



Transformative Worship in Islam

Experiencing Perfection

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri
with Muna H. Bilgrami



Publisher: Zahra Publications

ISBN (Printed Version): 978-1-919826-76-9

ISBN (E-Book Version): 978-1-919826-77-6

<http://www.zahrapublications.pub>

First Published in November of 2013

© Haeri Trust and Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, no part of this eBook may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from Zahra Publications.

Copying and redistribution of this eBook is strictly prohibited.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Book Description	v
About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Preface.....	viii
Introduction.....	x
CHAPTER 1: Creation and its Direction.....	1
1.1 Cycles of Life and the Arrow of Time	1
1.2 Knowledge, Consciousness & Intelligence.....	4
1.3 Rationality, Inspiration & Revelation	9
1.4 States & Stages of Development.....	15
<i>The Purified Heart and the Light of Soul.....</i>	<i>16</i>
1.5 Oneness, Dualities & Universal Connectedness	19
1.6 The Return to Origin– <i>Ma`ād</i>	24
Chapter 2: Roots & Foundations of Truth	27
2.1 The Desire to Believe & Worship.....	27
<i>Prescriptions for the Spiritual Wayfarer</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Historical Evolvment.....</i>	<i>33</i>
2.2 Traditional Foundations of Faith.....	35
2.3 Unity (<i>tawhīd</i>)	38
2.4 Justice (<i>`adl</i>).....	44
2.5 Prophethood (<i>nubuwwah, imāmah & wilāyah</i>).....	50
<i>Layers of Understanding Prophethood.....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Imamate and Wilayah</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>The Connection between Imamah and Wilayah.....</i>	<i>53</i>
2.6 The Return (<i>al-ma`ād</i>)	55
<i>Spiritual and Physical Resurrection</i>	<i>56</i>
Chapter 3: Preliminary Keys to Effective Worship	65
3.1 Rituals, Intention, Attention & Appropriate Action.....	65
3.2 Ritual Purification (<i>taharah</i>).....	67

3.3 Outer and Inner Ablution (<i>wudu'</i>).....	69
<i>The Significance of wudu'</i>	69
<i>Ritual Ablution According to Revealed Law</i>	70
<i>Meanings of Ritual Ablution</i>	71
<i>Higher Meanings of Ritual Ablution</i>	72
<i>Additional Recommended Actions of Ritual Ablution</i>	77
<i>Invalidations of Ritual Ablution</i>	77
3.4 Ritual Bathing (<i>ghusl</i>)	79
3.5 Dry Ablution (<i>tayammum</i>) & the Meaning of Water	84
<i>Invalidations of Tayammum</i>	85
<i>The Meaning of Water & Dust</i>	85
3.6 Supplicatory Prayer (<i>du`a</i>).....	91
Chapter 4: Traditional & Transformative Acts of Worship.....	98
4.1 The Branches of Faith or Acts of Worship	101
<i>Prescribed Behavior</i>	105
4.2 Formal Prayer (<i>salāt</i>)	108
<i>Timings</i>	110
<i>Preparations for Acts of Devotion and the Presence of the Heart</i>	111
<i>Preface to Prayer and the Meaning of Various Acts</i>	114
<i>Obligatory Actions and Conditions</i>	117
<i>Intention (niyyah)</i>	118
<i>The Standing Position (qiyām)</i>	119
<i>The Initial Takbīr (takbīr al-ihram)</i>	120
<i>Bowing from the waist (ruku`)</i>	120
<i>The Prostration (sajdah)</i>	122
<i>Other Obligatory Actions</i>	123
<i>Further Obligatory Actions of Prayer</i>	125
<i>Additional Requirements</i>	128
<i>Disliked (makruh) Actions During Prayer</i>	134
<i>Meaning and States in Prayers</i>	138
4.3 Fasting (<i>sawm</i>)	152
<i>Fasting in History</i>	152

<i>The Islamic Fast</i>	153
<i>Meaning and Benefits of Fasting</i>	157
<i>Making Up or Expiation</i>	157
<i>The Feast of Fast-Breaking (‘Id al-fitr)</i>	167
4.4 The Pilgrimage (<i>hajj</i>)	169
<i>The Pillars of the Pilgrimage</i>	170
1. <i>Al-Ihrām</i>	170
2. <i>The Walking Around the Ka`bah (tawāf)</i>	172
3. <i>Hastening between the Stations of Pilgrimage (sa`y)</i>	172
4. <i>The Pause on `Arafah (wuqūf)</i>	174
<i>Other Obligatory Actions</i>	176
<i>The Lesser Pilgrimage or `Umrah & the Ka`bah</i>	178
<i>The Ka`bah</i>	178
<i>The Levels of the Pilgrimage</i>	179
4.5 Obligatory Wealth Tax (<i>zakāt</i> and <i>khums</i>).....	192
<i>Basic Legal Foundation and Purpose</i>	194
<i>Types of Tax and their Significance</i>	197
<i>Khums</i>	205
<i>Those Deserving of Spiritual Donations</i>	205
4.6 Striving in the Way of God (<i>jihād</i>)	210
4.7 Commanding Goodness & Forbidding Evil (<i>amr bi’l-ma`rūf wa’n-nahi `an al-munkar</i>)	
214	
Chapter 5: Appropriate Conduct.....	218
5.1 Islam & Reforming the Lower Self (self/soul dynamics)	218
<i>The Remedy for Grooming the Self</i>	218
<i>Self-Knowledge and Its Refinement</i>	220
5.2 Transformation through Self Accountability& Reflection (vices & virtues).....	224
5.3 The Relationship between Mind, Brain & Conduct (emotions & rationality)	227
5.4 Relationships	230
5.5 The Necessity of Living Teachers & Guides to Realize Oneness	232
Chapter 6: Transformed Beings	235
6.1 Return to the Beginning	235

6.2 Maps & Boundaries & Life's Topography	238
6.3 Transition to Infinite Boundlessness.....	240
6.4 The Complete Person – Mulla Sadra's Journey.....	241
6.5 No one but ONE.....	246
CONCLUSION.....	247
Glossary	254
Bibliography	266
eBooks By Zahra Publications.....	268
General eBooks on Islam	268
The Qur'an & Its Teachings.....	268
Sufism & Islamic Psychology and Philosophy	270
Practices & Teachings of Islam.....	271
Talks, Interviews & Courses	273
Poetry, Aphorisms & Inspirational	274
Autobiography.....	275
Health Sciences and Islamic History.....	275

Book Description

‘Transformative Worship in Islam – Experiencing Perfection’ uniquely bridges the traditional practices and beliefs, culture and language of Islam with the transformative spiritual states described by the Sufis and Gnostics. In this collection of teachings on how the worship of Islam can transform insight and perception of Reality, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri presents profound guidance for those who journey through the path of Islamic belief and practice. He draws from the Noble Qur’an, the Prophet’s traditions, narrations from the *Ahl al-Bayt* and seminal works from Sufi masters and scholars.

Transformative Worship in Islam – Experiencing Perfection will inspire the serious seeker of spiritual knowledge to make the connections between intention, attention and direction. Describing in detail the stages of spiritual evolvment, the author highlights the need for grooming the self, refining its lower tendencies, practicing self-accountability, and guiding it towards the higher virtues of the soul, through the regular discipline of a worship which brings one into Divine Presence. The seeker will be taken to the stages of self-realization where all dualities meet and unify within the human soul. The purified heart is a precondition for this awakening, while enlightenment is the natural outcome after dispelling all causes of egotistic confusion and concern for personal survival. This book reveals how the soul is forever embedded in sustainable joy and contentment and awakening to this condition is not only our birth-right but the very purpose of our existence.

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

The author and co-author thank the sincere and invaluable help of Anjum Jaleel, Yaqub Moosa, Shafia Mohamed, Leyya Kalla and others who have facilitated this production.

Preface

As a child growing up in Karbala, Iraq, I often wondered about the practical and personal benefits of Islamic practices and rituals. I was taught that *salāt* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting) and other key practices help to bring about desirable personal habits, discipline and thus success in life. It was not until much later that I began to realize the transformative effects of practicing Islam as a *Dīn* – way of life. This understanding was mainly due to my exposure to the rich heritage of *ʿirfan* (gnosis or inner knowledge) from the school of Ahl al-Bayt and the great Sufi Masters of Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, from different schools of thought. Personal conduct and outlook on life will no doubt change when a sincere Muslim absorbs and lives the *Dīn*.

Islam is the pathway to the realization of Allah’s perfect grace, dominance, presence, and control over the universe – seen and unseen. All states and manifestations, physical and the spiritual, what is in time and eternal, are all emanations from the original Single Divine Source and Essence – Allah. The *Dīn* is a life map that can take the committed seeker to the desired destiny through knowledge of reality and the experience of sacred presence – self-realization of eternal truth.

Our present time is dominated by rationalization, material power and ambitions to the detriment of inner health and spiritual delights. This state of global imbalance between outer wealth and lack of spiritual well-beingness may also be a driving force to rediscover the *Dīn* and prophetically prescribed practices. Personal illumination, understanding and wisdom are essential foundations for a healthy society and its stability and justice.

Originally gathered mostly from Arabic sources which have influenced and inspired me over several decades, this book is an attempt to share with the spiritual seeker (especially Muslims), the keys to inner transformation and awareness of the One God. The book may also be of interest to the general public interested in the wisdom of the prophetic teachings. 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. Light upon light.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

February 2013

Introduction

Life is a practice to understand how and why experiences come about in order for us to maintain wellbeing and happiness. Most religions present descriptions of earthly realities and provide prescriptions for human contentment and the stability of society. Sets of defined behavioral patterns, rituals and religious practices are hallmarks of most human cultures.

