progression onward to pure gatheredness and Absolute Oneness (*al-Hadrah al-Wahdaniyah*). This is the station of ‘two bows’ length’¹⁴ as long as duality continues to exist. When it is lifted it then becomes the station of ‘or closer’¹⁵, which is the furthestmost extreme of the station of nearness. The fourth is the Journey ‘by Allah’ the station of eternity (*baqa*’) which occurs after annihilation (*fana*’) and is the differentiation after unification.

It is inevitable that at times, the sincere seeker will experience states in which the meanings behind these journeys will be reflected to him and he will perceive them inwardly. However, a state (*hal*) or a momentary spiritual illumination (*ishraq*) is different from a station (*maqam*), the latter being when the seeker is firmly established within this condition and is thus able to remain steadfast on the Path of the Return to the Divine Essence whence he originally came.

¹² In *Risalat al Say`wa at Suluk*.

¹³ Qur’an 15:7.

¹⁴ Qur’an 53:9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

Revelation differs from inspiration. True inspirations are reflections of the prophetic revelations. Those who are following in the footsteps of the prophets and seek insights and inward inspirations must maintain outward precaution and acceptance of the revealed laws of Islam. The world of the unseen opens up to those who live in harmony with the material and seen world. This can happen when the primal and natural codes are adhered to. These are the Prophetic laws and the *Din*.

The word *wahy*, which we translate as ‘revelation’, literally means ‘a writing, a mission, an inspiration, or words which are hidden and which originate from other than man himself’. Used as a verb, *waha* means ‘to reveal to someone’, or ‘to show, indicate or speak to someone by utterances which are hidden from others’. The word *ilham*, which we translate as ‘inspiration,’ has the tri-literal Arabic root of *lahima* and means ‘to swallow or devour something’. The fourth form of the verb, which is the corresponding verbal form of the verbal noun, *ilham*, carries the meaning that something is placed within the heart of man by Allah, as if it were cast into his soul and he was consumed by it.

The means used for conveying an inspiration or *ilham* is an angelic power or force which brings spiritual knowledge and everything praiseworthy for the soul, without the interference of any lowly desires.

‘Whispering’ (*waswas*) refers to thoughts, ideas, or concepts, which confuse the heart causing misfortune, grief, or any condemnable negative effect. Thus whispering is the foundation of false notions and corrupt ideas, including one’s baseless fears of poverty, ill-health, or the fear of some imagined disaster which may befall one, as well as all reprehensible thoughts. Whispering is brought on by a satanic voice, which is able to afflict the self because of one’s inattentiveness or weakness or distraction.

The way these inspirations and the inner illuminations, which spring from them, are made manifest in subtle ways and often not very clear, such as during sleep and after the material and sensual veils have been lifted from the self. Inspirations occur during waking consciousness

when Allah, through His hidden and subtle kindness, removes the veils and wonders from the realm of the unseen and illuminates the heart like a sudden flash of lightning.

Revelation, on the other hand, is similar to inspiration, except that it differs in regard to the strength of its clarity and the fact that the angel who has been sent with it is also witnessed. As Allah says:

It is not for man to be spoken to by Allah except by way of a revelation (*wahy*) or from behind a veil or by way of a messenger whom He sends. (Qur'an 42:51)

The point here is that knowledge and insight comes upon the heart in various ways, by way of revelation and inspiration, by way of messengers and teachers, Revelation, in particular, is transmitted by the angels. It is related from the Imams that revelations were received by messengers (*rusul*) while in a waking state and that the remainder of the prophets (*anbiya'*) received them while asleep.

The direct and inward receiving of knowledge without the existence of any external agent is explained by the fact that man's soul has the capacity to perceive the nature of phenomena as well as its original reality. This reality is veiled, however, because of man's lack of preparation to accept these illuminations and knowledges.

The human soul is like a mirror that is placed in front of the mirror of primal reasoning, or the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuz*), which contains all that has been decreed by Allah until the Day of Resurrection. Thus, the real essence of knowledge is manifest in this mirror which combines all occurrences. The reflection of this essence is seen in the mirror of the soul which is similar to the image of a form seen in a large mirror that is reflected in a mirror facing it, while between the two mirrors is the veil of the self. This veil may differ in thickness, texture, or delicateness, depending on the state and stations of the person and his closeness to his Lord.

When this veil is lifted the inner vision or insight is opened. In Arabic, this insight is referred to as *basirah*. It is by means of this inner vision that the soul witnesses what is inscribed upon the Preserved Tablet.¹⁶ The ease by which the veil is lifted is in proportion to the degree of readiness of the soul, its total submission and unconditional faith, the purity of the heart, and the receptivity to light by the mirror of the intellect and reasoning.

Some scholars are primarily concerned with acquiring outer knowledge and conduct without regard for the states of the heart or the struggle to eliminate reprehensible qualities or attachments. This is the basic difference between the religious scholar and the spiritual master with regard to Divine Knowledge. Scholars prefer to occupy themselves with learning to bring themselves closer to Allah. The seeker of gnosis, on the other hand, severs his attachments to this creation so that Allah may overwhelm his heart and bring about its unfolding through spiritual openings, by removing the Veil from it through the subtle generosity of His Mercy.

There is no doubt that the seeker who uses his intellect will have a balanced approach to acquiring knowledge through study, and to the struggle against the self, as well as to the perfection of the heart. Thus he will take from the master and follow in the footsteps of the Prophets and those to whom these matters have been unveiled, those who are abstinent and have turned to Allah. For whoever turns to Allah, Allah surely has already turned to him.

The sincere seeker applies himself honestly and wholeheartedly in a balanced way through study, following instruction and struggling against the lower self towards a greater total awareness and a purer state of beingness. Following in the prophetic footsteps and maintaining strong connection with enlightened beings increases one's constant focus on the higher objective by constriction and abstention from distractions and other pitfalls. He who belongs to Allah, Allah will be his.

¹⁶ Qur'an 18:22.

CHAPTER TWO: The Roots of Faith

THE FOUNDATION OF WORSHIP (*IBADAH*)

Living faith is the key to awakened and enlightened existence. It begins with questioning the meaning and purpose of life. Anyone who seriously reflects upon the ever-changing experiences and quests in this world will conclude that all human beings seek the state of knowledge that will always give them reliable and sure guidance. The physical, material world is forever in flux and change and yet we continually seek balance and equilibrium.

Faith begins as a notion and ends up with access to the Divine Ocean. The price for this journey is sincerity, commitment, perseverance and total and utter reliance upon Allah. To begin with faith is a useful idea. With increased awareness and appropriate actions one ascends through stages whereby one experiences 'living faith', where the seen and unseen meet in a perfect fit. Divine Justice begins to be apparent and the faithful person comes to live with insight and inner contentment.

