

The Book of Character

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Preface

*Truly, in the Messenger of God
you have a beautiful standard
for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day
and who remembers God unceasingly.*

[Al-Ahzab 33:21]

*And indeed, after the reminding,
We wrote in all the books of wisdom:
“My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.”
Truly, in this is a Message
for people who would worship God.
We have sent you as a mercy for all creatures.
Say: “What has come to me by inspiration
is that your God is One God:
will you then surrender yourselves to Him?”*

[Al-Anbiya 21:105-108]

*Consider the soul and the order and proportion given to it,
and its enlightenment as to that which is wrong and right:
truly, the one who purifies it shall reach a happy state
and the one who corrupts it shall truly be lost!*

[Ash-Shams 91:7-10]

The Prophets, peace and blessings be upon them all, are gifted to humanity by our Most Gracious Sustainer and enjoined with a responsibility to convey a Way of Being in response to a need that wells up within a community. The *din*, the Way, the primordial religion has been repeatedly revealed in new unfoldings in response to the need of humankind. These messengers come to us as human beings like ourselves, yet shining brightly with the Light of Divine inspiration as a grace and a mercy to draw us closer to the Truth.

Over thirteen hundred years ago the Prophet Muḥammad (S) conveyed the revelation of the Qur’an renewing the monotheistic religion of Abraham and bringing together the law of the Prophet Moses and the

love of Jesus into the manifestation of a harmonious way of life balanced within nature and all realms of human society. Muḥammad (S) is referred to as the “seal of the prophets,” the confirmation and completion of prophethood, so we should be able to find in the Book that he conveyed and the example of his life and ways of being, the keys to being and behavior in our own time as well. As we question what it really means to be a human being and what the finest proportion of character for a human being is, we can look to both the words of the revelation, the Qur’an, and the example and sayings of Muḥammad for instruction, inspiration, and guidance.

My dear Prophet!

Without a doubt you have been adorned with the noblest character!

[Qur’an 68:4]

Regarding Muḥammad (S), Umm Ma’bad al’Khuzza’iyya] replied, “I saw him to be a man of evident cleanliness, fine in character, his face handsome, slim in form, his head not too small, elegant and good looking, his eyes large and black, his eyebrows long, his voice deep, very intelligent, his eyelids brown, his brows high and arched, his hair in plaits, his neck long and his beard thick. He gave an impression of dignity when silent and of high intelligence when he talked. His logic was impressive, he was decisive, not trivial, not trite, his ideas like pearls moving on their string. He seemed the most splendid and fine-looking man from a distance and the very best of all from close-by, medium in height, the eye not finding him too tall nor too short. A tree-branch, as it were, between two others, but he was the finest-looking of the three, the best proportioned. He was the center of his companions’ attention. When he spoke, they listened well, and if he ordered, they hurried to obey, a man well helped, well served, never sullen, never refuted.”¹

When ‘A’isha was asked what Muḥammad was like, she replied that he was the living Qur’an.

¹ Imam Abu al-Fida’ Isma‘il Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Volume II, p. 172.

‘Ali describes the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings:

God’s Messenger was the most generous of people in giving out and the mildest and foremost of them in patience and perseverance. He was the most truthful of people in speech and the most amiable and congenial in companionship and the noblest of them in family. Whoever sees him first is stricken by awe of him but whoever knows him closely is attracted to him deeply, and whoever attempts to describe him says: ‘I have neither before him nor after him, ever seen the like of him, upon him be peace and blessings’.²

[Ibn Kathir comments] that when first built, the mosque of the Prophet (S) had no *minbar*³ from which to address the congregation. He would speak while leaning against a palm tree trunk in the wall next to the *qibla* near where he prayed. Eventually he began to use a *minbar*... As he moved over towards it to make his address from it and passed by that tree trunk, it moaned like a love-lorne camel because it had always heard his speeches delivered near itself. And so the Prophet (S) returned to it and hugged it until it settled down, just like a baby, and became quiet. Details of this will be given hereafter through various lines, from Sahl b. Sa’d al-Sa’idi, Jabir, ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Umar, ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbas, Anas b. Malik and Umm Salama, God be pleased with them.

What more appropriate than the comment made by al-Hasan al-Basri after relating this story, from Anas b. Malik, “O Muslims! A piece of wood so pining for the Messenger of God (S)! Do not men hoping to meet him have even more right to yearn for him?”⁴

The human being can have nothing but that for which he strives.

[53:40]

The Prophet was asked what was the best thing a Muslim could be given, and he replied, ‘Good character.’⁵

Al-Sadiq relates that a man came to the Prophet saying, ‘O

² M. Fethullah Gulen, *Prophet Muhammad The Infinite Light*, Volume II, p. 147

³ A *minbar*.

⁴ Imam Abu al-Fida’ Isma’il Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Volume II, p. 205.

⁵ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, p. 164.

Messenger of Allah, which people have the most perfect faith?' 'Those of them who have the best character,' he replied.⁶

It is related on his authority that the Messenger of Allah said, 'Most of my people who gain entry to the Garden will gain entry by having *taqwa* (fearful awareness of Allah) and good character.'⁷

With the example of the Prophet Muḥammad (*S*) before us and the light of the Qur'an to guide us, may we strive towards the meeting with our Lord. May we find ourselves in the best possible condition when we come to meet our Maker, our most Trusted, Most Compassionate, and Truest Friend.

⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

⁷ Ibid., p. 164

Our Essential Nature

*In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful
 Consider the fig and the olive, and Mount Sinai,
 and this city of security!
 Truly, We have created human beings in the best proportion.
 Then We reduce them to the lowest of the low—
 except those who have faith and act rightly:
 For they shall have an unceasing reward!
 What, then, could from now on cause you to deny this moral law?
 Is not God the Wisest of judges?
 [Sūrah At-Tin, 95:1-8 complete]*

*Always remember the blessings
 which God has bestowed on you,
 and the solemn pledge by which He bound you to Himself
 when you said, “We have heard, and we pay heed.”⁸
 And so, remain conscious of God:
 truly, God has full knowledge of what is within hearts.
 [Sūrah Al-Maida, 5:7]*

*Witness, the only true religion in the sight of God
 is self-surrender to Him.
 [Sūrah Al-Imran, 3:19]*

*Say: “My Sustainer has but urged the doing of what is right;
 and He wants you to put your whole being into every act of worship,
 and to call Him, sincere in your faith in Him alone.
 As it was He who brought you into being in the beginning,
 so also to Him will you return.”
 [Sūrah Al-A'raf, 7:29]*

Imam Ali has said, ‘Increase your remembrance of Allah, for it is the best of remembrances, and desire what has been promised to those who live their lives fearing Him—for His promise is the truest of promises. Model yourselves according to your Prophet (S), for his is the best guidance.’⁹

⁸ See also verse 2:285

⁹ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, p. 101

[...The word “character” in English originally meant a sign, a brand or a stamp. “A man of that stamp” means a man of this or that particular character. The letters and image stamped on a coin give it its *character*. According to al-Ghazali, “A trait of character...is a firmly established condition (*hay’a*) of the soul, from which actions proceed easily without any need of thinking or forethought.”

A thing’s character is its essence, its true nature. Yet we talk about building human character, as if character were something that could develop over time. If our character is our true nature, isn’t it something we were born with? Why do we have to develop it?

To say that someone “has character” means that he or she has taken some real steps toward becoming a true human being. To have character means to be fully formed; to have no character, or a bad character, is to be undeveloped, or developed in an unbalanced way. Just as a body-builder who builds certain muscle groups but not others is not really well developed, someone who develops his mind but not his feelings, or his will but not his mind will be unbalanced. He will have flaws and weaknesses in his character.

So character is something we have to work on. But we need to develop it on the basis of who we really are as God made us. God “stamped” us with our true character before we were ever born; our job is to develop, to actualize, what God has stamped us with. Just as to “envelop” means to wrap something up, to “develop” means to unwrap something. Character development, then, is the process of *unpacking* what God has provided us for our journey through this world, and into the next. Various experiences during this life may *stamp* us and mold our character. But since all experiences ultimately come from God, everything we encounter in this life is part of God’s knowledge of the character He has stamped us with, in eternity, before we came into this world.

In Arabic the word for character, with the connotation of good character, is *khuluq*, which is related to the word *khalaq*, creation. Character is the form in which God has created us; our responsibility is to live up to it—to conform ourselves, in time, to the shape in which God has created us, in eternity.¹⁰

¹⁰ Charles Upton, contributor.

The Soul's Longing

The journeys of spiritual teachers of humanity, prophets, and messengers of God, towards Truth are eternal sources of inspiration for all souls who long for meaningfulness on all levels. Their experiences enlighten the way of humanity forever. Deep reflections on their journeys could inspire the modern world with so many meanings that our era lacks. Learning from them does not imply going back to the past; it is an invitation to humanity to refresh its memory of how a human being can fulfill his or her humanity with the hope that we might have a better future. Of course we are not to handle the life of great spiritual teachers with the assumption that we would be able to absorb them fully. This is not possible because the part cannot encompass the whole. Even though a drop of the ocean carries its entire characteristics, it can never be the ocean. So, a soul who longs for truth is a glimmer of the Light of great teachers, and with that quality he or she is qualified to derive some wisdom from his or her journey.

The great teachers longed for a truthful life during times when the majority of people were satisfied by a false one. They longed for knowledge during times when ignorance and superstition were overwhelming. They longed for the spreading of peace during times when conflict was commonplace. They longed for the prevailing of justice during times when oppression was legitimized. They longed for spiritual freedom while the majority accepted the constraints of matter.