Islam provides details of numerous ‘necessary’ or obligatory practices and rituals for individuals and communities. The Qur’an and the Islamic way of life provide the spiritual path, maps and codes which may unlock the durable common purpose and meaning of life on earth. The Qur’an addresses numerous facets of existence, all encapsulated within the mysterious Divine Unity that encompasses all. The Makkan *āyāt* of the Qur’an are mostly to do with Truth, which is absolute and permeates the whole of creation. Many of the Madinan verses relate to community, society, relationships, justice and other important aspects of governance. The life of the Prophet (S¹) exemplified the most complete and dynamic way of living in the moment without denial of the passage of time. For many centuries before the life of Muhammad (S) all true prophets had lived this appropriate way, according to their time and communities.

All acts of worship begin with self-awareness and a desire for higher knowledge. The preparation for worship is the declaration of intent and the hope to be focused, attentive and engaged in the process of a deepening one’s state of awareness. A point may arrive when the worshiper loses concerns with worldly mundane matters and begins to experience subtler levels of awareness which are deeper than the normal day to day variety. The ultimate purpose of worship and prayer is to experientially realize a state that is not subject to earthly or mental limitations. This may be variously identified as the sacred void, inner bliss, pure peace, or ultimate or higher consciousness. From ancient times, Shamans and priests led circles of people in attaining this ‘transcendent’ experience.

¹ *Sallā Allāhu `alayhi wa-ālihi wa-sallam*: Allah’s salutations and peace be upon him and his family. This invocation is implied every time the Prophet’s name is mentioned.

The metaphor of the heavenly creation of Adam and the subsequent descent to earth describes how the human being is made from elements of earth, water, fire and air, and is imbued with special knowledges through the sacred soul. The difference between Adam and other creations in the ‘Heavens’, such as angels, *jinn*s and satans, was that Adam had the capacity and ability to exercise some independent will. This ‘will’ could either cause damage and destruction or speed up insights and enlightenment. The desire and love of worship is the enactment of the hope of transcending the limitations of the physical and material side of our make-up, and attain the metaphysical, boundless and timeless zone, which is where we can experience liberation from all mental limitation.

Human beings are the only creatures who have a full sense of awareness of their awareness. When you look in the mirror and see yourself, you know that the image is of your own self. It is thus natural for human beings to anthropomorphize God and in that way try to bring that idea of Divinity closer to us in form. All creative acts emanate and overflow from Allah, according to innate and subtle patterns. There is a great danger in reducing the mystery which pervades the universe and permeates it all into an entity or idea which we label as ‘God’. Allah is not an entity. Allah is *The Reality* from which all realities emanate and by which they are sustained. It is safer and more appropriate to characterize this as sacred light, rather than a defined entity. Religious people can fall prey to the pitfall of personalizing God, as is evident in the phrase, ‘God is most kind,’ or, ‘He is generous to me’. All energies, matter, Attributes and essences are simply shadows of this sacred light. Sweetness is not honey, but simply one attribute of honey.

Worship in Islam is based on the prophetic realization of the pervading unity of the original force and power in life (*tawhīd*). The prescribed acts of worship are part of a culture that grooms and brings up its children to develop outer and inner references regarding appropriate conduct. Islam acknowledges the forces of nature and prescribes appropriate ways to work along natural paths and patterns towards a higher level of spiritual realization. Islam does not deny personal identity or the quest for success and achievement, but rather it highlights the need to transcend whatever is experienced within the created dimensions of space and time so as to awaken into the zone of eternal presence – Allah. In Islam the *sajdah*, or prostration in prayer, symbolizes the act of

annihilation of the self-identified individual into the original ‘no-thingness’, where only Truth, or Allah, is present.

Traditionally Muslims have emphasized fear of suffering or fear of the unknown in order to change the behavior of the seeker. Teachers adopted strict methods of upbringing and *ādāb* (courtesy and comportment) in order to influence behavior and mind-sets. The oral culture of the years gone by, the rural communities and their socio-economic and religious connections, were very helpful in reducing natural egotistic tendencies and deviations. In our present day, however, most educated young people can be more incentivized by the love for self-improvement and expanding awareness into higher levels of consciousness than by fear of punishment or eternal fire. The way of the Sufi gnostics was to give a taste (*dhawq*) of the inner joy to the new seeker in order for the individual to accept the need for personal discipline and restrictions and to focus upon the ‘higher’. In this way they attuned the seeker’s ability to glean insights from the heart, the locus of gnosis, and soul.

The culture and religion of Islam is founded on the Qur’an and the way of the Prophet (S). The Qur’an reveals that the essence of the foundation of creation is Allah’s light (Verse of Light, 24:35). That light permeates whatever is known and unknown in the heavens and on the earth. *Āyat ul-Kursi* (Verse of the Throne, 2:255) which is very frequently recited by Muslims declares that it is Allah Who governs the universe, that His signs are evident throughout existence and whatever is in the heavens and earth belongs to that Reality. The *Āyat ul-Kursi* declares that whatever manifests in the universe is transient and dependent upon Allah – the Constant, Eternal, Ever-Present.

Just as acts of worship are prescribed in the Qur’an, human development is described by numerous verses, such as, ‘O mankind, you are constantly struggling towards your Lord until you will come to meet [know] Him’ [84:6]. Adamic consciousness has within it the seeds of supreme reality; thus we cannot stop until that is realized. Transformative worship begins with sincere hope and trust and ends in realizing that in truth the whole universe is in adoration and

worship of its sustaining original Light. The fully realized being knows that in truth there is none other than the One and everything else is a shadow of that truth.

All human endeavors that increase knowledge, ability, efficiency and wholesomeness imply a journey towards higher consciousness. Life begins with basic sentiency and ends with spontaneous awareness of awareness. The arrow of time moves from the ‘no-thingness’ towards the absolute Oneness. Worship can be regarded as an evolutionary spiritual exercise to transcend the mind and come into unison with the divine soul within. Ultimate liberation and enlightenment implies taking constant reference from the immutable soul. In a sacred tradition Allah declares that, ‘The Heavens and Earth do not contain Me but the heart of he who believes contains Me.’ Every heart contains a soul and the potential to realize that truth is open to all.

This book attempts to bridge the traditional cultures and language of theologians with the transformative spiritual states described by the Sufis. In a way these two voices are, in essence, complementary. One relates to the basic foundation of prophetic practices and Islam for everyone. The other voice emphasizes the spiritual states and transformational purpose of outer practices and disciplines. This voice appeals to all human beings interested in higher consciousness, or spiritual awakening and enlightenment.

As my intention is to give the modern reader ease of access to spiritual development along the path of Islam, I have chosen to minimize or avoid certain traditional or technical terms as far as possible and substitute them with ones that feel lighter and easier to the contemporary reader, so that the focus is on one of ontology rather than morphology, on meaning rather than linguistic form. Specifically, terms like ‘basic’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘advanced’, or variations thereof, have been preferred, so as to reflect the increase in depth from outer form to deeper meaning when looking at foundational beliefs and practices of worship prescribed by Islam. Traditionally, these levels would have been most commonly categorized respectively as *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* (cf. [Chapter 1, 1.2](#) for detailed explanation). In this way I hope to give pliancy to these categories, for they reflect different stages in knowing. It is, after all, the light of these states and stations which we hope to share.

While such tools of division are useful to distinguish and denote different stages in awareness, implicit within them is the temptation to see them as a linear progression. While no doubt our progression from childhood to youth to adult is chronological in our understanding, and the growth in our layers of awareness is tied to that process, all are in fact part of a multi-dimensional whole. There is as much lateral movement as vertical and, indeed, at other subtler planes of cognizance, insight, and gnosis. Without the outer, the inner finds no means of expression, and without the inner, the outer can become a mere shell – often used against the path of awakening to higher consciousness, rather than to facilitate it. In the pursuit of higher, transformational knowledge, it is wise to see these tools of identification for what they are, and not as the thing itself.

Excessive categorization and labeling may also induce complacency or self-congratulation about ‘attainment’ along life’s journey. If the goal is to live a life of transformative worship, then none of these ‘levels’ can be considered separately or neglected. They are merely indicators of a spectrum. No two people go through exactly the same duration of time or intensity in any spiritual path.

I prefer to bring forth the seamlessness of the *zāhir* (outer, manifest) in relation to the *bātin* (inner, hidden). In truth they are always connected. For the purpose of didactic teaching such categorizations or labeling are helpful. My interest, however, is in the transformative impact, particularly for the mature and advanced practitioner who is less concerned about distinction and differentiation and is entering the zone of personal experience which transcends all of these barriers.

A few words are in order about some of the terms used in this book. The term ‘emanation’ implies that the origin is non-discernible, unseen, pure energy, coming into more discernible energy and form. ‘Evolvment’ is the same as evolution, i.e. a growth process involving change in response to time and circumstance.

In the Qur’an the word *nafs* is used to indicate the lower self, the high self or soul or heart, or the entire being; it is the full verse that makes clear which particular aspect of the human being is

being addressed. This is why the Qur'an can be confusing for the uninitiated, particularly when read only in translation. The following two verses are good examples: 'And the Self (*wa nafs*) and how He made it, and inspired it to know] its...' – here it is talking about *insān*, how mankind has been made, with lower and higher aspects; another e.g. is 'And We created you from one soul (*nafs* *wahidatin*)'. To distinguish the lower self from the higher, I use 'soul' or 'spirit'. The human reality is that of a soul or spirit which is inseparable from the cosmic Soul, or God, and gives rise to connectedness to the world of matter, through mind, brain and senses. The 'self' is that individuation of the soul deriving its life from it, but having particular qualities and characteristics which are changing and evolving all the time.

Generally speaking the first third of a person's growth and development is when the lower self, or the ego, is shaped and given its own character. In the second third the individual begins to question their authenticity, independence, seeking their origin and the light which is the soul. In the last third, generally, the *nafs* and all the layers of ego and personality begin to be discarded and the reference to the soul, or living by it, starts to become dominant. So the movement is from creating an entity to shedding everything in a conscious return to its original cause and reality. A helpful metaphor for this is light understood as either a particle or a wave. Light is, of course, both wave and particle. The photon is a 'personality' and dies. The wave never dies. When the two combine you get the full spectrum of the human being – from the lowest end nothing other than decadence and disruption, yet at the higher end noble and divine. The full being contains the interplay between the human and divine. The emphasis is different that an ordinary human being sees through the lens of *insān*, through humanity, the fully evolved, or enlightened being looks at everything through the lens of oneness. In Imam `Ali's words, 'I did not see anything unless I saw Allah before it, in it and after it.'