The efforts of the Prophets, the Imams and the Masters in their instruction of the people were directed at perfecting the knowledge of the fundamentals or Roots (*usul*)¹ and the Branches of Faith (*furu`*)² and at the perfection of both knowledge and action. It has been said that all of Allah's commandments and prohibitions are contained within two phrases of the Prophet's:

...reverence for Allah's command and compassion for Allah's creation...

Needless to say, the burden of the Prophets, the Messengers and the Masters differs from the burden of the remainder of creation. Allah has said to His Prophet:

¹ *Usul al-Din*: unity (*tawhid*), justice (*`adl*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), imamate (*imamah*), judgment that takes place at the return (*al-mi`ad*).

² *Furu` al-din*: prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), pilgrimage (*hajj*), obligatory tax (*zakat*), and striving in the way of Allah (*jihad*) and enjoining good and forbidding evil (*amr bi'l ma'ruf wa'n-nahy `an al-munkar*).

So, be steadfast as you have been commanded. (Qur'an 11:112)

With regards to this the Prophet said:

Surah Hud [chapter 11 of the Qur'an] has caused my hair to turn grey.

By this verse we are also made aware of the value of the Prophets and their position before Allah as well as their high position of honor in relation to men.

The responsibilities of men differ in correlation to their status; however, this is not so with regards to the Roots of Faith. The Roots of Faith are not limited to humanity alone, but rather include the entirety of creation. All creatures and existing beings, be they high or low, are in search of perfection. Allah says:

There is no beast upon the earth nor any bird that flies on its two wings but that there are nations like unto them; We have left nothing from the Book; then they will be gathered together unto their Lord.
(Qur'an 6:38)

As for acts of devotion, it is as Allah says:

I have not created the Jinn or Humankind save that they worship [Me].
(Qur'an 51:56)

From this we see that the soul of man, as well as his entire body, is in prostration and is led by Allah's command, obedient to His regulations. This is the true *salat*, the spiritual prostration, glorification and remembrance. Likewise, it must be seen that there is a *salat* for every entity in existence as well as a form of glorification (*tasbih*) and a prostration. It may be said that every entity in existence has its own 'life' and level of spiritual awareness. Real life relates to the knowledge of Allah, which is possessed by everything in existence according to the rule, which Allah has established:

Surely if you would ask them who created the heavens and the earth, their reply would be "Allah". (Qur'an 31:25)

Everything remembers and affirms Allah's Divinity and His Oneness:

There is nothing that does not glorify His praises. (Qur'an 17:44)

This is also an indication of the fact that spiritual awareness comes before glorification, in that to glorify Allah without awareness of Him is impossible. Based upon what has been said previously, we know that existence is one cycle revolving between the lover and the Beloved, between the knower and the Known, the seeker and the Sought, as He says:

Thus Allah will bring forth a people whom He loves and who love Him.
(Qur'an 5:54)

Likewise, in a *hadith qudsi*, He says:

I was a hidden treasure and I loved to become known.

The True Beloved is Allah alone and the lover is His creation. Each created entity has a unique direction in the journey to His Presence. The goal of all is the Eternal One, free of any multiplicity. It has been said:

Allah is not loved but by Allah, Allah is not known but by Allah, Allah is not remembered but by Allah, and there is nothing true in existence but Allah, His Names, His Attributes and His Works, Thus, everything is Him, by Him, from Him, and to Him.

As He says:

He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden and He is the Knower of all things. (Qur'an 57:3)

We can say that the two potentials of knowledge and action are represented by the Roots and the Branches of the Faith. The completion of the Roots of the Faith is accomplished by the purification of the inward and the perfection of faith, while the purpose of the Branches is to purify the outward and bring about the perfection of all one's actions.

It is not possible to cleanse the inner totally from the impurities except by way of sound belief in and knowledge of Unity, Justice, Prophethood, Imamate, and the Return to Allah for Judgment. Cleansing the body of impurities and uncleanness is likewise not possible except by way of the five branches of faith: prayer, fasting, payment of the obligatory tax, the pilgrimage, and striving in the way of Allah. As Imam `Ali has said:

Allah has made faith based on knowledge (*iman*) obligatory to cleanse oneself of idolatry, [He has made] prayer to remove pride, and the obligatory tax as a source for sustenance. He has made fasting as an affliction to purify men, the pilgrimage to bring one close to the Islamic way of life, and struggle in the way of Allah to strengthen Islam. He has made the command of goodness and the forbidding of evil as something which improves people's conduct and obstructs or reduces foolishness. He established the ties of kinship to increase the numbers, and retaliation to prevent the loss of blood. He has established punishments under the law to destroy what is not permitted, and has decreed the abandonment of drinking intoxicants as a protection for reasoning.

Anyone who desires to purify both the outer and the inner should follow both the roots and the branches, on any of the three levels: the shari`ah, the tariqah and the haqiqah. Whoever possesses true belief and perfected faith must adhere to the five roots, since it is essential that he believes in Unity in order to be cleansed of seeing other than Allah (*shirk*), and that he believes that Allah is the Just and Wise and that He does not condone acts which are reprehensible.

...and never does God do the least wrong to His creatures. (Qur'an 41:46)

The belief in Unity and Allah's Justice are dependent upon the existence of a Prophet and his demonstration of some form of miracle to confirm and verify their soundness. Therefore one must believe in the Prophet and Prophethood and, similarly, that Islam will not remain without a being who is devoid of error in order to preserve the shari`ah and carry out its principles with correct guidance and instruction, as it is expressed in Allah's words:

Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those who possess authority from among you. (Qur'an 4:59)

It was necessary for Allah to send the Prophets and Messengers and to maintain continuity in the existence of enlightened beings. Everything which proceeds from here is nothing other than an invitation to men to return to their Lord and to the correct guidance of the Straight Path on the Day of Resurrection, and to remind them of the promise and the promised time.

UNITY

Unity (*tawhid*) is the belief that there is no deity other than Allah, that He is One, without partner in His godhead and that there is nothing like Him in His Essential Attributes and no equal to Him in existence. Thus, He possesses knowledge unsurpassed, no one is equal to Him in His creation, and He has no peer. Allah says:

Say, O People of the Book come to a plain word between Us and you, that we will not worship other than Allah and we will not associate anything with Him, and we will not take others among us as Lords in place of Allah. (Qur'an 3:64)

He also says:

Your god is One God. (Qur'an 2:163)

This *tawhid* is what the Prophets and Messengers have declared from Adam until our Prophet Muhammad when he said:

I have been commanded to strive with the people until they say, "There is no deity but Allah".