From that perspective, I share with you some reflections on how the Holy Qur'an presented their stories with the focus that all of them sought surrender to Allah, and thus they are all termed "Muslim." Namely, the word "Islam" is used in the Holy Qur'an with a deeper dimension than a creed to be compared to other creeds, or a set of social or cultural customs and traditions of certain societies who carry this label. Rather, Islam in the Holy Qur'an points to a living Truth that transcends names, labels, languages and/or religious affiliations. It is the Law of full surrender to Allah as existentially experienced and sought by all souls who search for a truthful life infinitely. The Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad (S) clarifies that this potential for surrender to Allah is embedded in the primordial nature of the soul and stamped on its texture since God breathed of His Spirit into humankind. It is what the Holy Qur'an terms

“*fitra*,” asserting that if human beings communicated with their *fitra*, it would lead them to the fulfillment of their souls’ longing, to life according to the Law of creation. The Prophet Muḥammad (S) said, “*Islam is the Religion of the Primordial nature (fitra). Every newborn baby is born according to fitra, then parents give him a name of a religious affiliation (Christianity, Judaism, Magus...etc.)*.”¹¹

However, to live according to *fitra*; to surrender to Allah fully, is not taken for granted, for the human soul is susceptible to being imprisoned in the “vessel of clay” of the body with all its limitations, and to forgetfulness about his or her primordial nature, *fitra*. So, living according to *fitra* is an expression of the highest degree of spiritual awareness. It is an objective to be sought, and a fruit of great spiritual struggle. That is to say, Islam as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (S) clarifies that even though each human soul has a potentiality to feel his or her longing for submission to Allah by giving the chance to his or her *fitra* or spiritual origin to be awakened, a human soul needs to be liberated from the constraints of matter to be able to communicate with his or her *fitra*.

The Holy Qur’an reveals that the pure nature (*fitra*) has led great souls to a common Path that has fulfilled their longing. That common Path is a language of a spirit who longs for full surrender to the Eternal Law of Life.

Primordial Nature (Fitra) Leads to A Common Path

Even though great teachers of humanity were living in different times and places, and confronted different challenges, they had something in common: 1) a natural deep inner light that made them feel the existence of the Transcendent Supreme, and pushed them to reject the widespread dogmas and practices of their people; 2) they all sought guidance from within and from a higher source, and they prepared themselves to receive that guidance; 3) the Supreme responded to their striving and revealed to them from within and from the Beyond a path by which to lead a truthful life; a path that made of their whole life a language of spirit. They were guided to present the fruit of their experiences to other searching souls.

¹¹ *Fitra* is not to be confused with “instinct” since instinct is related to the attributes of the physical body, while *fitra* is the primordial nature of the soul that carries the spiritual awareness and quality.

Rejection of Dogmas

The Holy Qur'an reveals that Prophets can see that peoples' projection of physical or mental images towards God reflects a direct deficiency of realization and conceptualization of the Supreme Transcendent. As great souls, they can see that such practices lead human beings to being encased in dense layers of falsity through which they can never reach Truth. Prophets are reluctant to be like those people who commit a fatal mistake by being captured in worshipping images of several kinds, those who put limits to what is limitless, and measure what is eternal, absolute, and perfect with the yardstick of what is transient, relative, or imperfect. These lose their link to the really Divine. To take an idol as Divine is not merely an outward practice; it is also an inner attitude of rigidity and stagnation that blocks the human being's capability to be spiritually free. It is an attitude that captures the soul in illusions created by limited existence. From that perspective, we read in the Holy Qur'an that Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad and most prophets were not satisfied with the dogmas of their time. Abraham, for instance says to his father,

“Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error.”[Sūrah Al-An'am 6: 74]

“O my father! Why worship that which hears not, and sees not, and can profit thee nothing?”[Sūrah Maryam 19: 42]

False deities that great souls reject, the Holy Qur'an clarifies, are not only stone idols, they are stagnant traditions, labels, and dogmas. Joseph, for instance says, *“If not Him, you worship nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority.”*[Sūrah Yusuf 12: 40]

The Holy Qur'an quotes prophets criticizing those who stick to blind imitation and bestow divinity on stagnant traditions. Prophets try to direct their attention to that deficiency, but the common response is: *Nay! they say: “We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by their footsteps.”*[Sūrah Az-Zukhruf 43: 22]

Another false deity that prophets never have worshiped is what the Holy Qur'an refers to as *“hawa,”* which means the lust for something of the material realm that a human is apt to adore or bestow an absolute value

to. The Holy Qur'an says to Prophet Muḥammad (S) that one who worships his *hawa* is not qualified to discern the truth.

*Then do you see the one who takes as his god his own vain desire?
Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing
and his heart (and understanding), and veiled his sight:
Who, then, will guide him after Allah (has withdrawn guidance)?
Will you not then receive admonition?*

[Sūrah Al-Jathīya 45: 23]

The Holy Qur'an relates parables of people who were not ready to receive guidance because they were fully involved in worshipping their "*hawa*." It gives the parable of Qarun who lived at the time of Moses and had such a great lust for money that he could feel no divine dimension in life. The pharaoh at the time of Moses also lusted for authority so much that he made of himself a god, and consequently could not feel the existence of God. In the time of Muḥammad, some people adored physical existence so much that they could not feel any spiritual depth in life. They were so captured within the constraints of matter that the paramount dogma with which they lived in accordance was denial of a coming life: *And they say: "What is there but our life in this world? We shall die and we live, and nothing but Time can destroy us." But of that they have no knowledge; they merely conjecture.* [Sūrah Al-Jathīya 45: 24]

*No vision can grasp Him. But His grasp is over all vision:
He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things. [Sūrah Al-
An'am 6:103]*

. . . whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance.

For Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing [Sūrah Al-Baqara 2:115]

*Glory to Him! He is high above all that they say!
Exalted and Great (beyond measure)! [Sūrah Al-Isrā 17:43]*

*Praise and glory be to Him!
(For He is) above what they attribute to Him!
[Sūrah Al-An'am 6:100]*

*Glory to Him, and far is He above having the partners
they ascribe unto Him! [Sūrah An-Nahl 16:1]*

There is nothing whatever like unto Him. [Sūrah Ash-Shura 42:11]

The Holy Qur'an also clarifies that it is part of the *fitra* that the soul is liberated from dogmas and false deity when he believes in the Unseen, *Al Ghayb*. To believe in the Unseen in the Holy Qur'an is an inner certainty within a human that makes him sure that whatever he might come to know, there is always more that is beyond the known and the knowable. When this certainty exists, souls do not become imprisoned in dogmas, nor do they bestow divinity on anything in the transient realm. Rather, they continuously move forward towards greater knowledge and freedom ceaselessly.

But how can a human being be liberated from all dogmas and false deities? This takes us to the second point.

Seeking Guidance from Within and from a Higher Source

Since they were not satisfied with other people's practices and approach to life, the prophets began to search within and beyond. They were guided from within to open to listen to what their hearts would tell them. They naturally wanted to distance themselves from the noise of a corrupt life and the negative energy of the overwhelming darkness. They spent time in seclusion purifying the whole of their existence by controlling the physical body's desires. The vibrant *fitra* guided them to allow the divinity within to come to the surface of consciousness. In the meantime, they would also direct their faces to the Supreme Transcendent seeking guidance from a higher source. We read in the Holy Qur'an that Abraham said,

I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me! [Sūrah As-Saffāt 37:9]

“And I will turn away from you (all) and from those whom ye invoke besides Allah: I will call on my Lord. [Sūrah Maryam 19: 48]

The Holy Qur'an gives us an example of the search of a soul longing for a source of guidance in the story of the experience of Abraham. The story reveals his longing for his Lord whom he recognizes first in a star, then in the moon, and then in the sun. The moment Abraham came to be fully certain that Allah transcends any of His manifestations, was the very moment he realized that he was receiving guidance and support from his

Lord. Namely, Abraham reached a moment of receiving great divine knowledge in which he could realize with no confusion that Allah is both Unseen and also Manifest because all aspects of nature sign to Him, and also because He manifests Himself to man from within himself as well as all around him. The guidance was not letters or words; it was a superb power of enlightenment that made Truth in Abraham's heart clearer than the rays of the sun. Abraham could evidently discern his own *fitra*, and God's closeness and guidance.

So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might (with understanding) have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star: he said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said: "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, he said: "Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray. When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all)." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah. For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah." [Sūrah Al-An'am 6: 75-79]¹²

Muḥammad

Since Muḥammad is the archetype of sainthood, it is in strict conformity to his *summa*, and by taking nourishment from his example, that the aspirant manages to restore his original nature of *imago Dei*.

"God created Adam in His own image," says a famous *hadith*. Likewise, "man has virtually all the Divine Names engraved in the very clay of his being." It is because of this divine similitude that God has called

¹² Aisha Rafea, "The Soul's Longing," excerpted from *A Hidden Treasure*, p. .

him to be His *khalifā*, his “vicegerent” on earth. “Vicegerency (*khalifā*) was assigned to Adam, to the exclusion of the other creatures of the universe, because God created him according to His image. A vicegerent must possess the attributes of the one he represents; otherwise he is not truly a vicegerent.”¹³ But these two favours granted exclusively to man, his divine form and his governance, simultaneously expose him to the greatest danger of his existence: the illusion of sovereignty. As the Shaykh al-Akbar [Ibn al-Arabi] points out on a number of occasions, being conscious of his original theomorphism leads man to forget that he was created from clay—the most humble of substances and a symbol of his ‘ontological servitude’ (*‘ubudiyya*). The power and the authority that his mandate grant him lead him to consider himself autonomous. He appropriates sovereignty, which rightfully belongs only to Him Whom he represents and he betrays the oath of vassalage that he made when he replied to the question “Am I Not your Lord?” with “Certainly, we are witnesses!”¹⁴

When he refuses to assume his status as ‘servant of God’ (*‘abd Allah*), he is henceforth unworthy of being ‘God’s vicegerent’ (*khalifāt Allah*). “The homeland of man is his servitude; he who leaves it is forbidden to take on the Divine Names.”¹⁵ To regain his original nobility, he must reactivate the divine characteristics inscribed in his primordial form; characteristics that his pretension and ignorance had covered up. “The Prophet (S) said, ‘I have come to complete the “noble character traits.”’ He who lives in accordance with the ‘noble character traits’ follows a law of God even if he is not aware of it. To perfect one’s character means to strip it of all that tends to give it a vile status. Actually, vile characteristics are vile only by accident, while noble characteristics are noble by essence, for what is vile has no foundation in the divine [...], while noble characteristics do have foundation in the divine. The Prophet (S) perfected the noble character traits to the extent that he established the ways through which a character can maintain a noble status and be exempt from a vile

¹³ Muhyiuddin Ibn al Arabi, *Futuhat I*, p. 263.