Qur'anic extracts are introduced by the # symbol while quotations (hadith or otherwise) are introduced with the ~ symbol. Other than in a few places references have not been given but a bibliography is supplied.

The material in this book is a natural extension of original Islam. It also does not elaborate on the intricate details of practice and application; that is left to the specialized books on *fiqh*, jurisprudence, according to the different schools of thought. The hope and intention of this work is to benefit all practicing Muslims (and other seekers) by raising their level of consciousness. That is the real purpose of all human endeavors, struggles and aspirations.

CHAPTER 1: Creation and its Direction

1.1 Cycles of Life and the Arrow of Time

The beginning of creation is a mystery, described in the Qur'an as originating in a sacred command: '*Kun*' or '*Be*' [2:117, 3:47]. From utter unity and apparent nothingness, an explosive cosmic expansion and diversity came about. Countless stars and galaxies vibrate, circulate and orbit in an extraordinary dynamic and interactive way. A similar, amazing, invisible world exists within the atoms. Early on in creation splitting and dispersion was the dominant force in bringing about our known and unknown universe to us. The Qur'an describes the beginning as well as the end of time and the collapse of the universe back to its original nothingness with signs and allegories. Solid mountains will move like clouds and return to dust and all of creation will discover the truth of absolute Oneness.

The most constant force that drives human beings is to explore, discover and understand the multiple levels of connections in the world around us, and the origin and end of things and life. We now know that matter and energy are totally linked and that whatever we consider as solid matter is a temporary freeze of some energy, which will be released in time. Light is composed of photons which are particles flowing as waves; so is the rest of the universe. Stars, galaxies and creations have qualitative and quantitative Attributes and, are thus defined entities. Each also has a beginning and an end. In the case of humans, we are also composed of physical matter and other forms of energy such as the electromagnetic waves that drive our muscles, as well as neurons, and a mysterious entity called soul or spirit, which we consider to be the source of personal, individuated life. Thus we are both heavenly and earthly – made up of matter and light.

Life on earth started a few hundred million years ago when chemicals and molecules in tidal pools interacted in a special fashion due to the incessant energy given to them by light and heat. Early original life was simple in form and function. Early complexity appears as reproduction, growth and then other specializations occur. Then multitudes of realities appear as opposites as well as complementarities, such as gender pairs. Matter is accompanied by anti-matter as well as

dark matter. Bright stars have their total opposite in black holes and so on. Light and consciousness seem to have a very special relationship. Visible light constitutes a very small portion of the electromagnetic wave spectrum. Normal consciousness also seems to be only part of a much wider spectrum of consciousness, which includes sleep, dreams, the sub-conscious, and many other subtler states like intuition and other psychic phenomena.

In creation we observe countless dualities, pluralities and complementarities, all of which seem to be moving in time towards finality. Within this mysterious movement of time, from the beginning (such as the Big Bang, or God's command of 'Be') to the end of the universe, there are countless beginnings and endings. Each entity has a destiny and in the case of humans we can influence our destiny by will, within limitations that pertain to time and space.

The arrow of time seems to begin from nothingness moving towards a very complex expanding universe, with infinite interlinked creations and finite realities. For human beings there is a clear arc of consciousness or an arrow of time that we experience which begins with conception in the womb, moves to a new stage of consciousness after birth, and continues to rise until the brain is fully developed and the healthy mind fully functional (between the ages of 30-40). For a physicist, in theory, time can be reversed. But in actual experience we know that today is the product of yesterday and will only give rise to tomorrow and not the reverse. Also, we know that whatever is born is also on its way to its end or death. Entropy increases and, therefore, from an experiential point of view, there is no reversal of time.

The human drive to acquire knowledge and understanding results in ever-increasing degrees of complexity in both individual and social behavior. Human knowledge and collective understanding have been accelerating during the past few centuries and especially during the past few decades. We are now reaching a point where knowledge is potentially available to all human beings.

Islam addresses our material, mental and spiritual needs at all levels – personal or communal. Islam's path is based on the fundamental realization that truth, higher consciousness, or the 'Absolute,' permeates all the universes and realities, seen and unseen, and that the direction of

the life-force in human beings is towards experiencing and realizing the mysterious grace of Sacred Presence. If there is a purpose in life it is to know that life is eternal and intrinsically utterly perfect, irrespective of short term human perception. The prophetic revelations emphasize the need for human beings to accept responsibility for intentions and actions and to willfully desire higher levels of consciousness and insight, i.e. knowledge of God. All acts of worship and religious prescriptions are intended to reduce the veils and background noise in the human psyche or ego, so that the innate light within the heart (soul) shines and elevates the individual to God consciousness without denial of earthly limitations.

1.2 Knowledge, Consciousness & Intelligence

There is a natural, innate human drive towards a metaphysical understanding, knowledge of, and experience of a reality that is beyond rational and mental limitation, that is, God or Allah. Archaeological discoveries of earliest burial sites indicate a deep primal force within the human soul that drives us towards a higher level of consciousness or transcendence. Some of these burial sites are over 100,000 years old and contain stone pillars representing focal points for ritual worship. The rational mind and the material world seem insufficient to contain the natural human drive to ‘know all’. Furthermore, we seek a certainty that is not subject to changes in space or time.

Islam is God-centric and is based on descriptions of Allah as pervading the fabric of the universe – He ‘is closer to you than your jugular vein,’ [50:16] and, ‘Wherever you turn there is the face of Allah’ [2:115]. The ultimate challenge in life is to realize this spiritual fact. People will experience various stages of this mystery. Real personal development of this knowledge relates directly to sincerity, trust and certainty of this truth. The result is conscious awareness of Allah at all times and circumstances.

Knowledge affects us in two ways. One is practical, factual, empirical and rational, what the sound mind accepts and uses, e.g. if you go out in the rain without protection you will get wet. The other is metaphysical, subtler, interactive, intuitive, spiritual and transformative – e.g. your relationship with other people improves if you are kind and compassionate towards them. We human beings are like ‘living mirrors’ which absorb and reflect some of the information or impact made upon them.

Human consciousness has two levels or spheres of awareness:

- the personal, local or conditioned consciousness.
- the boundless, pure consciousness that enables us to go beyond the limitations of local awareness.

The ‘fall’ of Adam from paradise can be regarded as the force that propels his offspring to seek eternal perfection through higher consciousness. The Qur’an’s description of human life as a gift, or ‘loaned trust’ implies a pure consciousness that is boundless and eternal, a sacred realization or presence.

Like others before them, Muslims have tried to chart the layers, different levels and subtleties of knowledge and conscious awareness. Various terms and descriptions have been used by Muslim scholars and realized Masters 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 states that *shari`ah* is the name applied to a divinely revealed system of laws consisting of basic tenets, or roots or foundations (*usūl*) and their various branches of knowledge (*furu`*); and that *tariqah* consists of adhering to them in a careful and consistent manner; while *haqiqah* is the confirmation of the ultimate Truth behind existence by way of illumination and witnessing, or through attaining certain spiritual states.²

In this classical paradigm, 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*) as represented by the *faqih* and others of that caliber. The ‘people of *tariqah*’ (those on a defined path) are those who possess knowledge and wisdom, represented by the *`ālim* (scholar) and the *hakim* (judge). The ‘people of *haqiqah*’ (those seeking the ultimate truth) possess an inner knowledge based upon their own witnessing, represented by the enlightened Master (*`ārif*).

² Sayyid Haydar al-`Amuli (d. 1385 CE / 719 AH), *Asrār al-Sharī`ah wa Atwār al-Tarīqah wa Anwār al-Haqīqah* (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. ~ Imam `Ali

In this same vein the Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

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

Other triadic descriptive terms have often been used to describe the reality of different levels of people's knowledge of Allah, such as:

- the Common People (*al-`ām*) – 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-khās*) – these are the learned men (*al-`ulamā'*), the men of wisdom (*al-hukamā'*), and the ones with the knowledge which enables them to make legal decisions;
- the Chosen Few of the Elect (*khās al-khawās*) 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.

Using this same approach when looking at the act of worship known as prayer, it has been said that prayer (*salāt*) as prescribed by the *shari`ah* consists of:

- service – i.e. serving yourself by lessening your ego;
- nearness – i.e. nearer by being less caught in dualities;

- and the reunion of lovers – Truth is ONE.

Regarding foundational beliefs, yet another Master³ had divided the stages of the knowledge of the unity or Oneness of Allah (*tawhīd*) into three divisions:

- Unity of the Common People;
- Unity of the Elect;
- Unity of the Chosen Few among the Elect.

Ibn `Ajiba wrote that the lights of *shari`ah* lead to the rulings of outer conduct, which then guide the lights of *tariqah*, which are the rulings of inner conduct. And the lights of *tariqah* lead to the lights of *haqiqah*, which illumine the entire universe.

By way of cautioning the reader, as stated in the introduction, the use of certain terms or categorizations have been minimized, as the intention is to give the contemporary Muslim easy access to spiritual development along the path of Islam. As far as possible I have substituted them with ones that are more user-friendly and hope, thereby, to mitigate excessive structure and avoid the pitfall of complacency and vanity about ‘progress’ on the path. Specifically, when looking at foundational beliefs and practices of worship prescribed by Islam terms like ‘basic’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘advanced’, or variations thereof, are used to reflect the increase in depth from outer form to deeper meaning. Progress is in the sense of journeying, and this can be as much lateral as vertical, or indeed, multidimensional. None of these ‘levels’ can be taken separately or neglected if one seeks to become transformed through one’s worship. These categories merely indicate a spectrum of consciousness, for no two people experience anything exactly the same in any spiritual path.