Unity for the People of shari`ah

The scholars of shari`ah confirm with evidence and intellectual proofs that if there were in existence two independent gods, each would have been distinct from the other in essence. This

Unity of which we speak is the outward and obvious form of Unity which nullifies the outward form of idolatry. It is perfected by the utterance of the words '*La ilaha illa Allah*' (There is no deity but Allah). Upon doing so, one becomes aware of the Oneness of Allah as far as one is outwardly concerned; then one's outward and inward both are cleansed from the impurity of obvious idolatry, as Allah says:

Indeed the people of idolatry are unclean. (Qur'an 9:28)

This type of Unity is also called 'Proven Unity' because it is Unity, which has been confirmed by way of evidence and proof. It is also known as Intellectual Unity, because it is arrived at by way of reasoning and logic.

Unity for the People of Tariqah

After attaining the level of Unity which is expected on the level of shari`ah – obtained through intellectual evidence bringing one to the testimony that there is no deity but Allah, the One, the Only, and that there is nothing other than Him in existence – whoever believes in the Oneness of Allah will then turn his gaze away from the effects and causative factors and place his complete trust in Allah. He will surrender himself to Him totally and will be contented with Him; as Allah states;

Allah is contented with them and they are contented with Him. (Qur'an 5:119)

Likewise, He says;

And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him. (Qur'an 65:3)

Shaykh Al-Harawi (d. 481 AH/1088 CE) refers to the Unity of the Elect saying:

This is the Unity, which is confirmed by way of Reality itself. It is when regard for the various outward causes of phenomena is dropped, and one rises above intellectual disputes with their accompanying evidence. It is when one does not look for evidence of *tawhid*, nor

does he seek a reason for trust, nor a means for his salvation. He witnesses only the preponderance of Reality, by way of his judgment, knowledge and ability to discern things in the proper order of their significance.³

The difference between Unity for the people of shari`ah and Unity for the people of tariqah is that the former is achieved by way of intellectual knowledge and is associated with the general masses, while the latter is something that is witnessed and is associated with the elect. The former will bring about purification from obvious association, while the latter will purify one from the more subtle association, which is more difficult. Everyone who turns away from the realm of creation and sees the One Whose Existence is absolutely true and permanent will say: There is nothing in existence but Allah. Then he is a believer in Unity and a Lord; thus both his inner and outer will become cleansed from the impurity of hidden or subtle association, as Allah says:

And most of them do not believe in Allah, but rather they are people of association. (Qur'an 12:106)

One teacher has said:

Indeed, purification from obvious association and idolatry is easier than purification from subtle hidden association, in the same way as arriving at the Unity of Godhead is easier than arriving at the Unity of Existence. This is because the one who has hidden association considers himself a believer in the Oneness of Allah merely because of his acceptance of the fact that there is no deity but Allah, while he neglects the subtle association which lies concealed within his self and its perceptions and aspirations.

In the same vein, the Messenger of Allah mentioned the following:

The traces of association among my people are more hidden than a black ant crawling on a pitch-black stone in the midst of a dark night.

³ In the book *Manazil al-Sa`irin*.

He said this because the Prophet knew that some of his people would not be saved from it. It is known that the subtle hidden form of association is something which is peculiar to believers and Muslims, and not to the unbelievers and hypocrites because Allah has mentioned this subtle association in conjunction with the word faith based on knowledge (*iman*), which can only be applied to those in Islam:

And the majority of them do not have *iman* in Allah, but rather they are idolaters. (Qur'an 12:106)

The combination of outward association and faith with knowledge is impossible. The meaning here, then, could only be the subtle hidden form of association which the Qur'an refers to as '*hawa*', which carries the meanings of desire, lust, or worldly pursuits:

Have you not seen him that has taken his desire as his god, and Allah has made him err while having knowledge... (Qur'an 45:23)

It is one's desires that lead to hypocrisy, rejection of Reality, and various types of association. For this reason, it is said that, with the exception of Allah, desire is the greatest deity worshipped.

This form of Unity has its basis in trust, submission, contentment, and acquiring the courtesy and Attributes of Allah. This is considered to be the Unity of Attributes. The Unity of the Chosen Few, however, is based upon annihilation and complete obliteration into the Essence of Allah, traversing all of the stations and levels; hence the saying; '*Tawhid* is the dropping of anything extra.'

Unity for the People of Haqiqah

Those who have arrived at the levels of Unity for the people of shari`ah and tariqah are the ones who witness nothing in existence but Allah. They are aware of no reality other than Him because they see His Existence is True, while the existence of all else is merely a reflection or shadow and, therefore, subject to change, obliteration and destruction; as Allah has said:

Everything upon it (the earth) perishes and the Face of your Lord remains, the Possessor of Might and Generosity. (Qur'an 55:26-27)

This is what is meant by 'He Who Remains' (*al-Baqi*); that is, He remains within eternity. 'He who perishes' (*al-Fani*) means that the one with this attribute will not remain. It is for this reason that one finds that the Master will say that there is nothing in true existence but Allah, His Names, His Attributes and His Works, and thus all is Him, by Him, from Him and to Him. Allah indicates this when He says:

And wherever you turn then there is the Face of Allah. (Qur'an 2:115)

The word 'Face' refers to Allah's Essence: wherever you turn you will witness His Essence and His Existence because He surrounds all.

And Allah has surrounded all things. (Qur'an 4:126)

Three degrees of Unity have been described thus: the Knowledge of Certainty (*`Ilm al-Yaqin*); the Eye of Certainty (*`Ayn al-Yaqin*); the Truth of Certainty (*Haqq al-Yaqin*). They are also referred to by the terms '*Islam, Iman, and Ihsan*' or 'the Companions of the Left Hand, the Companions of the Right Hand, and the Near Ones Who Have Gone Before.' The Prophet referred to these three levels when he said:

This world is forbidden to the People of the Hereafter and the Hereafter is forbidden to the People of the World, but they are both forbidden to the People of Allah.

The first group mentioned in this tradition has reached the station of verification (*tahqiq*), the level of the Inward. They have witnessed Unity and by virtue of this have been counted among the People of the Hereafter. This is because they have gone beyond the Outward and arrived at the Inward; they have witnessed what they sought with their inner eye or insight (*basirah*).

Say: This is my way, I call to Allah by way of insight, I and those who follow me. (Qur'an 12:108)

The second group is at the station of emulation (*taqlid*). They follow someone else with knowledge. This is an Outward stage. These people are considered to be people of the world because they have not yet gone beyond it by virtue of their attachment to it and their love and desire for it – as the Prophet has said:

The love of the world is at the head of every wrong action.