¹⁴ *Sūrah Al-A’raf*7:172.

¹⁵ Muhyiuddin Ibn al Arabi, *Futuhat I*, pp.362, 367.

status.”¹⁶

*Consider the soul and the order and proportion given to it,
and its enlightenment as to that which is wrong and right:
truly, the one who purifies it shall reach a happy state
and the one who corrupts it shall truly be lost!*

[*Sūrah Ash-Shams* 91:1-10]

[Muḥammad is the Complete Man, *al-Insan al-Kamil*. He is the exemplar of our *fitrah*, of the human form in its original nature as God created it. The love Muslims feel for the person of the Prophet (S) has to do with the fullness of his humanity—not in any sentimental sense, but rather because in him is revealed an unfailing and providential capacity to bring out the full humanity of any and every situation, and then act upon it.

In the Islamic view, humanity is both *‘abd*, God’s servant, and *khalifā*, God’s fully-empowered representative in this world. This is our *fitrah*. And our central example of what it is to be *‘abd* and *khalifā* is Muḥammad. His submission to God was perfect, not because, like some of the greatest saints, he intensely desired to submit to God in a passionate and self-sacrificial way, but because he was one with the nature of things. According to the nature of things, in the face of the Absolute Reality of God, the creature is as nothing; whatever reality he has is a pure gift from the Absolute Reality, nor can he ever break out of, or wander away from, the sovereign Will of God. Whether or not he submits *willingly*, he always submits *actually*. Muḥammad knew this, and therefore submitted willingly, and perfectly, thus becoming a perfect representative and messenger.¹⁷

Not only does the messenger who is a [servant] subordinate his own will to that of his Lord; there is nothing in his mind or in his memory that could obstruct the free passage of revelation. Muḥammad is *‘abd* and *rasul*; he is also *nabi al-ummi*, the unlettered Prophet (S) ; a blank page set before the divine pen. On this page there is no mark made by any other pen, no trace of profane or

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 341. Excerpted from Claude Addas, *Ibn Arabi, The Voyage of No Return*, p. 23-24.

¹⁷ Charles Upton, contributor.

indirect knowledge. A prophet does not borrow knowledge from the human store, nor is he a man who learns in the slow human way and then transmits his learning. His knowledge derives from a direct intervention of the Divine in the human order, a *tajalli*, or pouring out of the truth upon a being providentially disposed to receive it and strong enough to transmit it. The purity of the stream of revelation remains unsullied in its course from the spring which is its origin to the lake into which it flows; in other words, the Qur'an exists in written form exactly as it issued from the Divine Presence.¹⁸

It was out of this perfect submission that Muḥammad (S) became the complete *khalifâ* of God. He was like a mirror turned to face all of God's Names and Attributes. The mirror itself does nothing, and (as it were) *is* nothing. It is because of this submission, this *Islam*, that all the forms of life can appear within it. The Prophet (S) was a shepherd, a businessman, a caravan-leader, a contemplative, a warrior, a diplomat, a legislator, a judge, a ruler, a man of his clan and his family, a father...but he was not thereby a "Renaissance man," a person who seeks diversity of experience for its own sake, who develops and over-develops many and diverse talents because he is basically in flight from his true nature, and from the God who made him. He never departed from his Center in order to develop this or that side, or fragment, of his character. His character was unified, and beautiful, because it reflected the Unity of God.¹⁹

'Allah has created the intellect from a stored-up light which was hidden within His fore-knowledge, and neither emissary, prophet, nor high-ranking angel has seen it. Then He has made knowledge itself, understanding its spirit, doing-without (*zuhd*) its head, modesty (*haya*) its eyes, wisdom its tongue, compassion (*ra'fali*) its purpose and mercy its heart. Then He filled and strengthened it with ten things: certainty, faith, truthfulness, tranquility (*sakinah*), sincerity, kindness (*rifq*), generosity (*atiyyah*), contentment (*qunu*), submission (*islan*), and patience. Thereupon He spoke to it saying, "Go back," and it went back; "Come forward," and it came forward; then, 'Speak!' and it

¹⁸ Charles leGai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, p. 64.

¹⁹ Charles Upton, contributor.

replied, “Praise belongs to Allah, Who has neither enemy nor rival to Whom there is not likeness and no comparison and no equal, before Whose might everything is submissive and humbled.”²⁰

We develop character by practicing and realizing the *virtues*. The word “virtue” is related to the word “virility” (similar in meaning to *shahama*, manliness.) We used to talk about the “virtues” of herbs and stones—by which we meant their power to heal us, to make us complete. Virtue is power. It is the power to be who we really are, to attain and maintain the human state God has commanded us to embody. The virtues are what allow us to live up to the Trust God has placed upon us, which we as a race have willingly assumed (*Sūrah Al-Ahzab* 33:72). They are what allow us to be *abd*, God’s servant, and *khalifā*, God’s fully-empowered representative in this world—not only in our essential nature, by which we are *abd* and *khalifā* from all eternity, but consciously and intentionally. Virtue is the power which allows our intent to match our nature.

According to the Qur’an, *Sūrah Fatir*, 35:15, “O men! It is you who stand in need of God, whereas He alone is self sufficient...” Only God is the Rich (*al-Ghani*) because Being itself can be attributed only to Him (*al-Qayyum*); we are so poor that we can’t even claim Being for ourselves. If our very being is a gift from God, we certainly can’t attribute any of the virtues to ourselves. All the virtues, all the powers, belong to God alone; they are His Names and Qualities. When we practice a virtue until we have fully embodied it, then our soul has been qualified with the Divine Name which corresponds to that virtue. We have been *stamped* by God with that Name.

. . . Virtues are the actions we must perform in the greater *jihad*, the struggle against the commanding self;²¹ but they are also *truths*, penetrating insights, new ways of looking at things. To practice a virtue is to transform our experience of ourselves, society and our fellow human beings in very specific ways. To acquire a particular virtue is to train ourselves in how to see the signs of a specific Name of God in the world around us.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

²¹ *Nafsi ammarah*.

. . . The virtues, or constellations of virtues, elucidated in this text, are clearly visible in the character of Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him. . . There is no virtue, no Name of God which is not reflected in the character of the Prophet (S) . All virtues are Muslim, just as all virtues are Hindu or Jewish or Christian or Buddhist. But since every revelation of God is unique, Islamic virtue carries its own particular “fragrance,” which is unmistakable.²²

²² Charles Upton, contributor.

Essential Faith

*Such is God, your Sustainer: there is no god but Hu,²³
the Creator of everything: then worship Him alone—
for it is He who has everything in His care.*

*No vision can encompass Him, but He encompasses all human vision:
for He alone is Subtle Beyond Comprehension, All-Aware.*

*Means of insight have now come to you
from your Sustainer through this divine Message.*

*Whoever, then, chooses to see,
does so for the benefit of his own soul;
and whoever chooses to remain blind,
does so to his own harm.*

[6:102-104]

*The parable of those who take protectors other than God
is that of the Spider who builds itself a house;
but truly, the Spider's house is the flimsiest of houses
if they only knew.*

*Truly, your Sustainer knows what they call upon besides Him
and He is Most Exalted, the All-Wise.*

*And such are the parables We offer humankind
but only those of inner knowing understand them.*

*In true proportions God created the heavens and the earth:
truly, in that is a sign for those who have faith.*

[29:41-44]

*And know that among you is God's Messenger:
were he in many matters to follow your inclinations,
you would surely fall into misfortune;
but God has caused faith to be dear to you,
and has made it beautiful within your hearts,
and He has made hateful to you lack of faith, wickedness,*

²³ *Hu*: the pronoun of Divine Presence. All words in Arabic have a gender grammatically ascribed to them as they do in French and Spanish, etc. Although *Allah* is referred to with the third person masculine pronoun *Hu* (*Huwa*), it is universally understood that *Allah's* Essence is beyond gender or indeed any qualification, far beyond all our attempts at definition, limitless in subtle glory.

*and rebellion against that which is good.
Such indeed are those who walk in righteousness—
through God's grace and favor;
and God is All-Knowing, Truly Wise.*

[49:7-8]

From an early age it seems that Muḥammad (peace and blessings upon him) had a strong sense of connection with his Creator and sought to know His Source better through the witnessing of creation, solitary retreat, and inner listening and prayer. His earliest years were spent in the desert under the care of his foster mother, Halima. As he grew older, his grandfather, 'Abd al-Mutallib, and then his uncle, Abu Talib, took him along on trading journeys where he spent many days and nights encompassed by the wide expanse of the desert and the vast dome of sky and stars.

As a young man Muḥammad began to retreat periodically to a cave in the hills overlooking the town of Mecca. Here he would fast during the month of Ramadan and deepen in prayer and contemplation seeking to know better his Creator and to fathom His creation of humankind and worlds within worlds.

Later, after his marriage to Khadija, it was here that the revelation of the Qur'an began to be conveyed:

This occurred when he was forty years of age. . . . Al-Bukhari stated that Yahya b. Bukayr related to him . . . from 'A'isha, God be pleased with her, who said, "The first indication of revelation to the Messenger of God (SAAS) came in the form of true visions in his sleep. Every vision he had came like the breaking of dawn.

"He then developed a liking for solitude. He would spend time alone in the cave Hira' where he would seek religious purification through devotions. He would stay there many nights and then return to his family for more provisions to continue doing so; then he would come down to Khadija and repeat the same.