Human beings are driven to higher consciousness by prayer, meditation and a host of creative pursuits such as the arts, music and other transcendental activities, reflecting our yearning to

³ Khwajah `Abdullah Ansari (d. 1088 CE / 481 AH), author of the books: *Tafsīr al-Qur`ān al-Majīd* (Commentary of the Qur`an) and *Manāzil al-Sā`irīn* (Stations of the Wayfarers).

return to a blissful state of contented happiness – paradise. It is ultimately supreme consciousness that we all desire, here and now. The objective is not prayers or rituals per se, but a sustained state of well-being and happiness.

Human perception and experience begins with rudimentary self-awareness. The baby looks at her hands and wonders about the movement of her arm. Self-awareness develops into egotistical identities and the illusion of individuality and separation from creation. Nature has programmed us to care for personal survival as a foundation to subsequent evolvement and growth. Consciousness begins with conception and birth and grows into wider and deeper levels of awareness until maturity, at which time intelligent people begin to question the purpose, meaning of life and subsequent experiences like death and the hereafter. The arc of consciousness leads to higher levels and what religious and spiritual people call transcendence. While there are countless levels of consciousness, such as non-REM sleep and REM sleep, states of hypnosis, transcendence implies a radical shift into another zone which is the essence and root of life. In religion it is called God-consciousness, or *taqwa*, and in Islam the emphasis on attaining this is through *dhikr*, remembrance and awareness of this primary and ultimate light within us, the source of self-awareness. The purpose of life, therefore, is to be in constant reference to this Supreme Consciousness which enables us to put into perspective all other changing states that we experience in life. Self-realization or enlightenment implies this natural awakening.

1.3 Rationality, Inspiration & Revelation

Islam regards the physical world as only a part of the vastness of reality, the greater portion of which is unseen. Life is based on the two zones of the ‘rational/causal’ and the ‘Unseen’ and they are seamlessly connected. The evolution and development of life proceeds from the material, visible, and tangible, towards the subtler zones of feelings, emotions, intuitions, insights and the vast domain of the Unseen. Revelation refers to what ‘descends’ from the Unseen towards the more discernible human understanding. It therefore gives greater clarity to the direction and purpose of movement and change in life, from the physical to the metaphysical, from the personal to the universal, and from the short duration of life on earth to the infinite domain of life itself.

It is said that reasoning (*`aql*) will never be guided except by the *shari`ah* and that the *shari`ah* will never be clearly understood except by reasoning. The verbal root of *`aql* means to comprehend, envelop and contain. *`Aql* is the faculty by which we are able to exercise reason and analysis and its related intellectual disciplines. The *shari`ah* and reasoning need each other in the same way as the soul and the body need each other. The *shari`ah* may be thought of as a building with reasoning as its foundation: one is useless without the other.

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 external beams. Likewise, these beams are useless if they cannot be utilized to give sight. One of the interpretations of Allah’s words ‘...light upon light...’ [24:35] 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 dust of this world falls upon the pupil of a man’s eye his vision will be marred. What clarity can there then be if one is attached to the entire world and therefore be veiled by it?

The traveler upon this path who possesses reasoning will be guided by it to adhere to *shari`ah* and thereby progress towards realization of truth. This can only be achieved by harnessing the natural physical and spiritual forces within so as to experience transformation.

Reasoning and rationality show us causal connections. Yet there are also situations which are counter-intuitive that do not follow the norm of reasoning, e.g. emotions and feelings, or the ‘sixth sense’, and insight supersede basic reasoning in our behavior. Beyond the mind’s limitation there is a subtler causality. For example, prayer (*salāt*) is considered to be the most important of the acts of worship and yet the Prophetic teaching rules that a woman does not have to make up the prayers missed during her menstrual cycle, whereas she is required to make-up her missed fasts and this would seem to imply that fasting was more important!

Human beings may be considered as the people of the ‘middle way’. One of the meanings of ‘middle’ is the half-way point between the visible and material realm on the one hand, and the metaphysical unseen realm on the other. Potentially we contain the essence of these two domains. The journey in this life is about realizing the connectedness between:

- the relative and the absolute
- conditioned/personal life and boundless/eternal life
- humanity and divinity

The evolvment and development of human life involves personal will and effort to experience the relationship between personal limitation and the vastness of what the soul contains – a reflection of God’s light. All acts of worship are to facilitate this unification.

Revelation differs from inspiration. True inspirations are reflections of the Prophetic revelations. Those who follow 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 unseen world. This can happen when the primal and natural codes are adhered to – that is, the *Dīn*.

The word *wahy*, translated 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 *ilhām*, which we translate as ‘inspiration,’ has the tri-literal Arabic root of *lahima*, meaning ‘to swallow or devour something’. The fourth form of the verb, which is the corresponding verbal form of the verbal noun, *ilhām*, carries the meaning that something is placed within the heart (soul or spirit) of man by Allah. The means used for conveying an inspiration or *ilhām* is an angelic force which brings spiritual knowledge and what is praiseworthy for the soul, without the interference of lower desires.

Inspiration must be distinguished from what is traditionally understood to be the ‘whispering’ of negative thoughts. In Arabic *waswās* refers to thoughts, ideas or concepts which confuse the heart, causing misfortune, grief or other negative effects. This whispering is the root of false notions and fears, including baseless fears regarding ill-health, poverty, or the fear of imagined disasters. Whispering is considered to be a satanic voice that is able to afflict the self due to inattentiveness or distraction.

The way inspirations and other illuminations which spring from them (during sleep or when most relaxed, or during prayers) become manifest are subtle and often not very clear. Occasionally inspirations do occur during waking consciousness when, due to Allah’s grace, wonders from the realm of the unseen illuminate the heart like a sudden flash of lightning.

Revelation differs from inspiration, in the strength of its clarity and the fact that the means of transmission (the angelic medium) is also witnessed.

It is not for any human being that God should address him except through inspiration (*wahy*) or from behind a veil or by way of a Messenger whom He sends. [42:51]

The point here is that knowledge and insight come upon the heart in various ways, by way of revelation and inspiration, by way of signs, Messengers and teachers. Revelation, in particular, is transmitted by the angels, or ‘angelic’ agency. The source of higher consciousness is the universal governance that emanates from supreme consciousness and the way higher

consciousness reaches us is through different streams or packages with varying intensities. Revelation is of the highest; intuition, inspiration and insights are of lower degrees.

It is related from the Imams that revelations were received by Messengers (*rusūl*) 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 due to the capacity of man's soul to perceive the nature of phenomena, as well as its original root and essence of phenomena. This essence is usually veiled due to man's lack of preparation to accept these illuminations and knowledge.

When this veil becomes thin or is lifted altogether insight becomes clear. 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' or 'Well-guarded Tablet' [85:22]. The ease by which the veil is lifted is proportionate to the degree of the soul's readiness and its submission, the purity of the heart, and the evolvment of intellectual reason.

Some religious scholars and theologians may be primarily concerned with acquiring formal information and knowledge without due regard for the states of the heart, for eliminating reprehensible qualities, or for grooming the self by replacing vices with virtues. Throughout the history of Islam we generally detect clear differences in divine knowledge between the religious scholar and the spiritual Master. Scholars and theologians are generally most concerned with the application of religious injunctions and laws. The seekers of gnosis, on the other hand, are concerned with severing attachments to creation in order to gain insights and subtle knowledges relating to the soul and Allah's lights. This is the path of liberation and enlightenment which ignited the hearts of the early Muslims and the Sufis.

The balanced approach to acquiring knowledge is through the study of and the struggle against the self, as well as the purification of the heart. The seeker will take from the Master and follow in the footsteps of the Prophets and the people of gnosis and realization. It is related in a divinely revealed tradition (*hadith qudsi*) from the Prophet (S) 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 (*nawāfil*) 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.

The state of the spiritual Master is described as:

~ His body is within 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 (*`ārif*) 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. The *`ārif* has become annihilated from the creation, from desire, and from 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. ~ Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq⁴

There are two verses in the Qur'an which, on the face of it, seem to describe the Prophets differently. One says: 'And We do not differentiate between them' [2:136], meaning that their inner state and knowledge of the sacred domain is the same (i.e. they have all awakened to the prevailing truth). However, another verse tells us: 'Some of them we have favored over others' [17:55], implying that their impact on the society and culture at the time in which they appear differs in extent and durability. Some of them produced radical changes in their people, others were much less well known and their outer impact was minimal. The extent of laws and regulations given to them also differs. The true message is always the same however: creation is an emanation from an eternal light that permeates the entire creation and to which it ultimately returns. The purpose of human spiritual growth and development is to enable humanity to realize its root of divinity. Prophets and Messengers were people who experienced that unity, and

⁴*Misbāh al-Sharī'ah*, 'The Lantern of the Path'.

revealed it in their times. They were wholesome and modest human beings imbued with divine qualities, heavenly beings on earth.

1.4 States & Stages of Development

The evolvement of human consciousness resembles the growth of a seed into a mature plant with the fruit as its final product. The ultimate fruit of human life is the realization of Allah's utter and perfect presence and universal dominance. All created entities undergo cycles in their growth and development, and this is true of mankind not only in biological growth but also in emotional and spiritual dimensions. Sincere, diligent and conscious practice leads to the transformation that is the goal of the *Dīn* of Islam.

The original meaning and purpose in life is engrained within the human soul and is enacted through the dual nature of human consciousness. Biological evolution and the love of survival and growth is the foundation upon which spiritual evolution takes place. First the ego develops, and then it has to surrender to the soul which is its source and essence. The limited, conditioned consciousness of the lower self can naturally lead to higher consciousness and enlightenment. Our mind is the connecting point between the inner and the outer world, enabling us to maintain a balanced life.

Every sentient creature on earth grows and evolves towards a higher state of consciousness or self-awareness. Although life on earth seems to have evolved in a random fashion, the directionality of the desire for the highest possible state of consciousness is clear in more evolved animals – especially man.