The third group are those who have been annihilated, and they are classified as being the People of Allah because they have by-passed both the Outward and the Inward, and have arrived at their goal, the Ultimate Truth. They have witnessed Allah in His Light and with the tongue of their exalted state they have proclaimed: ‘Blessed is the One Who may not be reached except through Him!’ Their words concur with those of the Prophet who said:

I saw my Lord by my Lord, and I knew my Lord through my Lord.

Salman al-Farsi was a man who had attained this station, of whom the Prophet said:

Indeed the Garden longs for Salman more than Salman longs for the Garden.

The Garden is within the realm of the Hereafter, Salman was a man of Allah, and the men of Allah have gone beyond the Garden.

The Prophet has said:

The good actions of the righteous are on the level of the bad actions of the near ones.

The Prophet also indicated three types of Unity in his well-known supplication:

O Allah, I take refuge in Your Forgiveness from Your Chastisement, and I take refuge in Your Contentment from Your Anger, and I take refuge in You from You.

The first reference is to the Unity of Action, the second is to the Unity of Attributes and the third is to the Unity of Essence. There is no station above the Unity of Essence. It is attained only by those who have been granted a mighty portion, as the great master, Ibn `Arabi, has indicated in his book, *The Pearls or Bezels of Wisdom*:

If one has tasted this, one has tasted the utmost and there is nothing loftier to be attained by a created being. So, let not your soul desire or long for advancement beyond this degree for there is nothing beyond it save sheer non-existence.

JUSTICE

When Allah created man, He commanded him to assume certain responsibilities. It was, therefore, just after these responsibilities were given that He sent to man someone who would teach him about this responsibility and expound His Divine Law and indicate what would be beneficial to man in order to be correctly guided to the Path and to overcome ignorance and darkness. This is His justice (*`adl*).

Allah has bestowed (goodness) upon the people of faith when He sent to them a Messenger from among themselves who would recite to them His signs and purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom, even if they had previously been clearly misguided. (Qur'an 3:164)

In a *hadith qudsi*⁴ the following was said:

I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known so I created.

This process is referred to as 'favor' (*fadl*). It is favor in which the slave finds the closer he is to obedience and knowledge, the further he is from disobedience and ignorance. This process depends upon the faculty of reason, which is within our *fitrah* (innate nature). The freely chosen actions which one performs are either compatible with one's sense of reason or not. There is no

⁴ Sacred Tradition in which the Prophet quotes God.

doubt that some of our actions are contrary to our reason, like oppression, deceit, foolishness, and corruption, while others are in harmony with reason, like gratitude for kindness, returning something with which one had been entrusted, the repayment of a debt, and so on, all of which are quite obvious.

Justice for the People of Shari`ah

Justice in the eyes of the people of shari`ah is to say that Allah never performs any action which may be considered foul or mean, nor does He neglect or forget anything in creation. He is not an oppressor so this is not conceivable in His Decree, nor does He act unjustly in His Wisdom. He rewards those obedient to His ways and He punishes the disobedient. He does not require of His servants that which they do not have the power and ability to do and He does not punish them more than appropriate and needed. The phenomena of the world which issue forth from Him, even the creation of predatory animals, harmful plants, deadly poisons, whatever it may be, is considered to be good. All evils like oppression, meanness, and corruption, issue forth from other than Him, as He states:

And if they do something vulgar they said we found our fathers doing it and Allah has commanded us to do it. Say: Indeed Allah does not command abomination, do you attribute to Allah that which you know not? (Qur'an 7:28)

Allah also says:

Whatever reaches you of goodness is from Allah and whatever reaches you of evil is from yourselves. (Qur'an 4:79)

These two verses show that foul actions as well as good actions come from the slave; the latter, however, occur by way of Allah's guidance and one is granted success in them by Allah.

There is nothing, then, which would indicate oppression from Him or that wrong actions issue forth from Him. This is the meaning of justice in the eyes of the people of shari`ah, in accordance with Allah's words:

Whoever does good it is for his own self and whoever does evil it is against it, for your Lord is not an oppressor to His servants. (Qur'an 41:46)

Justice for the People of Tariqah

After they have become firmly established in their belief in the shari`ah, justice in their eyes is that Allah has given each human the means to accomplish his own perfection on the level of inherent truths, natural disposition and instinct, and various states and actions, to the extent demanded by justice and fair play, with neither injustice nor deviation, deficiency nor neglect. He is the Essence of Absolute Generosity, and when absolute generosity is given to those who are ready for it, it is given in the most perfect and complete manner. If it were not so we could not say He is the embodiment of absolute generosity, when He says:

And He gave you all you asked Him for. (Qur'an 14:34)

That is, He gave you everything you demanded in the eternal realm according to your ability and, readiness, without increase or decrease.

Say: "Nothing will reach us but that which Allah has written for us, He is our Master, so let the people of faith trust in Allah." (Qur'an 9:51)

This is a confirmation that whatever comes from Him is in accordance with the requirements of justice and wisdom, It is incumbent upon the slave to trust in Him and have confidence in His Actions and Words and to not turn to anyone else; as He states:

Is not Allah sufficient for His servant? (Qur'an 39:36)

And:

And whoever trusts in Allah He is sufficient unto him, indeed Allah carries out His commands. Allah has made a decree for all things. (Qur'an 65:3)

This is the station of trust, submission, and contentment, which in turn will bring about the mercy and contentment of one's Lord. Allah has indicated this contentment with His words:

Indeed, those who have faith and perform acts of goodness, they are the best of creation, their reward is with their Lord, gardens under which rivers flow, eternally therein forever, Allah is content with them and they are content with Him, that is for whoever fears his Lord. (Qur'an 98:7-8)

The *'awliya'* or friends of Allah who have attained the station of contentment, submission and trust, neither look to the past nor to the future. Attachment, desire or expectation regarding existence will only bring about insecurity, sadness and fear – sorrow for what has passed and anxiety for what is yet to come. Allah says the following concerning this:

Indeed the Friends of Allah will have no fear upon them nor will they be grieved. (Qur'an 10:62)

Meaning, they are free of anxiety and sorrow.

Imam `Ali stated the following:

I have found complete abstention from the world (*zuhd*) in two phrases of the Qur'an: "...in order that you not be saddened over what has passed you by and not be expectant for what will come to you." (Qur'an 57:23)

The Friends of Allah are always content and in balance whether in sadness or happiness. Ibn 'Abbas relates his experience with the Prophet who told him:

Be mindful of Allah and He will be mindful of you. Remember Allah and you will find Him before you. Go to Allah in times of wellbeing, and He will come to you in times of difficulties. If you ask of anyone, ask of Allah. If you seek help, seek help from Allah. The ink of the pen has already dried after having written what will be until the Day of Judgment. If all the creatures of creation wanted to render you some benefit, which Allah had not already decreed, they would be

incapable of it. If they wanted to harm you in any way, and Allah had not already decreed it, they would be incapable of doing so. Perform your actions for Allah in gratitude and certainty and know that there is much virtue in patience with something, which you dislike, that victory comes with patience, and that relief comes from hardship and with difficulty comes ease.