"Eventually the truth came to him while he was there in that cave Hira'. The angel came and told him, 'Read!' He replied, 'I don't read.' He then said, 'The angel then overpowered me and choked me until I could bear it no more, and then he released me. Again he said, Read! Again I replied, 'I don't read.' Once more he overpowered me

and choked me till I could bear it no more, then he released me and said, ‘Read!’ I replied, ‘I don’t read.’ Again he overpowered me and choked me a third time until I could bear it no more. Then he released me and said, ‘*Read in the name of your Lord who created; He created man from a clot.*²⁴ *Read! Your Lord is the most noble, He who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know*’ [Surat al-‘Alaq, 96: 1-5].

“The Messenger of God (SAAS) returned home with this, his heart palpitating. He went in to Khadija, daughter of Khuwaylid, and said, ‘Wrap me up! Wrap me up!’ They did so until the terror left him.

“He then spoke to Khadija, telling her what had happened, saying, ‘I was afraid for myself.’ “Khadija replied, ‘Oh no! I swear by God He would never abuse you. You maintain family ties, you are hospitable to guests, you support the weak, provide for the poor and help out when tragedy strikes.’

“Khadija then hurried off with him to Waraqa b. Nawfal b. Asad b. ‘Abd al-‘Uzza, who was her cousin. He had earlier become a Christian, and used to write the Hebrew script, copying out from the Bible in Hebrew whatever God, inspired him to write. He was an old man by then, and he was blind.

“Khadija told him, ‘O cousin! Listen to your nephew!’ Waraqa then addressed him, ‘O nephew, what did you see?’ The Messenger of God (S) then told him what he had seen. Waraqa commented, ‘This was the angel Gabriel who used to come down to Moses. How I wish I were a young man again! I hope I am still alive when your people exile you!’ The Messenger of God (S) exclaimed, ‘Are they to exile me?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘no one has ever received what you have without being treated as an enemy. If I am alive when your time comes, I will give you every help.’²⁵

*The faithful are those
whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned,*

²⁴ *Alaq*, often translated as clot is rather a clinging connecting cell indicating our innate connection with the Divine and subsistence through God as well as the first moments of life in the womb . . . see *The Lights of the Qur’an* Curriculum text, *Sūrah Al-‘Alaq*.

²⁵ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Volume I, p.278-279.

*and whose faith is strengthened
whenever His signs are conveyed to them,
and who place their trust in their Sustainer—
those who are constant in prayer
and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance:
In truth, these are the faithful!
They shall have stations of dignity with their Sustainer,
and forgiveness, and a most generous provision.*

[8:2-4]

The Fear of God manifested by the Prophet Muḥammad (S), peace and blessings be upon him, was not a fear for the future, but rather an awe and terror in the face of God's Majesty in this present moment.²⁶ According to Ansari, "Daqqaq says: 'Awe is a precondition of knowledge of God. As God says, "*God warns you to beware of Him*" [3:28].' (*Resalaye qoshayriya*). The fear of the elect resides in their awe of Majesty, not in their fear of chastisement. Fear of chastisement is to worry for oneself and one's welfare, but awe of Majesty is reverence for God and forgetfulness of self."²⁷

We have noticed that there is a shared Path among all revelations and words of wisdom. Teachings are diverse in their means of expressions and each revelation has its distinct character but they all guide man to a kind of life where the evolvment of spirit is the focus. They all teach him how to make of his life on earth a fruitful journey where he gains truthful life. We call that Path, Way, Road the Primordial Religion. In all of them man is guided to be on the Path by being linked to the Origin of all existence within and around. He is also taught how to gain real life by turning all aspects of his earthly life into means for his spiritual growth. In other words revelations guide man to live according to the Eternal Law of Life. The more he evolves spiritually the more he gets in harmony with the Law, and the more capable he becomes of making his earthly life a profound expression of the spiritual goals.²⁸

²⁶ Charles Upton, contributor.

²⁷ Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufism II*, p. 3.

²⁸ Ali, Aliaa, and Aisha Rafea. *Beyond Diversities: Reflections on Revelation*, p.11.

*God is the Protector of those who have faith,
leading them out of the depths of darkness into the light.*

[*Surah al-Baqarah* 2:256-257]

*The messenger, and the faithful with him,
have faith in what has been revealed to him by his Sustainer:
they all have faith in God, and His angels,
and His revelations, and His messengers,
making no distinction between any of His messengers;
and they say: "We have heard, and we pay heed.
Grant us Your forgiveness, O our Sustainer,
for with You is all journeys' end!"*

[*Surah al-Baqarah* 2:285]

In the *Old Testament*, revelations guide man to go beyond diversities in order to see the underlying unity and order. That is the way to realize the existence of the Transcendent Unseen Supreme Power. This Supreme Power is called God. Even though God manifests Himself in His creation, God remains Transcendent, Unknown, and Unseen. If man is not aware of that truth, he is either confused between God and His manifestations or distracted by the manifestations and cannot discern the existence of the One Beyond.

Torah means Law, the guidance of Moses led his people to recognize the Divine Law which governs every thing. The Ten Commandments themselves reveal the ethical law that is believed to be universal. Moses reveals to his people the epitome of the Law, to know God: "*You will find him if you look for him.*" (The Bible, *Deuteronomy* 4: 29)

Allah is the Omnipresent, yet cannot be seen, He is everywhere and in no particular place.²⁹

No vision can grasp Him. But His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.

[*Surah al-Anam* 6: 103]

To Allah belong the East and the West: wherever you turn,

²⁹ Rafea, Ali, Aliaa, and Aisha. *Beyond Diversities: Reflections on Revelations*, p. 25.

there is the face of God. For Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.

[Surah Baqarah 2: 115]

*And if My servants ask you about Me—witness, I am near;
I respond to the call of the one who calls,
whenever he calls Me:
let them, then, respond to Me, and have faith in Me,
so that they may follow the right way.*

[2:186]

Khadija

Khadija bint Khuwaylid was known in the community of Mecca³⁰ as *at-Tahira*, “the pure one.” A woman of great integrity, intelligence, and spiritual depth, she became the wife of the Prophet Muḥammad (S), peace and blessings be upon them both, before the responsibility of Prophethood came to him. Before marrying Muḥammad, she had previously been married and widowed, and had developed and been conducting her own business in caravan trade. She was forty years old, when, being aware of Muḥammad’s sincere trustworthiness and skillfulness, she hired him to oversee one of her trading caravans. At the time, Muḥammad was twenty-five and of meager financial means. When her caravan returned from a very successful trading venture under his charge, through her cousin, Khadija proposed marriage to Muḥammad. At first Muḥammad was

~ This biographical sketch is excerpted from *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, p. by Camille Helminski.

³⁰ Mecca is the locale where Muḥammad was raised. It is here that the Kaaba is located, the temple which was dedicated to the one God by Abraham, and originally, before him, it is said, built by Adam, which was then later cleansed and rededicated by Muḥammad. Mecca is in Saudi Arabia near the Red Sea and is the direction toward which all Muslims turn in prayer five times a day.

hesitant to believe such a match was possible for someone of his financial state and limited tribal status—he had been orphaned at an early age and taken under the wing of his uncle.³¹ However, he was of the noble tribe of the Bani Hashem, who held the honorable responsibility of providing water to the pilgrims visiting the Kaaba.

Muhammad accepted Khadija's offer, and a very happy marriage unfolded. More independent now that he was supported by Khadija's love as well as her wealth, Muhammad would often retire to a nearby cave to meditate and pray for long periods. It was here, during the month of Ramadan in 610 A.D. that at the age of forty, he received the first revelation of the Qur'an.³² Overwhelmed and concerned that perhaps he was losing his mind, he rushed home to Khadija and told her to cover him with a blanket. She held him close and reassured him that a man such as he did not suddenly go crazy but that indeed what had taken place was a tremendous spiritual experience. She went to her cousin, Waraqa, a Christian who was well-versed in Jewish and Christian prophecy, and he confirmed for her that indeed Muhammad must be the messenger whose coming was referred to in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and that this must be the opening of his mission as a Prophet. Khadija was the first to have faith in his mission as a prophet who had come to renew the message of monotheism of the whole Abrahamic tradition, coming both to the peoples of Arabia and *as a mercy to all the worlds*.³³

Through the early years of prophecy, Khadija supported Muhammad when many in the community were against him. Even though she and her family were eventually ostracized and forced to endure great hardship, she never wavered in her support of Muhammad and his mission. She was his

³¹ The Prophet was born after the death of his father, Abdullah ("the servant of the One God"). When he was six, his mother, Amina, died, and he became the ward of his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib. When he was nine, his grandfather also died, and he was taken in by his father's brother, Abu Talib. Abu Talib loved the Prophet dearly and often took him with him on his trading journeys; his wife, Fatima, gave Muhammad a mother's love. He grew into manhood alongside their sons, including the young Ali.

³² *Sūrah Iqra (al-Alaq), sūrah 96: "Recite, in the Name of your Sustainer who created . . ."*

³³ *Surah al-Anbiya 21:107.*

constant companion and confidant and welcomed and helped to support all who joined with them in the newly awakening faith.

After years of deprivation due to the intensity of the boycott against the emerging muslim community, Khadija died at the age of 65 in 619 A.D. just before permission came for the *Hijrah*.³⁴ She and Muḥammad had lived contentedly together for 25 years. Together she and Muḥammad had two sons, Qasim and ‘Abd Allah who both died in infancy and four daughters, Zaynab, Ruqqayah, Umm Kulthum, and Fatimah, who were the only children of the Prophet Muḥammad (S) to live past infancy. She raised them all with a strong sense of Spirit, and reliance upon their Sustainer. She was known for her purity, her wisdom, her generosity, and her kindness. Khadija was buried in the al-Mala’ cemetery in Mecca.