The soul within the heart draws its power directly from the Omnipresent. For outer direction we take counsel from others, and for the inner direction we simply need to turn to the heart and the sacred light therein. All actions and all desirable Attributes have their essence in Allah and – they belong to God and emanate from Him. That original sacred light is the beacon towards which everything is directed.

Terms like god-consciousness, soul consciousness, or self-realization, all indicate states or situations more evolved than that of ego consciousness and its limitation to issues of survival, personal identity, and dominance.

The Purified Heart and the Light of Soul

The physical heart is a major organ of the human body. The metaphorical heart is where the soul inhabits and emits its life force. It is this heart that is often referred to as the most important factor in spiritual progress. There can be numerous diseases of this heart, which range from being sick, jealous, mean or tarnished, to being attached and numerous other ailments. The metaphorical or inner-heart needs to be purified so that the connection between the earthly world and the sacred soul within this heart becomes clear.

Generally, it is easier to reign in the ego and the lower self through improved behavior, and accountability, through tutelage of mind and conduct. However, to purify the heart and render it wholesome, the inner heart requires different disciplines and tutelage than mind and conduct. The human love for meditation, peace or even monastic life, are signs that we want to purify the heart from all outer tarnishes. A purified heart has no lust, anger or attachments within it; therefore the light of God will shine through it. The ultimate test is the willingness to give away whatever one loves to keep.

When the heart is pure the soul will bring about the realization that life is ever-perfect and is forever. The truly awakened heart has no concern about personal death, for it knows that the soul is eternal. Respect for life on earth can be genuine and real due to the realization of the sacredness of the soul within the heart. Through reverence of the soul, we also tolerate or respect other aspects of human life.

It is the wholesome heart that enables us to pick up signals from the unseen, past, present, or future, and endows us with intuitive, spontaneous insights. The purified heart allows the light of the soul to shine through whatever Allah wills, in His infinite generosity.

The glow or energy of a purified heart, freed from the shadows and veils of ‘otherness’, is called ‘presence’. Much has been written about polishing the heart and cleansing off the tarnish that prevents it from reflecting the Light of Allah. Beyond the ritually prescribed acts, practices like meditation and invocation, or *dhikr*, have been practiced in varying forms so as to strengthen this process.

The purpose of verbal confirmation by invocation and remembrance (*dhikr*) is to awaken the heart. As one repeats with the tongue, gradually the heart will ‘take over’ and the meaning of what is invoked takes over one’s consciousness. Likewise, the remembrance of Allah in the heart will, in turn, spur the tongue on to *dhikr*. Thus the outer aids the inner and the inner enhances the outer.

A high degree of pure consciousness may be attained during deep meditation and when the heart is in a state of complete stillness and the mind, thoughtless. Enlightened Masters have categorized four levels or stations of worshippers:

- *The first group*: They understand the manner of performing the physical / mechanical aspects of prayer, and they may even understand the meanings of the words they utter. The inner state, as far as they are concerned, is to pay attention (i.e. have presence of mind) during the actual 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.
 - *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 that everything which is praiseworthy is attributable only to Allah. Presence of the Heart for them is when their hearts are focused on the remembrance of these qualities or Attributes.
 - *The third group*: They perceive these truths conceptually and intellectually and realize them within their own hearts. They have realized 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 empirical evidence, yet his belief in it has not reached or affected his heart.
 - *The fourth group*: They have combined these truths and experience them within their heart and thus have reached the station of serenity and contentment – a wholesome realization of truth. They now know that acts of devotion resonate within the heart, making clear the foundation of unity (*tawhīd*).
-

The great metaphysician, Sadr al-Dīn al-Shirazi, otherwise known as Mulla Sadra, divides men according to the levels of discipline of the self (*nafs*)⁵:

- *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.
- *The second division*: Those who discipline the heart and purify it of impurities.
- *The third division*: Those whose state absorbs divine Attributes and who unify with them.
- *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 on the light of Allah and nothing else.

⁵*Al-Asfār al-Arba`ah* (The Four Journeys), d.ca 1637 CE / 1050 AH.

1.5 Oneness, Dualities & Universal Connectedness

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth. He is the Source, the Cause, the Sustainer and the Governor. All creations exist within the confines of space and time and are fashioned according to intricate patterns which trace their future destiny. Allah is not definable, measurable or tangible, yet His Attributes and qualities are most desired by all of creation. He witnesses everything known and unknown. He is the Creator and Sustainer of everything. Thus our senses are derived from His Attributes. He is above all, within all and after all, and His signs are there wherever you turn. Allah is the One, Unique, incomparable Reality from which all transient, contingent realities derive their power and characteristics.

The path to understanding the Truth and the Real begins by admittance of personal inadequacy, needs and reliance on the source of mercy and generosity – Allah. Through love of Allah's Attributes and qualities the process of evolvment of consciousness begins. When we shift our focus and attention from the tangible, discernible world to the subtle world of essence, a personal bridge is established between the soul and the self. Our consciousness will link what is conditioned and limited (self), with pure consciousness (soul). Practicing Muslims punctuate their prayers by declaring '*Allahu Akbar*' – Allah is greater than any description. From the unseen, we experience the seen. These two realms are seamlessly connected and emanate from Allah.

The lights emerging from the One Essence spread out throughout the universe to reveal countless qualities and multiple shadows, forms and shapes. There is a wide range of hardness and softness in the tangible world. The same variations can be seen in all other matters of senses and feelings. Creation appears in pairs and symmetries that show different degrees of opposite qualities as well as complementarities.

It is a constant human quest to discover the roots, origin and the relationships between these diversities and dualities. We also look for causalities and correlation in the endeavor of reaching a conclusion that is secure and holds true. In the outer world, there is no permanent stability as everything is naturally subject to change in time and space. What is a poison for a certain

condition is a cure for another, and what is desirable now can be despised later. The children of Adam have to battle on earth under the shadows of the tree of discord and dispersion. Only by transcendence do we start on the desirable journey of ascendance back to the sacred realm of true security – the sacred light within the heart.

Most worldly quests are like chasing after a mirage that only appears to be water, but cannot quench thirst. It disappears only to reappear in another illusion. Those who follow a religious or spiritual path, with demarcated outer boundaries and limitations, and practice constant reflection and self-correction are struggling to transcend the confusions of lower consciousness so as to attain the delights of higher consciousness and Oneness.

From this source of absolute gatheredness, separation began with the emanation of movement and energy and then patterns emerged, all of which generated the archetypes of all that exists in creation. Further down this arc of creation, energy, matter and form interlinked. At yet a further stage in this process, separation took place when the opposites in creation, such as day and night, hot and cold, and wet and dry, became clearly distinguishable one from the other. The fabric of our experience is woven from inner and outer aspects, from gatheredness and separation, from the heavenly and the earthly, from meaning and form. These patterns exist in dynamic tension with each other and every other dimension, seen and unseen in existence.

As we know, every human being is biologically different from another, although there is a common genetic connection going back through time. Even in our personal experiences, deep down, we can all discern a shared sense of sameness in what matters most in our lives. Our form or color may differ but we all unite in our desire for contentment and happiness. We are the ultimate example of how difference, or separation, meets in sameness or gatheredness.

With regard to the outer world, then, we are compelled to connect with and relate to the thread of unity that permeates all existence. At the very instant that separation occurs (i.e. the cosmic Big Bang or human inception), what comes into being is the seeking of its gatheredness or original unity. The source of our desire for gatheredness is the soul within us, which replicates the original primal gatheredness and unity. The self, which is shadow to the light of the soul, drifts

away to experience separation, insecurity, restlessness and all the opposite qualities beamed out from the soul, such as tranquility, contentment, joy and bliss. The shadow/self imagines that by acquiring wealth and worldly reputation, for example, it may increase its status and honor. The self imagines this because the acquisition of wealth and reputation is a small reflection of what the soul already has, which is being totally honored and loved by its Creator. The self in its waywardness spends a lifetime trying to imitate the soul by striving to acquire fame, wealth, knowledge, security, and so on, with a modicum of success that is always short-lived and never ultimately satisfying. When and if the self truly surrenders to the soul, it realizes the folly of its years of being the prodigal child. It sees that while people may reject us, our soul or our Creator never does.

We return to the divinely revealed tradition already mentioned:

~ 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 (*nawāfil*) 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.

The language of distance is metaphorical, for Allah is not subject to place or time, for He pervades the universe and beyond – *Allahu Akbar*. If the decree of *tawhīd* or unity prevails, the being far or being near is merely a function of the individual's perceptual framework, the state of which is itself modulated by the degree of higher consciousness. Since, however, our experience of life is moderated by patterns of duality along a spectrum of extremes, the idea of being close or far can be helpful in distinguishing levels of awareness.

Drawing 'near' to Allah is always preceded by withdrawal 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 connection with the material realm of nature.
-

2. The sphere of emotions and the realms of allegory and symbolism.
3. The sphere of reason and intellect's true essence; this realm is void of matter and form.

The serious worshipper, in his prostration, passes by these three spheres as he withdraws from this world and enters into a sacred state beyond the mind:

And remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him completely. [73:8]

When Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq was asked which was the best action that enhances awareness of Allah, he replied:

~ I know of nothing after gnostic knowledge (*ma`rifah*) which is better than *salāt*. Have you not seen that the righteous servant (of Allah), `Isa bin Maryam, said (in the Qur'an): "He charged me with prayer and almsgiving as long as I remain alive." [19:31]

Being with people, serving them, and putting up with their difficulties is balanced by the act of withdrawal, seclusion, and reflection. Prophet Muhammad (S) regularly spent time in the cave called Hira outside Makkah for several days at a time. It was at the culmination of such periods that revelation occurred. The Qur'an describes the 40 days Moses spent in seeking his Lord, before he was given the 'tablets'. The tradition of 40 days of seclusion (*khalwah* or *chillah*, from *chehel*, forty in Persian) was taken by Sufi Masters to be a rite of passage, a serious emptying out (*khalwah* derives from *khāliya*, to empty out) – 'And when you are free [of worldly concerns] ...then turn your desire to your Lord' [94:7-8].