It is related that the great companion (of the Prophet) Jabir ibn `Abdullah al-Ansari was afflicted by old age and lameness in the last years of his life. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir visited him and inquired of his condition. Jabir replied:

I am in a state where I welcome old age over youth, sickness over health and death over life.

The Imam said:

As for me, if Allah should make me an old man, I would love old age. If He should make me a young man, I would love youth. If He should render me ill, I would love illness. If He should cure me, I would love the curing. If He should cause me to die, I would love death. If He should cause me to remain, I would love it also.

This station is attained through the knowledge that Allah knows one's condition and that Allah is just, as Allah Himself states:

Surely Allah does not wrong men in any way, but rather it is men who wrong themselves. (Qur'an 10:44)

Justice for the People of Haqiqah

The people of haqiqah have already been established in the knowledge that Allah is just in His works and words, and just in His giving and withholding. Thus, He must grant existence to every being according to whatever it is in itself, without imbalance or excess or deficiency. This is true justice, because it is the ordering of things in their proper sequence in time and space, the opposite of wrongdoing. Allah states in the Qur'an:

Each acts according to its own form [disposition]. (Qur'an 17:84)

That is, according to its outward form and inner potential and condition. For this reason He has said;

Thus Allah possesses the far-reaching proof and if He had willed, He would have guided you all completely. (Qur'an 6:149)

That is, Allah knows our intentions and actions and thus we experience His justice in our destiny. In this respect the Prophet has said:

Everyone is journeying to that which has been created for him.

It is said that [Prophet] Daud asked: 'O Lord, why did You create this creation?' Allah replied: 'For what they are,' that is, for what each one possesses of capacity and potential ability. Based upon this there is no room for any complaint, nor can one condemn Allah because He created one in this way or another. Allah would say: 'I have given you your existence only in proportion to your ability and your readiness, based upon your essence and your nature, not just merely from My own whims, because I am an Actor, a Doer, and you are the receiver of My action.' This ability is based upon one's primal existence in accordance with one's nature and potential ability; and thus Allah says:

He (Allah) will not be asked about what He has done while they will be asked. (Qur'an 21:23)

This indicates that His knowledge and wisdom supersedes theirs and that the All-Knowing, All-Wise, will not be questioned. However, they will be asked about their ignorance of the true meaning of reality and their ability to place things where they belong.

Allah is the All-Knowing, Perfect, and Wise Judge; it is not fitting that He should ever be asked about His actions, because He does nothing which is not in line with His Perfect Wisdom and Knowledge. Nothing, not even an atom in either the earth or in the vast expanse of the universe, is overlooked by Him; hence He says:

The Merciful taught the Qur'an, created man and taught him its explanation. (Qur'an 55:1-4)

And in another place He says:

Recite: And your Lord is the Most Generous, He who taught with the pen, Who taught man what he did not know. (Qur'an 96:3-5)

PROPHETHOOD

Prophethood (*nubuwwah*) occurs when a pure soul witnesses and experiences Divine Knowledge and discernment. This is accomplished by means of the Primal Intellect, which is sometimes referred to as '*Jibril*' (Gabriel) and is also referred to as the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Quddus*). The mission of prophethood is to bring that knowledge and discernment to those people who are their contemporaries or who live within the nation (*ummah*) of that Prophet or Messenger.

Shaykh Qadi Sa'id al-Qummi (d. 1103 AH/1691 CE) has written in his book, 'The Secrets of the Acts of Worship and the Reality of Prayer,'⁵ that the Messenger of Allah was commanded to propagate the laws and that he heard the voice and he witnessed an angel in addition to having spoken to him.

The position of the Prophet Muhammad was most glorious because a combination of three levels – nearness to Allah (*wilayah*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and prophetic mission (*risalah*) – were present in him. He was befriended by Allah and was close to Him, he was a Prophet, and finally he had been entrusted with a specific prophetic mission.

The Prophets who were referred to as the Possessors of Firm Resolution (*Ulu' al-'Azim*) were five in number: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. They were sent to all parts of the land, to both men and *jinn*, each one bringing with him a shari'ah which abrogated, restored,

⁵ *Asrar al-'Ibadat wa Haqiqat al-Salat*.

or expanded the previous one, and, as their name indicates, they were firm and patient in whatever afflictions they encountered.

Prophethood for the People of Shari`ah

When Allah created man He bestowed His Kindness upon him by sending prophets and messengers to inform them of what was necessary in the way of obedience to Him and to teach them what they should refrain from. The following are three main criteria for a prophet:

1. A prophet does not perform actions, which are in opposition to sound reason.
2. He calls human beings to Allah's obedience (i.e. that which is in harmony with nature), and warns them against disobedience (i.e. that which is discordant with nature).
3. After proclaiming his prophethood, he manifests a miracle, which confirms his position and is in harmony with his claim.

The prophet or messenger possesses behavior (*akhlaq*), conduct and qualities, which are godly. He is purified of all error, great or small, from the beginning of his life to the end, in order that men may trust him and believe him and have faith in his prophetic mission.

Prophethood for the People of Tariqah

After having firmly accepted the viewpoint of the prophethood as seen by the people of shari`ah, prophethood from this viewpoint represents the unveiling of the level of Reality and its secrets which are based upon Allah's Names, Acts and Attributes. A prophet is sent to mankind to guide men to their perfection in proportion to the level of their willingness and their innate ability.

Prophethood for the People of Haqiqah

This is to do with the absolute Divine Vicegerency. Its degrees accord with the stage of the person who is the manifestation of that Vicegerency. Prophethood in their eyes represents one who communicates the news of the Essence and Reality of Allah, His Attributes, His Names, His

Laws and His Commandments. The primal, true communication is accomplished through the Universal Soul to the differentiated self so that it may inform through the tongue of the intellect the reality, the Unified Essence, the Eternal Attributes, the Divine Names and the Mighty Laws. Thus, each Prophet is a manifestation of the prophethood of the Greatest Spirit. The prophethood of Muhammad differs from the others because its reality is the reality of the Greatest Spirit: within its form is manifest the reality of all the Attributes and Names of this Reality.