Even after remarrying, Muḥammad long mourned his devoted wife. “Khadija had been for the Holy Prophet (S) more than a wife. She had placed all her wealth, which was considerable, at his disposal. She had given him love. She was the first person to be converted to Islam, and had been a pillar of strength for the Holy Prophet (S) as well as the Muslims.”³⁵ When his later wife, ‘A’isha, questioned him about the extent to which he continued to remember and miss her, he said, “She embraced Islam when people disbelieved me, and she helped me in her person and her wealth when there was none else to lend me a helping hand. I had children only from her.”³⁶

³⁴ *Hijrah*, the emigration in 622 A.D. of the beleaguered new Muslim community from Mecca 260 miles north to the settlement of Yathrib, subsequently known as Medina, where they were received by Arab and affiliated Jewish tribes who were looking to Muḥammad to help them establish peace among their warring tribal factions. This year of the emigration is the year 0 in the Muslim lunar calendar, ie. the current year of 2001 C.E. is the same year as 1422 A.H.

³⁵ Alim (Islamic software), CD-ROM.

³⁶ Musnad Ahmad 6/117,118.

Trustworthiness, Truthfulness, and Sincerity

*Truly, We offered the Trust
to the heavens, and to the earth, and to the mountains;
but they refused to undertake it, as they were afraid of it—
but the human being undertook it
though he was indeed unjust and foolish,
so that God must chastise the hypocrites, men and women,
and the deniers, men and women,
yet God turns in mercy to the faithful, men and women:
for God is Ever-ready to Forgive, Infinitely Merciful.*

[33:70-73]

Put your trust in God if you are of the faithful.

[5:26].

Whosoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him.

[65:3]

*Let there be no compulsion in religion;
right wayfaring stands clearly apart from error.
Whoever turns away from the powers of evil and has faith in God
has grasped the most trustworthy handhold
which shall never give way.
And God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*

[Sūrah Al-Baqarah, The Cow, 2:256]

*Whoever submits his or her whole self to God and is a doer of good
has indeed grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold:
for with God rests the final outcome of all endeavors.*

[31:22]

*And put your trust in God,
for God suffices as your Guardian of Affairs.*

[33: 3]

On the authority of Anas b. Malik, it is told that a man came riding his camel, and he asked, “O Messenger of God, shall I leave my camel untied and trust [*tawwaku*] in God?” He replied, “Both tie your camel and trust in God.”

Ibrahim al-Khawwas commented, “Whoever genuinely trusts in God when dealing with himself will also trust in God when dealing with others.”³⁷

When Hamdun was asked about trust in God, he answered, “This is a degree I have not reached yet, and how can one who has not completed the state of faith speak about trust in God?” It is said, “The one who trusts in God is like an infant. He knows of nothing in which he can seek shelter except his mother’s breast. Like that is the one who trusts in God. He is guided only to his Lord Most High.”³⁸

The most common title of the Prophet Muḥammad (S) is *al-Amin*, “the Trustworthy,” based on the uprightness of his behavior as a youth and on his reputation as a merchant and caravan-leader. Frequently people entrusted their affairs to him, confidant of his truthfulness and trustworthiness. Continually he trusted in his Sustainer.

*O you who have attained to faith!
Remain conscious of God,
and be among those who are true to their word!*
[9:119]

*Follow those who ask no reward from you
and are themselves rightly guided.*
[Ya Sin 36: 21]

*On the Day of Reckoning God will say:
“Today, their truthfulness shall benefit
all who have been true to their word.
Theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow,
there to dwell beyond the count of time;
well-pleased is God with them,
and well-pleased are they with Him: this is the ultimate success.”*
[5:119]

³⁷ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 116.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 121.

Every word of the Qur'an had to pass through the purified being of Muḥammad. It had to be received by him in order to be conveyed.

In the *hadith al-ʾiṭk* [ʾAʾisha] stated, “By God, the Messenger of God (SAAS) did not get up, nor did any member of the family leave, until revelation came down to him. He underwent the agony that used to seize him (on such occasions) with sweat emerging like pearls from him, even though it was a winter’s day, because of the heavy burden of the revelation that came down upon him.”

. . . “I heard ‘Umar b. al-Khattab say, ‘When revelation came down to the Messenger of God (SAAS), it would be heard like the buzzing of a bee near his face.’”³⁹

Hussain Abbas comments:

When we understand something from the depth of our being, we sometimes lose control. We burst out. We’re happy for days. We are in a daze. We know of poets, who having come up with something really wonderful are then unable to continue . . . this joy that bubbles up, the sight that you get into the nature of reality. Consider all this and consider this is the person on whom the Qur’an came line by line. This is the person on whom it kept coming for twenty three years, ten months and five days. So crushing was this experience that he said that he would burst out in a cold sweat even if it were winter. If he were sitting on a camel, the camel would sit down. Consider the pulverizing nature of the divine revelation. And now consider that he never had a gap in his day to day activities.

This is trustworthiness incarnate and the guardians of trustworthiness are “veracity” and “sincerity.” According to Javad Nurbakhsh, Veracity (*sidq*) is “being truthful with God and the creation, both outwardly and inwardly, and being what one shows oneself to be,” (*Sufism V*, p. 91) while Sincerity (*ikhlas*) “is that, without paying attention to any creature or taking into account the gratification of your own self, you think, do and act for God.” (*Sufism IV*, p. 105)Whoever possesses the virtues of

³⁹ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Volume I, p.306.

veracity and sincerity will be trustworthy in his dealings with others, keeping his or her promises and fulfilling his or her responsibilities. In Shakespeare's words, "to thine own self be true/And it must follow, as the night the day/Thou canst not then be false to any man." To be true to yourself is not to follow the passions of your commanding *nafs*, but to be true to your *fitrah*.⁴⁰

*For all those who listen to God and the Messenger
are among those on whom God has bestowed His blessings:
the prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth,
and those who with their lives bore witness to the truth,
and the righteous ones; and what a beautiful friendship this is.
Such is the abundance of God—
and it suffices that God is All-Knowing.*

[4:69-70]

Sufyan ibn 'Abdullan al-Thaqafi asked the Messenger of Allah to teach him so that he need never ask anyone again. The Messenger of Allah answered, "Say that you believe in Allah; then always be truthful."⁴¹

*On the Day of Reckoning God will say:
"Today, their truthfulness shall benefit
all who have been true to their word.
Theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow,
there to dwell beyond the count of time;
well-pleased is God with them,
and well-pleased are they with Him: this is the ultimate success."*

[5:119]

Is it not to God that sincere devotion is due? [39:3] An authentic tradition states that the Prophet (S) related, on the authority of Gabriel (peace be upon him), who related about God (may He be exalted) that He said, "Sincerity is a secret taken from My secret. I have placed it as a trust

⁴⁰ Charles Upton, contributor.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 40.

in the hearts of servants I love.”⁴²

Yusuf b. al-Husayn commented, “The dearest thing on earth is sincerity. How many times have I struggled to rid my heart of hypocrisy, only to have it reappear in another guise.”⁴³

*O you who have faith! Why do you say that which you do not do?
It is most displeasing in God's sight
that you say that which you do not do.*

[61:1-3]

If one of you trusts another, then he who is trusted should deliver his trust. [2:283] Never make a promise while intending not to keep it. This is forbidden as it falls within lying and hypocrisy. Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated that the Prophet (S) said, “Three traits single out a hypocrite, even if he prays or fasts and claims to be Muslim: If he speaks, he lies. if he makes a promise, he does not keep it. If he is entrusted, he betrays the trust.”

Imam Al-Ghazali in al-Ihya explains that this hadith is applicable to those who promise while intending not to fulfill it, or those who, without an excuse, decide later not to fulfill the promise. Those who promise but could not fulfill their promise due to a proper excuse are not hypocrites. But we should be careful not to present a false excuse, as Allah knows our inner thoughts and intentions.⁴⁴

The word *sadiq* (truthful one) is derived from truthfulness. The word *siddiq* (exceedingly truthful, veracious) is the intensified form of it, being he who is pervaded by truthfulness. . . . The lowest degree of truthfulness is that one's inner being and outward actions are in harmony. The *sadiq* is one who is truthful in word. The *siddiq* is one who is truthful in all his words, deeds, and inward states.

Ahmad b. Khidruya instructed, “Let one who wishes God to be with him adhere to truthfulness, for God Most High has said, ‘Surely God is

⁴² Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p.187.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 189.

⁴⁴ Abu Ghudda, Shaykh Abdul Fattah. *Islamic Manners*, p.37-38.

with the truthful ones”⁴⁵

Abu Bakr, the first free man to accept Islam⁴⁶ was known for his trustworthy truthfulness. After the Mihrāj of the Prophet (S) when others derided Muḥammad (SAAS), it was Abu Bakr who immediately acknowledged what must be the truth of the Prophet’s experience. Abu Bakr trusted in the truthfulness of Muḥammad (S) . He said, “I believe that he is communicating revelation from God, early in the day or in the evening; so how should I not believe him regarding this?” From then on Abu Bakr was referred to as Abu Bakr as-Siddiqi, the “trusting.”

The best livelihood is trust in God. ~ Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi

Your livelihood is seeking you more than you are seeking it. ~ Imam Ali

In reply to the question, What is the best that people can possess, what brings them truest happiness, what is the sweetest of the sweet, and what is the pleasantest life to life? the Buddha answered: “Trust is the best that people can possess following the way brings truest happiness; truth is the sweetest of the sweet; and the practice of insight is the pleasantest way to live.”⁴⁷

*The Originator of the heavens and the earth—
He has made for you pairs from among yourselves
and pairs among cattle:
by this means He multiplies you; there is nothing whatever like Him
and He is the All-hearing, the All-Seeing.
To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth;
He grants abundant sustenance
or bestows it in meager measure to whom He wills:
for He knows well all things.
The same clear Path has He established for you*

⁴⁵ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 190-91.

⁴⁶ The first person to accept Islam was Khadija, then her slave Zaid b. Haritha, and Muḥammad’s young nephew ‘Ali b. Abu Talib, then followed by Abu Bakr.

⁴⁷ Anne Bancroft, *The Pocket Buddha Reader*. (Sutta Nipata) p.23-24.