Smaller periods of time are also practiced regularly. The smallest period is ultimately symbolized by the *salāt* which punctuates the day five times, giving us the chance to reconnect in awareness with the underlying reality that grounds our existence. This is useful until a time comes when the fourth journey which Mulla Sadra noted (for further elucidation cf. [Chapter 6, 6.4](#)), becomes established, that is, when you are with people but your inner state prevails. What

is frowned upon is being extreme in anything and in this case, being monastic is not prescribed. Islam advocates the middle way.

Islam is founded upon experiential *tawhīd*. The whole universe has emanated from one source and appears in infinite levels and layers of dualities, diversities, complementarities, competitions, cooperation and other forces. All these dualities reflect an aspect of a higher attribute which includes the names of Allah. With spiritual progress we realize that all actions emanate from the One essential source of all energies – Allah. All Attributes, ideas, and qualities also emanate from Allah’s qualities. The ultimate realization and inner peace is attained when one realizes that there is only one essential essence that pervades the whole universe – the essence of Allah. That is the deep meaning of *Lā ilāha illa’Llāh*.

1.6 The Return to Origin– *Ma`ād*

Adam descended to earth to be challenged by all the limitations and diverse interactions. The metaphorical descent is completed by the yearning to return to the bliss of paradise. After death, comes the mystery of the hereafter. The consciousness of a deceased person may need some time to adjust to the new state where personal will and the ability to act are lost. All of our human experiences on earth are limited by the speed of light and the hereafter beyond that. There may well be some deep subconscious memory of the original nothingness or pre-creation. The soul however, will carry with it the trace of earthly exposure, desires, attachments, actions and the states of mind and heart.

It is in the hereafter that every self will fully experience and realize the effects of its earthly intentions and actions, down to the smallest events. ‘Permanent’ hell or paradise, as referred to in reference to the afterlife, means that durations in that realm are radically different to our earthly notions of time and space. If during our life we were illumined by higher consciousness, then the passage through resurrection will be with ease. Otherwise, processes of purification (chastisements) will be experienced before the soul carries along its final journey. Every soul will be given its just due in the hereafter.

Immediately after death, the ‘soul-self’ energy entity that is the individual undergoes adjustments due to the loss of the body, mind, and will to act. Both the light of the soul that occupies the higher end of the spectrum of consciousness that resides in the individual as well as the individuated self, or ego, that resides at the lower end of this spectrum, experience a profound change in state of being. It is during this intermediate state, it is thought, that the deceased experiences bewilderment and confusion.

Whatever is born will die. Individual entities and creations, as well as celestial bodies and galaxies, all have beginnings and ends. Whatever is on this earth has its roots and origins in the heavens. All the materials on earth were originally stardust and gases. Every entity that is within the limitations of space and time has emerged from beyond the boundaries of any place or time.

Death is the end of earthly realms and resurrection is the return to origin, with an earthly color or tag representing our overall state of evolved-consciousness. Whatever has emanated from the heavens onto earth will return to the heavens with an additional earthly trace of biography and colors superimposed upon the original pure soul-energy. Human experiences on earth are like preludes, samples and preparations to witnessing ‘other worldly’ states of new dimensions beyond mental grasp and reason.

Life on earth has evolved over millennia culminating in human consciousness. Earthly existence occurs within the womb of space and time; whereas the afterlife is a new realm and comes about instantly after death. Resurrection is beyond all limits and ideas. It is a great mystery that awaits us all. The final material death of the universe triggers off a new re-emergence of a different life – that of souls and spirits. The new life will witness Truth in Divine Presence.

The rise of the Adamic consciousness with its complex brain and mental processes (producing a sense of separation, identity and inquisitiveness) necessitated the descent to the earthly domain of experience. In this dynamic environment there are all kinds of dualities and forces and dynamics that did not exist before. This new cradle of mankind is based upon earthly trials, tests and struggles in order to return to the inner state of peace and bliss as known by the soul before its imprisonment within body and mind.

The physical nature of man is from earth, water, air and fire, whereas the spiritual essence is beyond imagination. Every human being goes through a physical process of growing from a cell, to a clot, to a fetus, which matures within the womb and later outside of it for a few more months before further growth and maturity occurs. The cycle of human creation begins with birth, followed by the subsequent evolvment of the self and its complexities, which presents challenges and mysteries in relation to behavior, conduct and desirable states of contentment, stability and knowledge. The creation of Adam in paradise is a great metaphor of how, from Allah’s will, all kinds of creations emanate, the pinnacle of which (man) yearns to return to the original state of perfection and happiness in the eternal garden.

The cycles of birth and death are echoed in the descent of Adam and the ascent through passionate worship back to pure consciousness. The living emanates from the dead and the dead from the living – a paradox that cannot be resolved rationally. The paradox may disappear through insight and illumination, whose keys are faith in God and transcendence to the truth of Oneness.

Chapter 2: Roots & Foundations of Truth

2.1 The Desire to Believe & Worship

Through archaeology and anthropology (and the traces of pre-historical evidence) we now know that the earliest structures on earth (huge monolithic stones arranged in specific formations) were places for communal worship. Trance experiences and other ‘non-earthly’ insights were early examples of altered states of consciousness sought by man. The desire to know the mysteries behind existence and the rites and rituals of worshipping the power inherent in or behind phenomenal existence is as ancient as man himself.

Transformative ‘faith and practice’ is the key to enlightened existence. It begins with questioning the meaning and purpose of life. The ever-changing experiences of life lead us to seek a knowledge that will always be reliable and to find a consistent voice of real authority, where ‘authority’ means the voice of true wisdom and knowledge, not power. It is the voice of deep knowingness or certainty, not the office of command, which is what we often associate with this term. To listen to God is to be aware of the light of the soul within the heart. This light can shine when ‘the egotistic shadows are least’ and when the heart is purified from the confusion of dualities and ‘otherness’. The higher self (soul) will then illumine and override the lower self (ego).

Faith begins as trust and can lead to an experientially transformed state. The requirements of this journey are sincerity, commitment, perseverance and total reliance upon the higher state of consciousness which encompasses all life forms. With increased awareness ‘living faith’ unifies the seen and unseen. The outcome is a new outlook on all aspects of life on earth.

The efforts of the Prophets, the Imams and the Masters, in their instruction to people, were directed at perfecting intention, knowledge and action. Among Muslims this became known as

knowledge of the fundamentals or ‘Roots’ (*usūl*)⁶ and the ‘Branches’ of faith (*furu`*).⁷ 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....

The role and responsibility of the Prophets, and the Messengers are immense. Allah said (to His Prophet):

So, be steadfast as you have been commanded. [11:112]

With regards to this the Prophet commented:

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

All creatures and existing beings (be they high or low in intelligence or evolvement) are searching for perfection and for attaining the highest potential possible for them.

There is no creature that crawls on the face of the earth, nor any bird that flies on its two wings, but that they are nations like you; We have not neglected any matter from the Book; then they will be gathered together unto their Lord. [6:38]

As for acts of devotion or worship, Allah says:

I have not created the *Jinn* or Humankind except that they worship [Me]. [51:56]

⁶*Usul al-Dīn*: unity (*tawhīd*), justice (*`adl*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), imāmate (*imāmah*), and judgment that takes place at the return (*al-ma`ād*).

⁷*Furu` al-dīn*: prayer (*salāt*), fasting (*sawm*), pilgrimage (*hajj*), obligatory wealth-tax (*zakāt*), striving in the way of Allah (*jihād*) and enjoining good and forbidding evil (*amr bi’l ma’ruf wa’n-nahy `an al-munkar*).

Worship is the final stage of passionate adoration. One likes, loves and adores that which one knows is most desirable. Allah's Attributes, such as Power, Knowledge, Wealth etc., are most desirable qualities. When the entire being (body, mind and heart) is united in its focus, then worship is an act of recharging the human being. With such worship a person will be thrilled by the Creator's presence and prevalence.

Surely if you would ask them who created the heavens and the earth, their reply would be "Allah". [31:25]

Everything remembers and affirms Allah's divinity and His Oneness in its own way:

There is nothing that does not glorify His praises. [17:44]

Because our main concerns on earth relate to the physical, material and mental dimensions of life we do not comprehend their special way of glorification. Just as physically a child grows to become an adult, so too spiritually we grow along a ladder of knowledge, insights and worship, by starting with the basics of rituals. In time the limbs and organs, including the sense perceptions, begin to orientate towards the higher zone of consciousness. With maturity in spiritual practice, subtler awareness and sensing begins to take place until such time as it becomes easy and normal to depart from the normal state of consciousness to a higher state. The union between the lower self and higher self or soul now becomes natural and constant. A stage may be reached which is described in the Qur'an as 'those perpetually steadfast in prayer (*salāt*)' [70:23].

With spiritual wisdom and maturity we realize that existence is one cycle revolving between the lover and the Beloved, between the knower and the Known, the seeker and the Sought. Original sacred love is what unifies that which appears diverse or different in our minds.

Thus Allah will bring forth a people whom He loves and who love Him. [5:54]

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

~ I was a hidden treasure and I loved to become known, therefore I created so that I could be known.