The Qur'an relates that Allah created man as vicegerent (*khalifah* [2:30]) over the earth to act as His representative, invested with full power and authority, whom He would call 'man' (*insan*) at his highest potential. He also created for him an inward aspect and an exterior form, which have enabled him to move freely in the physical as well as in the spiritual realm.

The essence of mankind's inner being is the Greatest Spirit already mentioned, the Primal Intellect being its chief minister, the Universal Self its treasurer, and what may be referred to as the Universal Nature its lieutenant. Humankind's outer form is part and parcel of the outward form of the universe, from the heavens to the earth and whatever is between them. This outward form of the universe represents the Greater Man, to which people of profound spiritual knowledge have referred, saying: 'The universe is a macrocosm of man.' When they say that man is a microcosm of the universe, they are referring to human beings on earth as well as to this vicegerent of Allah in the heavens and the earth, because he is a manifestation of Obvious Reality while the Lesser Man is a copy taken from the Greater Man, like a son from his father. The reality of his inner being consists of the differentiated soul and the natural self. As for his exterior, it is a copy taken from the universe: within it are found the various components of the universe, both subtle and gross.

IMAMATE

The Imamate or successorship (*imamah*) is the leadership of the Islamic way of life, which involves encouraging people to preserve their spiritual and worldly interests as well as to restrain themselves from actions which would be harmful to these interests. Successorship is therefore necessary from the standpoint of reason, as well as from that of shari'ah, just as Prophethood and Islam are necessary for man by virtue of his very nature.

According to reason, people need a leader (*imam*) who possesses knowledge which places him above error, who will preserve the laws of the shari`ah for them, who will direct them regarding its provisions, and who will establish the limits prescribed by the Islamic way of life. This is in the same way that people need a prophet who brings the laws and explains to them what is permitted and what is forbidden. If the sending of a prophet is necessary because of his subtle perception and the strength of his position, the appointment of a leader is equally necessary, so that the proof and explanations of Allah given through the prophets will be confirmed. It may be said that the appointment of a leader is a blessing and a mercy from Allah, and mercy itself is obligatory upon Him, This is from the standpoint of reason.

When we look at what has come down to us by way of the written word, Allah says;

O you who believe, obey Allah, and obey the Prophet and those in authority among you. (Qur'an 4:59)

Here Allah commands His servants to obey those in authority in the same way that He commands obedience to Himself and to the Messenger, If obedience to Him and obedience to His Messenger is obligatory, then obedience to those who are in authority is likewise obligatory. The reason that a prophet or a leader must be above error is the same. Allah has foretold of the coming of the pure leaders:

And We want to bestow favor upon those who were deemed weak in the earth and to make them Imams and to make them heirs. (Qur'an 28:5)

The Imamate in general may be said to represent vicegerency from Allah. It is referred to as the station of authority and nearness to Allah, which is in turn the inner aspect of prophethood. Just as prophethood is a system consisting of the beings of the prophets and is perfected in the Muhammadi being, so too is the *wilayah* (nearness to Allah) a process comprising the beings of the friends of Allah perfected by the being of the last Imam (the Mahdi) who will seal the *wilayah* in the same way that the Messenger of Allah sealed the prophethood.

Shaykh Ibn `Arabi said:

Wilayah consists of two parts, one of which is unrestricted and the other which is restricted, or general and specific, because from the viewpoint that it is a Divine Attribute it is unrestricted, while from the viewpoint that it may be traced to the prophets and the friends of Allah, it is restricted. That which is restricted stands by virtue of the unrestricted while the unrestricted is made manifest by the restricted. Thus the *wilayah* of the prophets and the friends of Allah is a component of the unrestricted *wilayah* of Allah, the prophethood of the prophets is a component of the unrestricted prophethood, and this unrestricted form of the prophethood is none other than the Muhammadi truth outwardly, while inwardly it represents the unrestricted. The manifestation of this unrestricted *wilayah* is reserved for his unrestricted heirs, that is, his Ahl al-Bayt, the Pure Imams.⁶

To sum up, the *wali*, that is the possessor of *wilayah*, is of two types: one type whose *wilayah* – essentially true and eternal and who is referred to here as the unrestricted *wali* – represents the greatest pole, that is, our Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. The other type is the one whose *wilayah* is derived from the first type: his *wilayah* is earned and inherited; thus he is referred to as a restricted *wali* and this refers to Imam `Ali and his offspring.

THE RETURN

The return (*al-mi`ad*) refers to the return of the universe and whatever it contains to where it came from, in both form and meaning. This process occurs in the following three stages of resurrection (*qiyamah*): the lesser, the intermediate, and the greater.

The Return for the People of Shari`ah

This refers to the rejoining of the various parts of the dead body, forming them into what they previously were and returning the soul to it. This is what is referred to as the ‘Gathering of Bodies’. It is said that Allah created man, gave him knowledge, ability, desire, perception,

⁶ In his book, *Fusus al-Hikam* (‘Pearls or Bezels of Wisdom’).

various potentials, and placed the reins of choice within his hands. He thus placed upon man a great responsibility and distinguished him by certain subtleties, both hidden and clear. While the world is the arena for the fulfillment of these responsibilities, it is also the arena for earning reward. Man abides here for a limited time and it is here that he may attain his perfection. Then he proceeds to the abode of Reward, the Hereafter. All the Prophets and Messengers have foretold of the 'Gathering of Bodies' and have described the Garden and the Fire in different ways, according to the understanding of their people and their cultures.

The Return for the People of Tariqah

After they have become firmly established in the belief of the Return as seen through the eyes of the people of shari`ah, the Truth becomes manifest in the forms of the two names of the Hidden (*al-Batin*) and the Last (*al-Akhir*), along with other names like the Just (*al-`Adl*), the Truth (*al-Haq*), the Life-giver (*al-Muhyi*), the Giver of Death (*al-Mumit*). Just as the world itself in the beginning consisted of forms with the two names, the Manifest (*al-Zahir*) and the Primal (*al-Awwal*), along with other names, like the Originator (*al-Mubdi'*), the Giver of Existence (*al-Wajid*), the Creator (*al-Khaliq*), the Provider (*ar-Razzaq*), and so forth, so too is the reality of each name not devoid of His countless other names.