*as that which He enjoined on Noah,
 that which We have sent by inspiration to you,
 and that which We designated for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus:
 that you should steadfastly uphold the Faith
 and make no divisions within it.
 To those who worship other things than God,
 the way to which you call them may appear difficult.
 God draws to Himself those who are willing
 and guides to Himself everyone who turns to Him.*

[42:11-13]

With reference to numerous verses from the Qur'an, Aisha Rafea elucidates in her essay on the Soul's Longing, how all the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition have sought guidance from within and from a higher source, and have prepared themselves to receive that guidance; "the Supreme responded to their striving and revealed to them a path that made of their whole life a language of spirit." She indicates how longing souls have the possibility of becoming accessible to God's graces if they follow the paths of the prophets, and concludes that this journey is of benefit not just for the individual soul, but for the whole community of which *He* is a part. She proposes that it is the resulting greater spiritual awareness and the dissemination of spiritual knowledge that could lead to increased creativity in solving the problems and challenges of the modern age, and that it is in the development and continued sharing of this essential "Language of Spirit," rather than deified dogmas, that our hope lies.⁴⁸

The greatest trust is that which is between us and our Most Gracious Sustainer. It is that which gives us strength and enables us to be trustworthy according to our *fitrah*, our essential nature and our essential bond with God. May we learn each day to be more truthful and trustworthy and connect ever more deeply with our essential sincerity.

⁴⁸ Alia Rafea, "The Soul's Longing," *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, edited by Camille Helminski, p.

Abu Bakr

When Abu Bakr accepted Islam and announced this fact, he prayed to God the Almighty and Glorious. Abu Bakr was a man admired by his people, a well-liked and easy-going man. He knew more than anyone about the genealogy of Quraysh and of the good and bad in their history. He was a business man of fine character and charity.

His people would come and consult with him on all kinds of matters because of his knowledge, his business experience and the pleasantness of his company. He soon began inviting those he trusted of his friends and associates to join him in accepting Islam.

I have been told that those who accepted Islam through him were: al-Zubayr b. al-‘Awwam, ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan, Talha b. ‘Ubayd Allah, Sa’d b. Abu Waqqas and ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Awf, God be pleased with them.

They all went, accompanied by Abu Bakr, to the Messenger of God (SAAS) who explained Islam and its correctness to them and recited to them from the Qur’an; they then believed. These eight men were the earliest to accept Islam. They prayed and believed in the Messenger of God (SAAS) and in the mission he had received from God.⁴⁹

. . . Talha b. ‘Ubayd Allah said, “I attended the trade fair at Busra and there, in his cell, was a monk who called out, ‘Ask the Meccans at the fair whether any man of them is from the holy quarter.’”

Talha stated, “I replied, ‘Yes; I am.’ The monk then asked, ‘Has Ahmad come forth yet?’ I asked, ‘Who is Ahmad?’ He responded, ‘He is the son of ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib; this is the month during which he will appear. He is the last of the prophets. He will come forth from the holy quarter and go into exile to a place of date-palms, stony tracts, and salty earth. Be sure not to let anyone precede you to him.’”

Talha went on, “His words deeply impressed me. So I left quickly for Mecca. There I asked, ‘Is there any news?’ People replied, ‘Yes indeed; Muḥammad son of ‘Abd Allah, “the trustworthy”, has declared himself a prophet. And he has Abu Bakr b. Abu Quhafa as a follower.’”

Talha continued, “So I went off to Abu Bakr and asked him, ‘Have you really become a follower of this man?’ “Yes,’ he replied. ‘And you

⁴⁹ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, p.317.

should go off to him, see him and follow him. He is calling to the truth.” Then Talha told him what the monk had said.

Abu Bakr then took Talha with him and they went in to see the Messenger of God (SAAS). Talha then accepted Islam and told the Messenger of God (SAAS) what the monk had said; he was delighted to hear this.⁵⁰

After years of persecution, when divine permission was finally received for the Muslims to emigrate to Medina, Abu Bakr remained behind until the Prophet Muḥammad (S) was ready to depart:

“And, as I have been told, no one knew of the departure of the Messenger of God (SAAS) except ‘Ali b. Abu Talib and Abu Bakr, “the Trusting”, and his family.

“‘Ali was ordered to remain behind to return to people the items they had deposited with the Messenger of God (SAAS); anyone in Mecca who had concerns about things they owned would leave them in his care, such was his reputation for honesty and trustworthiness.

“Having decided to leave, the Messenger of God (SAAS) went to the house of Abu Bakr b. Abu Quhafā and they made their exit via a window at its rear.”

Abu Nu’aym recounted, through Ibrahim b. Sa’d from Muḥammad b. Ishaq, who said, “I have been informed that as he was about to leave Mecca as an emigrant to Medina for God, he said, ‘Praise be to God who created me when I had been nothing. O God, protect me from earthly terrors, misfortunes and mishaps in the nights and days to come. O God, accompany me on my journey and keep my family safe. Bless me in what You have granted me and humble me before Yourself. Raise me to the finest qualities in my character. Endear me to You, O Lord. And do not entrust (my fate) to people.

“O Lord of the frail, you are my Lord. I take refuge in Your noble visage before which the heavens and the earth rejoice, the dark shadows dissipate and the troubles of those who are first and those who are last are made right. (I pray) that You spare me your anger and discontent. I appeal

⁵⁰ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Volume I, p.317-318.

to You not to cease your favours and to spare me your sudden wrath, removal of your favour and all your anger. I will repay as best I can all your favours to me. And there is no power nor strength except in You.”⁵¹

The first night of their journey to Medina, the Prophet (S) and Abu Bakr hid themselves in a cave on the outskirts of Mecca. Not long after their entry into the cave, suddenly a spider wove a large web across the opening and a dove nested in the ledge of rock beside the cave door. When the Meccans who were pursuing them approached the cave and witnessed the spider web and the nesting dove they assumed that such settled creatures could not have been disturbed by human beings in flight and so they left the cave and continued their search elsewhere. Truly our protector is God.

Later, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (S), Abu Bakr was chosen as the first caliph, the first leader of the new Muslim state. He presided as head of the community for two years until his death in 634 when ‘Umar succeeded him.

Al-Bayhaqi stated, “The *hatiz* Abu ‘Abd Allah informed us . . . quoting Muhammad b. Sirin, as follows, ‘Some men were talking during the period of the rule of ‘Umar and apparently expressed their preference for ‘Umar over Abu Bakr. This reached ‘Umar and he commented, “By God, a single night or a single day of Abu Bakr would be better than the whole clan of ‘Umar! On the night when the Messenger of God (SAAS) went to the cave with Abu Bakr, the latter would walk in front for a while, then walk behind. Eventually the Messenger of God (SAAS) realized this and asked, ‘Abu Bakr, why do you walk behind for a while, then go and walk ahead?’ He replied, ‘O Messenger of God, I think of pursuit and walk behind you, but then I think of ambush and so walk ahead of you.’ The Messenger of God (SAAS) then asked, ‘You mean if something happened you’d rather it be to you than to me?’ ‘Yes indeed, by Him who sent you with the truth,’ he replied.

“When they reached the cave Abu Bakr said, ‘Stay outside, O Messenger of God, until I make sure the cave is safe for you.’ He went

⁵¹ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Volume II, p. 155

inside and made sure it was safe, but then remembered he had not checked out the crevice. So he said, ‘Stay where you are, O Messenger of God, while I check again.’ He then went back in, made sure the crevice was safe and said, ‘Come on down, O Messenger of God.’ And he did so.”

“ ‘Umar then commented, ‘By Him who holds my soul in His hand, that night was better than the whole clan of ‘Umar!’ “⁵²

Combining the various accounts we see that Khadija was the first woman to accept Islam, the leader of the pack, as it were, and also she preceded the men. Among slaves, the first to accept Islam was Zayd b. Haritha. And the first boy to accept Islam was ‘Ali b. Abu Talib; he was young then and had not reached puberty—as generally believed. These were then the family of the Prophet (S) . The first free man to accept Islam was Abu Bakr, “the trusting.”

Ibn Ishaq stated that Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Abd Allah b. al-Husayn of Tamim related to him that the Messenger of God (SAAS) said, “I never called upon any man to embrace Islam without him expressing reluctance, hesitation, and argument except Abu Bakr. He did not *‘akam* (“hold back”) from Islam when I told him of it, nor did he hesitate at all.”⁵³

The Shield of Trust

The Prophet (S) carried a shield . . . whoever puts his hand on the grip of the shield must do so in the way of the Prophetic practice, in order that it may be a refuge and a recompense.

If asked: With whom did the shield originate? Say: With Kayamarth, the son of Adam. It is also said that he was Adam’s grandchild and that

⁵² Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Volume II, p. 157.

⁵³ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Volume I, p.314.

Adam made him king of his [descendants]. Kayamarth loved hunting.

One day when he was hunting, he suddenly came upon an animal said to be a wolf. However much Kayamarth struck it with his weapon, his blows had no effect. He reflected that the animal's skin would be of good use against instruments of warfare, so he ordered that the animal be taken by means of a charm and killed. He cut the skin into the shape of a shield and hung it up. At times of battle, he carried it in front of his body and head. After him, alterations were made until the shield attained the form it now has.

If asked: How many are the kinds of shields? Say: Four:

1. The shield of caution
2. The shield of destiny
3. The shield of patience
4. The shield of meekness

If asked: What is the explanation of each of these?

Say:

1. The shield of caution is a shield woven of silk and cord in the customary manner. One carries it to ward off the wounds of arrow and sword.

2. As for the shield of destiny, it can repel some of the divine decrees; it is prayer and alms, as the Prophet (S) said: Nothing repels destiny except canonical prayer. Another time he said: Giving alms repels calamity and increases one's lifespan. This refers to conditional fate, not inescapable fate.

3. As for the shield of patience, it is to be sewn from the pains of the arrows of misfortune. Whoever makes patience his calling will achieve his desire.