Love is Allah's power that holds the universe along its journey. The True Beloved is Allah and created beings are the lovers. Each created entity has a unique direction in its journey to His Presence. The goal of all is the Eternal One, free of any multiplicity. In truth:

~ 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 Apparent, the Hidden and He is the Knower of all things. [57:3]

Prescriptions for the Spiritual Wayfarer

The human quest for a path in life that leads to sustainable contentment is relentless. We all seek knowledge of the root and origin of our lives so that we can arrive at living wholesomely and enjoyably in all situations. The Prophets present the Truth and prescriptions which deal with matters concerning the worldly existence of man and his journey towards his final destiny. 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. [2:151]

Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals, and many of the people...? [22:18]

There is nothing that does not glorify His praise but you do not understand their glorification. [17:44]

These verses indicate that all creation follows paths that acknowledge aspects of Allah's qualities. The Qur'an refers to man as *`abd*, which means slave, servant or worshiper. Being a slave in this context indicates man's fundamental state of dependence upon the greater reality, which is beyond the merely physical and visible, i.e. man's permanent state of need to be connected to his Source, Allah. The term 'slave' (God-servant or bondsman) derives from the term *`abd*, which indicates the human state as a complement to Allah's attribute of *Rabb*, Sustainer or Lord. 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 understand their glorification (*tasbih*)' [17:44]. However, every creature's prayer and prostration before Him is what is most suitable for its station, as He says:

Say: Each person acts according to what befits (knowledge and state) him. [17:84]

Just as there are always two aspects to every created thing, there are also dual aspects to the rules and prescriptions or code of conduct, i.e. an outward act and an inward meaning, one which is perceived through the senses and one which relates to the heart and soul. Rationality and reason are necessary entry points to subtler inner knowledges.

~ 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 a knowledge for every explanation and He made a door for every knowledge. Those who know this know it, and those who are ignorant of this are ignorant of it. The Messenger of Allah and the Imams are doors which speak and relate this knowledge. ~ Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq

The task of correct guidance and sound leadership lies with the men of knowledge who are the heirs to the Prophets in exemplary conduct and wholesomeness. Some of the Imams taught the following:

~ Whoever does not have a wise man to guide him correctly will perish. ~ Imam Zayn al-`Abidin

- ~ Whoever acts without insight is like the one who chases after a mirage in the desert: his haste will only increase him in distance. ~ Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq
- ~ Whoever 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. ~ Imam `Ali, *Nahj ul-Balagha*.

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!

The Islamic way of life is founded upon observance and restrictions within the various branches of the faith (*furu` al-dīn*). It encompasses the pathways of the heart and the internal state of the believer so that the remedy for the self (*nafs*) can be applied, and so that both the sensory and subtler veils may be removed. 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.⁸

In respect of which Abu Nasr al-Farabi said:

- ~ You possess a veil originating from yourself which covers you from yourself in addition to the clothing which covers your body; so attempt to lift that veil and you will then witness and no longer enquire about

⁸ Quoted from *Al-Fusūs al-Hikām*.

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 yourself; 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.⁹

The traveler of this path is responsible, by his or her innate nature, by reasoning and by actions, to know the nature of the self/soul dynamic in order to attain the goal of the most profound knowledge (*ma`rifah*) of the Lord. This is the path of the Prophets and the Messengers and those who follow their guidance.

Historical Evolvement

Within a few decades from the dawn of Islam, the natural linguistic and cultural differences of the new Muslims who spread out over a large geographical area brought about certain variations in detailed interpretations in the practices of the *Dīn*. Lack of easy communication from the center of political and religious authority and the scarcity of qualified religious instructors brought about different sects and ‘schools of thought’. A thousand years ago there were numerous schools of thought and sects, some of which differed considerably in their ‘theology’ to that of the mainstream. Likewise Sufi brotherhoods and ‘secret’ societies began to appear and flourish. Yet the Qur’an and patterns of prophetic conduct had always acted as a unifying base of Islam and the path of *tawhīd*.

In our present world where Muslims are now spread throughout the world, with hundreds of different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, we again find that the Qur’an and the prophetic way are the main unifying thread. In Turkey, for example, after a period of over seventy years of enforced secular rule and culture, we find a rise in the rediscovery of the

⁹ In *al-Mabda’ wa al-Mī`ād* (The Beginning and the Return) by Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Farabi d. 950 CE/ 339 AH.

Qur'an, the wholesomeness of Islamic morality and accountable conduct taking on a new lease of life and popularity.

The natural human desire to believe in a perfect and constant reality and truth – Allah – and the desire to be exposed to the light of this truth has always accompanied human consciousness and will become more universal and prevalent. We love truth and derive much joy and goodness by our awareness of it.

2.2 Traditional Foundations of Faith

In traditional Islam the separation between fundamentals of faith and its branches were often understood as the method of unifying the outer and inner aspects of human nature. Physical practices and rituals help to refine the self and its conduct, and bring the entire being nearer to the light of Oneness which permeates the universe and to realize the truth of the God-centricity of creation.

As already mentioned, traditional scholarship considered that the two potentials of knowledge and action were represented by the ‘Roots’ and the ‘Branches’ of the Faith. Perfecting or fulfilling the ‘Roots’ of the Faith was understood to be accomplished by the purification of the inward and perfection of faith, while the purpose of the ‘Branches’ was to purify the outward and bring about the perfection of intentions and actions.

In order to cleanse ‘the inner’ from impurities it was considered essential to have a sound belief in and knowledge of unity (*tawhīd*), justice (*`adl*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and the return to Allah for judgment (*al-ma`ād*). Cleansing the body, mind and self of impurities was likewise not considered possible except by way of what came to be known as the five branches of faith: prayer (*salāt*), fasting (*sawm*), payment of the obligatory wealth tax (*zakāt*), the pilgrimage (*hajj*), and striving in the way of Allah (*jihād*). Followers of the Ja`fari school of law also add to this the enjoining of good and the forbidding of evil (*al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa'n-nahi `an al-munkar*), as well as following the appointed Imam (*imāmah*). As Imam `Ali has said:

~ Allah has made faith based on knowledge (*imān*) 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 therefore follow both the roots and the branches, on any of the three levels: the basic (i.e. *shari`ah*), the intermediate (i.e. *tariqah*) and the advanced (*haqiqah*). Whoever possesses true belief and perfected faith must adhere to these foundational pillars, since it is essential to believe in unity in order to be cleansed of seeing other than Allah (*shirk*), and to believe that Allah is Just and Wise.

And your Lord is not unjust to His servants. [41:46]

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 his authority. Therefore one needs to believe in the Prophet and prophethood, and that Islam will not remain without correct guidance and instruction, as it is expressed in Allah's words:

Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those set in authority over you.
[4:59]

The presence of Prophets and Messengers has been a necessity so as to maintain continuity in the existence of enlightened beings. Everything which proceeds from here is nothing other than an invitation to mankind 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.

At its inception, Islam based on the Qur'an and the Prophetic teachings evolved over a period of 23 years. It connected the seen and unseen and the material and physical with its origin of energies and lights. Islam was formative and transformative. Like a torch that illumined the heart of the faithful it brought about a shift in people's perception and conduct.

With its geographical spread and the multi-cultural impact upon Islam and the large number of converts who needed to be taught, it became necessary to establish teaching centers and well defined doctrines. Numerous questions arose, e.g. What was the perfect way of performing ritual

ablution? How many people constituted the minimum number for congregational Friday prayers? And scores of other such issues.

Thus, the most acknowledged local theologian was considered as the authority which had to be acceptable to the dynastic rulers of the land. From this process arose dozens of schools of thought which, after some three centuries, were reduced to eight or nine schools of law or '*madhāhib*'.

2.3 Unity (*tawhīd*)

Unity (*tawhīd*) 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. Allah is utterly incomparable; thus, He possesses knowledge unsurpassed, no one is equal to Him in His creation, and He has no peer.

Say, O People of the Book, come to an equitable 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. [3:64]

Your god is One God. [2:163]

This *tawhīd* 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."

Scholars of *shari`ah* confirm by reason, evidence and intellectual proof, that if there were in existence two independent gods, each would have been distinct from the other in essence. This Unity is the outward and obvious form of Unity which nullifies the outward form of idolatry. It is perfected by the utterance of the words '*Lā ilāha illa`llāh*' (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 are both cleansed from the impurity of obvious idolatry, as Allah says:

Indeed the people of idolatry are unclean. [9:28]

This type of Unity is also called 'proven unity' or intellectual Unity, because it is Unity which has been confirmed by way of evidence and proof, reasoning and logic.

After Unity at the basic level is absorbed 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) one then turns one's gaze away from the effects and causative factors and begins to witness perfection in Allah's ways in creation. Now one can start to surrender oneself to Him totally and to be contented with Him:

Allah is contented with them and they are contented with Him. [5:119]

Likewise:

And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him. [65:3]

The Unity of the Elect, or what we may term the intermediate level, has been described thus:

~ This is the Unity which is confirmed by way of Reality itself. This is when regard for the various outward causes of phenomena is dropped, and one rises above intellectual disputes with their accompanying proofs. This is when one does not look for evidence of *tawhīd*, nor seek a reason for trust, nor a means for salvation. One witnesses only the preponderance of Reality, by way of his judgment, knowledge and ability to discern things in the proper order of their significance.¹⁰

The understanding of Unity at the basic level relates to intellectual knowing and is associated with the general masses. The next level is to witness Unity as the connecting factor in life. Everyone who turns away from the realm of creation and sees the One Whose Existence is absolutely true and permanent will declare that there is nothing in existence but Allah. 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. [12:106]

¹⁰ Shaykh Abu Isma`il Abdallah al-Harawi (d. 1087 CE / 481 AH) in the book *Manāzil al-Sā`irīn*.

One gnostic Master comments:

~ Indeed, purification from obvious association (*shirk*) 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 whoever harbors 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 (*shirk*) among my people are more hidden than a black ant crawling on a pitch black stone in the midst of a dark night.

The subtle, hidden form of association is relevant to believers and Muslims, and not to unbelievers and hypocrites because Allah has mentioned this subtle association in conjunction with the word ‘faith-based-on-knowledge’ (*imān*), which applies in Islam. It is impossible to combine outward association with faith based on knowledge. The meaning here, then, could only be that hidden form of association which the Qur’an refers to as ‘*hawa*’, which carries the meanings of whims, desires, 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... [45:23]

It is often ‘hidden’ desires that lead to hypocrisy and various aspects of ‘*shirk*’. That is why it is said that the greatest deity worshipped is ‘human desire’.