The world and the Hereafter are the projections of Allah's manifestations; thus, they must be eternal, not limited to specific time. The removal of a manifestation of Allah from existence is impossible. This means that resurrection consists of changing the outward universe, transforming it, and returning it to the inward realm. As the world consists of the manifestation of the inward in an outward form, its return is the reverse process. In spite of the existence of countless names, their actual meaning does not go beyond the following four names:

1. the First (*al-Awwal*)
2. the Last (*al-Akhir*)
3. the Manifest (*al-Zahir*)

4. the Hidden (*al-Batin*)

In any given situation, various Names of Allah are made manifest. The Hereafter (*akhirah*) is the manifestation of the following names: the Subduer (*al-Qahir*); the Eternal (*al-Samad*); the Matchless One (*al-Fard*); the One who Brings about the Return (*al-Mu'id*); the Life-giver (*al-Muhyi*); the Giver of Death (*al-Mumit*) and so on. This world, on the other hand, is the manifestation of the following names: the Manifest (*al-Zahir*); the Originator (*al-Mubdi'*); the First (*al-Awwal*); the Giver of Existence (*al-Wajid*); and so on.

The Spiritual and Physical Resurrection

One cannot avoid dividing the Resurrection into a physical and spiritual resurrection when referring to the position of the People of Tariqah and faith. Similarly, the Resurrection must be divided into the stages of Lesser, Intermediate and Greater. As this division is also applicable when discussing the People of Haqiqah, we will explain it in detail here.

The Lesser Spiritual Resurrection

This refers to the awakening and rising after the voluntary death of meaning. It is based upon the saying of the Prophet:

Die before you die.

And:

Whoever has died, his own Resurrection has already begun.

One great instruction tells us to:

Die voluntarily and you will live naturally.

Death here is not physical death, but rather it refers to subduing the desires and attachments of the self, for it is by these desires that the self lives on. The lower self is inclined to worldly

pleasures and lusts by way of desire, dragging and veiling the heart along with it. If, on the other hand, the self is subdued, the heart will return to its original love and the realms of purity and light. Experiencing this death is to taste freedom in nothingness; it is to experience the indescribable state of the spaceless, timeless, zone of supra-consciousness. This is the death and life which is indicated by Allah when He says:

Is the one who was dead and to whom We granted life and to whom We gave a light who walks by it among men like one in darkness who does not exit from it? (Qur'an 6:122)

Is the one who is engulfed in ignorance and darkness the same as the one to whom Allah has granted knowledge and light by which he walks among men, in perfection, aware of eternal life, and Divine Mercy?

Allah says:

Repent before your Creator and kill your self. That is better for you with your Creator and He will grant you repentance. (Qur'an 2:54)

With the same meaning Allah also says:

Do not reckon that those who have been killed in the way of Allah are dead, rather they are living with their Lord sustained and joyous by what Allah has bestowed upon them of His Grace. (Qur'an 3:169)

When the Prophet returned from a battle with the people of disbelief he said:

We have returned from the Lesser *Jihad* to the Greater *Jihad*.

When asked what was this Greater *Jihad* he answered:

The struggle against the self, which is opposing its desires.

It is also related that he said:

The *mujahid* is the one who struggles against his own self, because whoever becomes dead to his desires, becomes alive in His [Allah's] guidance.

That is, one becomes alive in guidance and is not led astray; he lives by his knowledge and is no longer dead in his ignorance. The following is attributed to al-Hallaj:

Kill me, O pious ones, for in my death is life.

The Intermediate Spiritual Resurrection

This refers to the process of becoming dead to all forms of condemnable behavior and all despicable attributes. It represents survival through laudable behavior and noble traits, which has been the goal since the coming of the Noble Prophet. These are the traits which Allah has described in the Qur'an when He says:

And indeed you are of a tremendous character. (Qur'an 68:4)

That is to say: Indeed your actions are based upon the greatest code of conduct and ethics. The Prophet said:

Take on the behavior code of Allah.

And he also said:

I was sent in order to complete the most noble code of behavior.

There is no doubt that if there existed a favor greater than the favor of the code of behavior and the ability to take it on, Allah would have distinguished His Prophet with it. The reason for this is that following Allah's code of behavior and assuming His Attributes is the cause of eternal joy and will bring one to the bliss of Eternal Presence. Allah's commandments to assume this code of behavior and to take on His Attributes are countless in both the Qur'an and in the words of His Prophet. Among them is this *hadith qudsi*:

My Earth and My Heaven cannot contain Me but the heart of My faithful servant contains Me.

Thus, the path of reaching Allah lies in directing the heart to take on His Attributes and His decreed code of conduct. It is for this reason that it is said:

The heart of the person of faith is the throne of the Merciful; the heart of the person of faith is the abode of Allah.

The Garden which is attained through this Resurrection is referred to as the ‘Spiritual Garden’; as in the Qur’anic verse:

The people of faith have succeeded, those who are humble in their prayer, and those who turn away from foolishness... They are the heirs who inherit the (Spiritual) Garden of *Firdaws*. They shall abide there eternally. (Qur’an 23:1-3 & 10-11)

The path is to exchange condemnable behavior for what is praiseworthy, and to extract oneself from the pit of darkness and take on the attributes of inner harmony and light. In this way, one prepares oneself to take on the Divine Attributes and code of behavior and thereby enter the Spiritual Garden before entering the Garden of Form. Thus, one becomes the Possessor of two Gardens and the Master of two Stages, in accordance with Allah’s words:

And for whoever fears the station of his Lord there will be two gardens. (Qur’an 55:46)

From another standpoint, if one were to extricate the self from all despicable modes of behavior (especially those of pride, deceit, miserliness, envy, greed, lust and anger) and to adhere to the best modes of behavior (especially the seven basic ones which are knowledge, wisdom, forbearance, humility, generosity, restraint and courage), and if one had attained the position of balance and justice (which is the final stage of perfection in the pathway to Allah), then the Fire described in the Book of Allah would be avoided and one would attain the two promised gardens. The Prophet described it thus:

Indeed Allah possesses a garden in which there are no Houris, nor honey, nor milk, but rather Allah manifests Himself there, laughing.

The first garden is experiential and the second one is spiritual and the difference between them is highlighted in the Prophet's words:

By the One who has the soul of Muhammad in His hand, the Garden and the Fire are closer to anyone of you than your own shoe-strap.

Imam `Ali has said:

He who has revived his reasoning and deadened the self so that he has crushed his pride and made his grossness subtle, and illumination and light have shown themselves to him, and the way has been made clear by them, he has walked along the way to the Door of Peace and the Lasting Abode.

The Greater Spiritual Resurrection

This refers to annihilation in Truth (*fana'*) and ongoingness (*baqa'*). It is often referred to as Annihilation in Unity. It is also called, 'The Nearness of *Nawafil*' (supererogatory prayers) because of Allah's words in a *hadith qudsi*:

As long as the servant continues to come near to Me with his supererogatory actions I will love him and if I love him I will be his ears, his eyes, his tongue, his hand and his feet. Thus it is as by Me that he hears and by Me that he sees, by Me that he speaks, by Me that he grasps and by Me that he walks.