4. The shield of meekness is that which wards off the blows of the sword of anger, for the meek are safe from the sparks of the fire of wrath.

If asked: What is the truth of the shield? Say: Taking refuge in God and knowing Him to be the (Uncaused) Cause.

If asked: How many are the rules of conduct for taking up the shield? Say: Five.

1. One must trust in God, not the shield; for if God wishes, He will protect His servants even without a shield. Should He not, a shield cannot save him. As Sa'di said: You have put the shield on your shoulder against the arrow of fate; if the arrow strikes your liver, what is its use?

2. One should not touch the grip of the shield in a state of impurity.

3. Whenever one takes up the shield, he should invoke God.

4. When taking it up, he should kiss the grip and, some say, the covering of the shield.

5. After removing the shield from the neck, it should be stored respectfully.

If asked: What does the shield and its handgrip resemble: Say: A circle.

If asked: What is the significance of the circle and its center? Say: It signifies that whoever holds the shield must remain firmly within the circle of moral reasonableness and compassion, as does the center. Just as the shield protects him, he, too, should protect the poor and the afflicted in order to be worthy of that handgrip.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ "The Shield of Trust" is excerpted from *The Royal Book of Spiritual Chivalry*, pp.345-347.

II.

Repentance (*Tawba*), Taking Account (*Hasib*),
and Forgiveness (*Ghafar*, *Ghafur*, *Afu*)

Repentance (*Tawba*)

Our Sustainer!

*You embrace all things within Your compassion and knowledge.
 Forgive then those who turn in repentance and follow Your Path,
 and preserve them from suffering through the blazing fire!
 And O our Sustainer! Bring them into the Gardens of Eternity
 which You have promised to them and to the righteous
 among their parents, their spouses, and their descendents!
 For You are Almighty, Truly Wise.
 And preserve them from harmful deeds;
 and any whom You preserve from harmful deeds,
 on that Day, truly, You will have graced with Your Mercy.
 And that will be the ultimate success.*

[40:7-9]

*Except such as repent and have faith and do good,
 these shall enter the garden,
 and they shall not be dealt with unjustly in any way.*

[19:60]

*Except those who repent and amend and hold fast to Allah and are sincere
 in their religion to Allah; these are among the faithful.*

[4:146]

*But if they repent and are constant in prayer and pay the poor-rate,
 they are your brethren in faith.*

[9:11]

O You who believe! Repent to Allah with a sincere repentance.

[66:8]

*Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance . . .
 and repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds.*

[4:17-18]

*O our Sustainer, in You we have placed our trust
 and to You we turn in repentance:
 for with You is all journeys' end.*

*O our Sustainer! Do not make us a ploy
for those who deny the Truth,
but forgive us, O our Sustainer!
For You are the Almighty, the Truly-Wise.”*

(prayer of Abraham and his followers)

[60:4-5]

*Turn all together toward God [in repentance],
O faithful ones, that you may attain bliss.*

[24:31]

It is reported on the authority of Anas b. Malik that the Messenger of God (may God's blessing and peace be upon him and his family) said, "The one who repents from sin is like one without sin, and if God loves a servant, sin does not adhere to him." Then he recited, "*Verily God loves those who turn unto Him [in repentance], and He loves those who purify themselves*" [2:222]. It was asked, "O Messenger of God, what is the sign of repentance?" He replied, "Remorse."

On the authority of Anas b. Malik, the Messenger of God (may God's blessing and peace be upon him and his family) is reported to have said, "There is nothing more loved by God than the youth who repents."

Therefore repentance is the first degree among the degrees of the wayfarers and the first station among the stations of the seekers. The inner meaning of repentance in Arabic is "return." It is said, "He repented," meaning, "He returned." So repentance is to return from what is blameworthy in the law of Islam to what is praiseworthy in it.

The Prophet (S) said, "Remorse is an act of repentance." Therefore, those well versed in the fundamentals of religion among the people of the Sunna have said, "There are three conditions of repentance [which must be present] in order that it be sound: remorse for the violations that have been committed, immediate abandonment of the lapse, and firm resolve not to return to similar acts of disobedience." One must apply these principles to make repentance effective.

One among the people of realization has said, "Remorse is sufficient in fulfillment of that because it has as its consequence the other two conditions, for it is impossible one should be remorseful for

an act in which he persists or the like of which he intends to commit.” This is the meaning of repentance by way of summary definition.

By way of elucidation and explanation, we may say that repentance has causes, an order, an arrangement, and divisions. The first cause is the awakening of the heart from the slumber of heedlessness and the servant’s becoming aware of his evil state. He attains this by means of the divine favor of attentiveness to the restraints imposed by God (may He be exalted) that come to his mind. This is by means of the audition of his heart, for it has come in the report, “The warner of God in the heart of every person is a Muslim.” The tradition “There is a piece of flesh in the body which, if it be healthy, the whole body is healthy and if it be corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Truly, it is the heart” also speaks to this matter. If his heart reflects on the evil of his deeds, he perceives the despicable actions he commits, and the desire for repentance comes to his heart, along with refraining from repugnant doings. Then God (may He be exalted) supports him in correcting his firm intention, in embarking on the path to a goodly return, and in becoming receptive to the means of repentance.

The first of these means is to part company with brothers in evil, for they prompt him to deny this goal and cause him to doubt the correctness of this firm intention. And that is not complete except by perseverance in witnessing, which increases his longing for repentance, and by the presence of motives impelling him to fulfill his resolve, from which he strengthens his fear and hope. Then the despicable actions that form a knot of insistence on his heart are loosened, he ceases the practice of forbidden things, and the rein of his self (*nafs*) is held back from pursuing passions. Then he immediately abandons his sin and concludes a firm resolve not to return to similar sins in the future. If he continues in accordance with his goal and acts in

If repentance diminishes once or twice and his desire causes him to renew the lapse—which may happen quite frequently—one should continue to hope for the repentance of such a person, for *Verily, to each period is a decree established* [13:38].

Abu Haf̣s al-Haddad remarked, “I abandoned a certain [reprehensible] deed and returned to it. Then the deed abandoned me,

and I did not return to it after that.”⁵⁵

Repenting to Him is freeing the heart of wrong actions and a returning from a distance to a proximity; in other words, stopping wrong actions immediately and making a resolution to stop them in the future. Moreover, it is striving to understand one’s deficiencies in the past.

Turning to Him is obligatory whenever wrong action is committed, and immediately after such an action. One of the conditions is that it be undertaken for the sake of Allah alone, not only for material reasons, social standing or out of fear of the ruler; a second condition is that one be full of regret, namely that the heart be pained and saddened at the wrong action. Regret is the essence of turning to Him in repentance, and the key to genuine repentance.

The fruit and excellence of regret is that one realizes the ugliness of one’s wrong actions.⁵⁶

Delay in turning to Him is self-deception, and continued procrastination is confusion: seeking an excuse not to turn to Allah is ruin.⁵⁷

The master Abu ‘Ali ad-Daqqaq (may God grant him mercy) said, “Repentance is divided into three parts. The first is *tawba* (repentance), the middle is *inaba* (turn to God), and the last is *awba* (return).” He placed *tawba* at the beginning, *awba* at the end, and *inaba* between the two. Whoever repents out of desire for [divine] reward is in the state of *inaba*. Whoever repents for the sake of obeying the [divine] command, neither for the desire of reward nor for the fear of punishment, is in the state of *awba*.

It is also said, “*Tawba* is the quality of the Believers.” As God Most High says, “*Turn (tubu) together toward God in repentance, O Believers*” [24:31]. (*Naba*) is the quality of the saints and those drawn nigh unto God. God Most High says, “*And those who brought a heart turned in devotion (munib) [to Him]*” [50:33]. *Awba* is the quality of the prophets and messengers. God Most High says, “*How excellent a*

⁵⁵ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 1-4.

⁵⁶ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.109.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.110.

slave. Ever did he [Solomon] turn [awwab] [to Us] [38:30] and [38:44]

Al-Junayd stated, “Repentance has three senses. The first is remorse; the second is the resolve to give up reverting to what God has forbidden; and the third is the righting of grievances.”⁵⁸

*But He turned to them [mercifully];
surely to them He is Compassionate, Merciful. [9:117]*

⁵⁸ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 6-7

He Frowned

In the early days of his mission, the Prophet Muḥammad was involved in conversation one day with some of the influential people of pagan Mecca, attempting to convey to them the truth of his message. While he was so engaged, a blind man approached and asked a question of him regarding the Qur'an. Muḥammad frowned and turned away from him, annoyed by the interruption. Shortly thereafter, Muḥammad was reproved by God with these first verses of the *sūrah* which then took on the title "He frowned."⁵⁹

*He frowned and turned away
because the blind man came to him.
But how were you to know whether he might grow in purity,
or whether he might have received counsel
and been helped by this reminder?
And the one who regards himself as self-sufficient,
to him you pay attention;
though if he does not grow in purity you are not to blame.
But as for the one who came eagerly to you
and with an inner awe,
him you disregarded.
By no means should it be so!*

⁵⁹ Al-Walid b. al-Mughira was standing talking with the Messenger of God (SAAS) who was addressing him, wishing to convert him to Islam, when Ibn Umm Maktum, that is, the son of 'Atika, daughter of 'Abd Allah b. 'Ankatha, passed by. Ibn Umm Maktum, who was blind, addressed the Messenger of God (SAAS) and began asking him to recite the Qur'an. This so upset the Messenger of God (SAAS) as to anger him, and this was because he was interfering with his efforts to convert al-Walid to Islam as he was hoping. "When the blind man persisted, he turned away from him frowning and ignored him. And so God Almighty sent down, '... and he frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him ...' up to the words, '... exalted, purified'" (*surat 'Abasa; LXXX, v.1-14*). It is also said that the person who was talking to the Messenger of God (SAAS) when Ibn Umm Maktum came along was Umayya b. Khalaf. But God knows best. ~ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad* Vol. II, p. 36

*For this is indeed a reminder
for anyone who will remember.*

[80:1-12]

Muhammad immediately felt remorse for having mistakenly rebuffed the sincere seeker, and became ever more watchful over his own behavior that he might respond ever more appropriately in every situation.