Those who are established at the basic and intermediate levels of *tawhīd* are the ones who witness through the lens of Unity. 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 transient reflection or shadow and therefore subject to change, obliteration and destruction:

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

This is what is meant by the Divine Attribute ‘He Who Remains’ or ‘The Everlasting’ (*al-Bāqī*); that is, He remains within eternity. ‘He who perishes’ (*al-Fānī*) means that the one with this attribute will not remain. It is for this reason that one finds that the Master (*ʿārīf*) will say that there is nothing in 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, there is the Face of Allah. [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 encompasses all things. [4:126]

In popular Islamic and Sufi Teachings three degrees of Unity have been described in various ways:

- the Knowledge of Certainty (*ʿIlm al-Yaqīn*), the Eye of Certainty (*ʿAyn al-Yaqīn*), and the Truth of Certainty (*Haqq al-Yaqīn*);
- the terms ‘*Islām*, *Imān*, and *Ihsān*’ (surrender, faith and excellent conduct),
- 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 (*This world is forbidden to the People of the Hereafter*) have reached the station of verification (*tahqīq*), or the level of the inward. They have witnessed Unity and by

virtue of this have been counted among the People of the Hereafter. They have gone beyond the outward and arrived at the inward, having 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. [12:108]

The second group (*and the Hereafter is forbidden to the People of the World*) is at the station of emulation (*taqlīd*): they follow someone else endowed with knowledge. This is an outward stage. They 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, the enlightened beings (*but they are both forbidden to the People of Allah*) are those who have transcended the lower self and thus are called the ‘People of Allah’, because they have arrived at the gate of the Ultimate Truth. The people of Allah belong to Allah and not to any identifiable world – hence anything other than Allah is ‘forbidden’. They have witnessed Allah’s Light with their hearts and thus their tongues proclaim: ‘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 someone who had attained this station; and the Prophet had said of him: ‘Indeed the Garden (Paradise) longs for Salman more than Salman longs for the Garden.’ The Garden is a state which the pure heart can experience in this world and the Hereafter. The Prophet said:

~ The good actions of the righteous are on the level of the ordinary 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 Actions (God's acts), the second is to the Unity of Attributes (God's qualities) and the third is to the Unity of Essence (the limitless, unfathomable quiddity of Beingness). 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 al-'Arabi has indicated in his book 'The 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.

The ultimate level of spiritual stations is the realization that there is *only* One and all else are shadows which overflow from the original One.

eBooks By Zahra Publications

General eBooks on Islam

Living Islam – East and West

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Ageless and universal wisdom set against the backdrop of a changing world: application of this knowledge to one's own life is most appropriate.

The Elements of Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

An introduction to Islam through an overview of the universality and light of the prophetic message.

The Qur'an & Its Teachings

Journey of the Universe as Expounded in the Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Qur'an traces the journey of all creation, seeing the physical, biological and geological voyage of life as paralleled by the inner spiritual evolution of woman/man.

Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 1: Commentary on Surah Al-Fatiha and Surah Al-Baqarah

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The first two chapters of the Qur'an give guidance regarding inner and outer struggle. Emphasis is on understanding key Qur'anic terms.

Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 2: Commentary on Surah Ale-`Imran

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A commentary on the third chapter of the Qur'an, the family of `Imran which includes the story of Mary, mother of `Isa (Jesus).

Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 3: Commentary on Surah Yasin

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Commentary on chapter *Yasin*. This is traditionally read over the dead person: if we want to know the meaning of life, we have to learn about death.

Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 4: Commentary on Surahs Al-`Ankabut, Al-Rahman, Al-Waqi`ah and Al-Mulk

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Shaykh uncovers inner meanings, roots and subtleties of the Qur'anic Arabic terminology in these four selected Surahs.

Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 5: Commentary on Juz' `Amma

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Insight into the last *Juz'* of Qur'an, with the objective of exploring the deeper meanings of Qur'anic Revelations.

The Essential Message of the Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Teachings from the Qur'an such as purpose of creation, Attributes of the Creator, nature of human beings, decrees governing the laws of the universe, life and death.

The Qur'an in Islam: Its Impact & Influence on the Life of Muslims

`Allamah Sayyid M. H. Tabataba`i

`Allamah Sayyid M. H. Tabataba`i shows in this gem how the Qur'an contains the fundamental roots of Islam and the proof of prophethood as the Word of God.

The Qur'anic Prescription for Life

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Understanding the Qur'an is made accessible with easy reference to key issues concerning life and the path of Islam.

The Story of Creation in the Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

An exposition of the Qur’anic verses relating to the nature of physical phenomena, including the origins of the universe, the nature of light, matter, space and time, and the evolution of biological and sentient beings.

Sufism & Islamic Psychology and Philosophy

Beginning’s End

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a contemporary outlook on Sufi sciences of self knowledge, exposing the challenge of our modern lifestyle that is out of balance.

Cosmology of the Self

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Islamic teachings of *Tawhīd* (Unity) with insights into the human self: understanding the inner landscape is essential foundation for progress on the path of knowledge.

Decree & Destiny (Original and a Revised Version)

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A lucid exposition of the extensive body of Islamic thought on the issue of free will and determinism.

Happiness in Life and After Death – An Islamic Sufi View

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This book offers revelations and spiritual teachings that map a basic path towards wholesome living without forgetting death: cultivating a constant awareness of one’s dual nature.

Leaves from a Sufi Journal

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A unique collection of articles presenting an outstanding introduction to the areas of Sufism and original Islamic teachings.

The Elements of Sufism

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Sufism is the heart of Islam. This introduction describes its origins, practices, historical background and its spread throughout the world.

The Garden of Meaning

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This book is about two gardens, one visible and fragrant, the other less visible but eternal. The beauty and harmony of both gardens are explicated in this magisterial volume, linking outer to inner, physics to metaphysics, self to cosmos.

The Journey of the Self

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

After introducing the basic model of the self, there follows a simple yet complete outline of the self's emergence, development, sustenance, and growth toward its highest potential.

The Sufi Way to Self-Unfoldment

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Unfolding inner meanings of the Islamic ritual practices towards the intended ultimate purpose to live a fearless and honorable life, with no darkness, ignorance or abuse.

Witnessing Perfection

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Delves into the universal question of Deity and the purpose of life. Durable contentment is a result of 'perfected vision'.

Practices & Teachings of Islam

Calling Allah by His Most Beautiful Names

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Attributes or Qualities resonate from their Majestic and Beautiful Higher Realm into the heart of the active seeker, and through it back into the world.

Fasting in Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a comprehensive guide to fasting in all its aspects, with a description of fasting in different faith traditions, its spiritual benefits, rules and regulations.

Prophetic Traditions in Islam: On the Authority of the Family of the Prophet

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Offers a comprehensive selection of Islamic teachings arranged according to topics dealing with belief and worship, moral, social and spiritual values.

The Wisdom (Hikam) of Ibn `Ata`allah: Translation and Commentary

Translation & Commentary by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

These aphorisms of Ibn `Ata`Allah, a Shadhili Shaykh, reveal the breadth and depth of an enlightened being who reflects divine unity and inner transformation through worship.

The Inner Meanings of Worship in Islam: A Personal Selection of Guidance for the Wayfarer

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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 among the *Ahl al-Tasawwuf* of all schools of thought.

The Lantern of The Path

Imam Ja`far Al-Sadiq

Each one of the ninety-nine chapter of this book is a threshold to the next, guiding the reader through the broad spectrum of ageless wisdom, like a lantern along the path of reality.

The Pilgrimage of Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a specialized book on spiritual journeying, offering the sincere seeker keys to inner transformation.

The Sayings and Wisdom of Imam `Ali

Compiled By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Translated By: Asadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate

Carefully translated into modern English, a selection of this great man's sayings gathered together from authentic and reliable sources.

Transformative Worship in Islam: Experiencing Perfection

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri with Muna H. Bilgrami

This book uniquely bridges the traditional practices and beliefs, culture and language of Islam with the transformative spiritual states described by the Sufis and Gnostics.

Talks, Interviews & Courses

Ask Course ONE: The Sufi Map of the Self

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This workbook explores the entire cosmology of the self through time, and maps the evolution of the self from before birth through life, death and beyond.

Ask Course TWO: The Prophetic Way of Life

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This workbook explores how the code of ethics that govern religious practice and the Prophetic ways are in fact transformational tools to enlightened awakening.

Friday Discourses: Volume 1

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Shaykh addresses many topics that influence Muslims at the core of what it means to be a Muslim in today's global village.

Songs of Iman on the Roads of Pakistan

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A series of talks given on the divergence between 'faith' and 'unbelief' during a tour of the country in 1982 which becomes a reflection of the condition occurring in the rest of the world today.

The Connection Between the Absolute and the Relative

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a 1990 conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, in which he talks about wide-ranging topics on Islam and presents it as the archetypal, universal, Adamic path that began when humanity rose in consciousness to recognize duality and began its journey from the relative back to Absolute Unity.

The Spiritual Path: A Conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri On His Life, Thought and Work

Professor Ali A. Allawi

In this wide-ranging conversation with Professor Ali Allawi, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri talks about his life story and the spiritual journey that he embarked on and the path he has been on ever since.

Poetry, Aphorisms & Inspirational

101 Helpful Illusions

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Everything in creation has a purpose relevant to ultimate spiritual Truth. This book highlights natural veils to be transcended by disciplined courage, wisdom and insight.

Beyond Windows

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Offering moving and profound insights of compassion and spirituality through these anthologies of connections between slave self and Eternal Lord.

Bursts of Silence

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Inspired aphorisms provide keys to doors of inner knowledge, as well as antidotes to distraction and confusion.

Pointers to Presence

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A collection of aphorisms providing insights into consciousness and are pointers to spiritual awakening.

Ripples of Light

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Inspired aphorisms which become remedies for hearts that seek the truth.

Sound Waves

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A collection of aphorisms that help us reflect and discover the intricate connection between self and soul.

Sublime Gems: Selected Teachings of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani

Spiritual nourishment extracted from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's existing works.

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.