Whoever attains to this Resurrection, after the above-mentioned annihilations, has attained true death and the Garden of Witnessing, which is above the Garden of Inheritance and the Garden of

the Self. These are the three Gardens, which are attained by way of the three Resurrections, to which Shaykh Ibn `Arabi refers in his book, 'The Makkan Revelations,'⁷ when he says:

Indeed, there are three Gardens: The Garden of Divine Jurisdiction, this being the one for children who have not yet reached the age of action. The second is the Garden of Inheritance, which is attained by anyone who enters the Garden from those whom we have mentioned and from the people of *iman*. The third is the Garden of Actions in which the people ascend according to their actions.

The people of the Garden are of various categories: the Messengers, the Prophets, the '*awliya*' (pl. of *wali*), the people of faith based on knowledge who believe in them, and the men with knowledge of Unity, who, through the faculty of reason, have come to know that there is no god but Allah.

As for the Muslims or believers, they are of three categories: The first group are the Prophets, the Messengers, and the heirs who are called the friends of Allah; the second group are the people who have knowledge of Allah through unveiling and proof according to their various stages, like the teachers of instruction, the scholars who have delved deeply into belief and the law; and the third group are the people of faith and those who have followed by imitation. In other words, these consist of the following three levels: the general masses, the elect and the chosen few of the elect. Their station in the Garden is according to spiritual stages they have attained, whether high, low or in between.

The Return for the People of Haqiqah

After the people of haqiqah have passed through the three resurrections mentioned previously, there occurs a resurrection equivalent to their annihilation in Action, Attributes, and the Unity of Essence, and their remaining within Truth corresponding to their stage within it.

⁷ *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyyah*.

The Lesser Spiritual Resurrection of the people of haqiqah is their annihilation in the Unity of Action and arrival at the point of witnessing the actual One who administers everything. For whomever the veils of Actions have been drawn aside by the opening of inner vision, he will only witness the Actions in their absoluteness as originating from the One Doer and the One Administrator and he will be freed from seeing anything else, even the acts themselves. He will reach the point of witnessing the acts emanating from the One and only Doer, Allah. When one is firmly established in station of the Unity of Action, one stands on the plane of the Lesser Resurrection before Allah, like the corpse before the one who washes it. The signs of this condition are trust, submission, entrusting one's affairs to Allah, and confirming it by one's own actions.

The outcome of this Resurrection, after annihilation, is the Garden of Action, which is the first of the Gardens and its pleasures and joys consist of witnessing the True Doer in every action and event.

The Intermediate Resurrection of the people of haqiqah refers to annihilation into the Unity of Attributes and the arrival at the point of witnessing the One Attribute, which runs through everything. The explanation of this is that for whomever the veils of Attributes have been lifted, all the veils of witnessing other than Him have been completely withdrawn to the point where, in the entire existence, he does not witness other than one True Attribute running through everything, like the flowing of life itself in the human body. Thus he has reached the Unity of Attributes and will be present on the plain of the Intermediate Spiritual Resurrection, free of the confines of seeing other than Him, which is true death; and Allah's words confirm this:

We have lifted from you your veils and your eyes are like steel.
(Qur'an 50:22)

It is said that Bayazid al-Bistami was asked, 'How is your day, O Bayazid?' He replied:

I have no morning and no night. Mornings and nights are for those who are chained to attributes and for me there is no attribute.

Bayazid was firmly placed within the Unity of Attributes after the Unity of Action, through unveiling and longing. This is what is meant when it is said:

'Essence is veiled by Attributes and the Attributes by the Acts, because anyone who has not had the veils of Actions lifted from him will not attain the Unity of Actions; and whoever has not had the veils of Attributes lifted from him will not attain the Unity of Attributes; and whoever has not had the veils of the Essence lifted from him will not attain the Unity of Essence.'

The Greater Resurrection of the people of haqiqah is the witnessing of the Everlasting Quality of the Essence in the Essence of Truth (Allah) after their annihilation within it, which is a spiritual annihilation, not a physical one; as Allah said:

Everything upon it will be annihilated and the Face of your Lord will (eternally) remain the Possessor of Glory and Generosity. (Qur'an 55:26-27)

and His words:

Everything will perish except for His Face, His is the Wisdom and to Him will you return. (Qur'an 28:88)

This will occur for whomever has the veils of beauty and glory from the Essence of Truth (Allah) lifted from him, and from whom the veils of duality have been lifted completely to the point where he witnesses nothing other than Allah, forever and eternally, which is the meaning of the saying:

There is nothing in existence but Allah, His Names, His Attributes, and His Acts; thus, all is Him, by Him, from Him, and to Him.

The ones who have arrived at the Unity of Essence, are present on the plain of the Greater Resurrection and witness the meaning of Allah's words:

...and whose is the dominion today? It is Allah's, the One, the Subduer. (Qur'an 40:16)

because their vision of Unity has subdued all other essences by virtue of the law:

There is nothing in existence but Allah.

And in the confirmation:

Say: Allah, then leave them to dally in their vain discourses, (Qur'an 6:91)

and correspondingly:

...and make not any other god with Allah (Qur'an 17:22)

This is the 'Unity of the Essence' which is realized by the people of haqiqah, and there is no Unity above it; as Allah said;

He is the First, the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden and He is Knower of all things. (Qur'an 57:3)

which is an indication of this witnessing.

The outcome of standing upon the plain of this Spiritual Resurrection is 'The Garden of the Essence', which is the highest of all the gardens reserved for the people of Unity who have progressed on the path of Unity; as Allah says:

Indeed the fearfully aware are in gardens and rivers in the seat of honor with the most Powerful Sovereign. (Qur'an 54:54-55)

because whoever witnesses other than Him in existence is not in Unity, nor is he one who is fearfully aware (*muttaqi*). For this reason Allah says:

O you who have faith, fear Allah with the awareness that is due to Him and do not die unless you be in submission to Him. (Qur'an 3:102)

That is to say, do not die the death of meaning, which in this station is referred to as annihilation, 'unless you be in submission', that is, Islam, which is the Unity of the Essence. Imam `Ali said:

I ascribe to Islam something which no one has previously ascribed to it: Islam is surrender, surrender is certainty, certainty is belief, belief is affirmation, affirmation is to execute and carry out, execution and carrying out are good actions.

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Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Son of Karbala

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

HEALTH SCIENCES AND ISLAMIC HISTORY

Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2

Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh

Edited By: Munawar A. Anees

Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Health Sciences in Early Islam is a pioneering study of Islamic medicine that opens up new chapters of knowledge in the history of the healing sciences. This two volume work covers the development of Islamic medicine between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.