Repent ceaselessly, with the strongest will not to return to the thing of which you repent, for only then is the repentance acceptable. Through Mansur ibn ‘Abdullah al-Harawi we hear Abul-Hasan al-Muzayyin say, “Three things make repentance real: regretting the past, deciding firmly not to return to the state of which one repents, and having fear in one’s heart, One is afraid because one knows perfectly well when one sins, yet does not know if one’s repentance is going to be accepted or refused.”⁶⁰

Then whoever fears My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve [2:38]. Those who fear God’s future punishment—who encounter Him in His names *Ad-Darr*, The Punisher, and *Al-Muntaqin*, The Avenger—are being called by Him to repent; and so fear is an aspect of Mercy, since God is also *Ar-Ra’uf*, the All-Pitying, *Al-Ghaffar*, He Who is Full of Forgiveness, and *Al-Ghafur*, the All-Forgiving. . . . In the words of Hazrat ‘Ali, “If you are able, increase your fear of Allah while at the same time having a good opinion of Him; the best of actions is to achieve a balance between fear and hope.”⁶¹

It is related by ‘Ali ibn Rabi’ah that:

I saw ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, may Allah be pleased wit him, presented with a horse to ride. When he placed his foot in the stirrup (to mount), he said: ‘*Bismillah*’. When he had settled himself in the saddle, he said: ‘*Al hamdu lillah*, Glory be to the One who has made all this subservient to our use - since (but for Him) we would not have been able to attain to it. Hence, it is unto our Lord that we must

⁶⁰ Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 42.

⁶¹ Charles Upton, contributor.

always turn. ⁵

Then he said ‘*Al hamdu lillah*’ three times, and ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ three times, and then he recited the following:

‘Glory to you, O Allah, I have done wrong, so forgive me. Surely no one can forgive me of my wrongdoing except You.’⁶

Then ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib laughed. When he was asked what it was that caused him to laugh, he replied:

‘Once I saw the Prophet (S) do exactly as I have done just now, and then laugh, so I asked him why he had laughed He replied, “Your Lord is pleased with His servant when, in the knowledge that there is no one else who can forgive him, he asks the Lord to forgive him his wrongdoing”.’

When a servant commits a wrong, he does something most unsavoury and unbecoming. In relation to Allah, that wrongdoing takes on the further aspect of transgression and insolence. He does these things as a result of being overcome by passion, or by distorted thinking. But for how long will he remain under the influence of his passions, or his warped ideas? Undoubtedly Allah awaits the return of those who stray, and rejoices with the repentance of His servant, and appreciates every step in His direction taken by that servant (*Al ‘Imran* 3:16).

How did he forget in the first place? What caused him to stray? Now he feels his own weakness and depravity, aware that it is Allah alone who can treat his wounds and restore his health:

*And those who, when they commit an indecency or do wrong to themselves, remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who but Allah can forgive one's sins - and do not knowingly persist in what they do [Al ‘Imran 3: 135].*⁶²

In this life, we are engaged on a journey of return to our Sustainer.

The *adab* or code of exemplary conduct of the Prophet (S), with regard to travel encourages the traveler to actively seek the protection of Allah, and to expect to see the workings of His infinite mercy.

Whenever one of his people set out on a journey, ‘Abdullah ibn

⁶² Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Remembrance and Prayer*, P.77-81

‘Umar would say to him:

“Come close to me so that I may say goodbye to you the way that the Prophet (S) used to say goodbye to us. He used to say: ‘I commit your *din* (religious conviction) to the keeping of Allah, and (so also) your responsibilities, and the outcome of your doings.’”⁶³

Once when the Prophet Muḥammad (S) was returning from battle, he told his companions: “Now we are returning from the lesser *jihad* to the greater *jihad*.” “And what is the greater *jihad*?” they asked. The Prophet answered: “The struggle with the self.”

Be aware of your states, count each breath and every moment of time allotted to you, and do not waste it. Sahl ibn ‘Abdullah al’Tustari said, “Your time is the most valuable thing you have. Give every moment its due.” Abu Sa‘id al-Razi reports that Junayd said: “All good is gathered in three conditions. If you cannot pass your days with what furthers you, at least do not pass your days with what works against you. If you cannot befriend good people, at least do not keep company with bad people. If you cannot give away what is yours for Allah’s sake, at least do not spend your fortune on things that will anger Him. Keep continuous repentance. . . .”

Hold on to Truth under any circumstances, . . . and do not allow [your] hearts [to fall] into heedlessness and imagination.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Vol. II, p.36.

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 57-58.

Taking Account and Responsibility

*That you have faith in God and His messenger,
and that you strive in God's cause
with your possessions and your lives:
that is best for you, if only you knew!*

[61:11]

*But He will call you to account for what your hearts have earned,
and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.*

[2:225]

*See how God has purchased of the faithful
their lives and their possessions;
in return, theirs is the Garden,
and so they struggle in God's way.*

[9:111]

Muhammad (S) established a new assessment of accountability (*hasib*). By establishing law and order in this way, the Prophet, peace be upon him, brought the entire tribal society together into a moral community capable of accepting it, with the result that:

- Order and discipline replaced tribal customs and conventions and eliminated their barbarity and savagery;
- All people were now equal before the law, whether weak or strong, poor or rich;
- There was no longer any place for favoritism or any preferential treatment in this community, where the principle of justice and equity prevailed; and
- The sanctity of law was duly preserved and zealously guarded within this Islamic community, which abided by Allah's commandments and thereby maintained its own security and safety.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Hasan al-'Anani, *Freedom and Responsibility*, p.195.

Not long before his death, Muhammad made the ritual pilgrimage together with his community. On the plain of Arafat he delivered his farewell sermon, encouraging his community with the best of behavior. He then called out asking if he had indeed fulfilled his mission. The crowd on the plain of Arafat called out, "Yes." Again he asked, and again they confirmed, and a third time he asked and a third time the people acknowledged the fulfillment of his mission. It was here then that the final verse of revelation of the Qur'an was received: *This day I have perfected your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you submission as your religion.* [5:3].

After his return from the pilgrimage, just before his death when he was quite ill, Muhammad visited the mosque beside his home and made a final effort to rectify his accounts. He called out asking if there were anyone whom he had ever hurt who had not received recompense. One man stepped forward and said that the Prophet had once knocked into him with his elbow when in battle. Muhammad asked his forgiveness. He called out again asking if there were anyone to whom he owed anything who had not been repaid. A man stepped forward saying that he had once given the Prophet three small coins which he not repaid. Muhammad repaid him with apologies and stated that it is better to blush in this world than in the next.

The Life of the prophets is exemplary in the way that they each were completely devoted to their Sustainer and continually taking account of their actions and attempting to fulfill the purpose of their existence. Within Islam, we are given the five pillars of faith upon which to base our lives: the witnessing of the Unity of God and Muhammad's messengership, the practice of prayer and devotion to our Sustainer, the support of others through the offering of purifying charity (zakat), the fast of Ramadan, and the journey of pilgrimage. Each of us as human beings is continually called to take account of our state before God and to look well to the responsibility of the trust we have undertaken.

The first practical step for me, then, in acquiring religious efficiency is to make an account of myself, [to keep a journal] of my supply of time and my manner of using it. Remember, time is really the most wonderful of God's gifts, for when it ceases for us, all else ceases with it, that is, in the sense of meriting or gaining anything for

heaven. In this all men are equal: no one has more than twenty-four hours a day. Time flows on in a constant stream and cannot be halted in its course. Our day is, in a way, laid out for us by obedience, and our very manner of life suggests a certain routine, but we must go farther and find out if there are not some little “inbetweenities,” as someone has aptly styled these spare moments, and we will be surprised and astonished at the number wasted, due either to mismanagement or sheer carelessness.

But records do more than this, “Know thyself.” Self-knowledge is the information they give. ~ Sister Mary Cecilia⁶⁶

We do not know when the moment of meeting with our Lord may come and we wish our account book to be clean. Continually Muhammad (S) prayed for right guidance from his Lord, and also made every effort to keep rectified his accounts with his fellow human beings, as the following story also illustrates. May we likewise be responsible for and repay our debts, whether material, psychological, or spiritual, with gracious generosity.

Paying our Debts

Abu Nu’ayrn told in his work, *al-Dala’il (The Signs)*, . . . “‘Abd Allah b. Sallam stated that God having wished good guidance for Zayd b. Sa’ya, Zayd said, ‘All marks of the prophethood were there as expected for me to recognize on the face of Muhammad (S) when I looked at him, except that there were two I had not explored in him: that his patient wisdom preceded his ignorance, and that the more ignorance was directed at him, the more his patient wisdom increased.’

“He stated further, ‘I used to be nice to him so that I could mix with him and get to know his wisdom and his foolishness.’

“He then told a story of his having made an advance payment to the Prophet (S) for profit. He went on, ‘And when the time for the loan was

⁶⁶ Dorothy Stewart, *Women of Vision*, p. 47.

due, I went to him and grabbed him by the closure of his cloak and gown, he being then at a funeral with some of his Companions. I also glared at him in an ugly fashion and said, “O Muḥammad, aren’t you going to pay me my due? By God, I never knew you of the tribe of ‘Abd al-Muttalib to be late payers! “

“‘Umar stared over at me, his eyes rolled like revolving celestial bodies. Then he said, “You enemy of God! Do you dare say to the Messenger of God (S) what I am hearing and do what I am seeing? By Him who sent him with the truth, if I were not wary of his blaming me, I would cut off your head with my sword!”

“Meanwhile, the Messenger of God (S) was looking at ‘Umar, smiling quietly with gentleness. Then he said, “‘Umar, both he and I were in need of something other than that from you; you should have told me to pay up properly, and him to behave better. Take him away, ‘Umar, and pay him his due. And give him 20 Sa’s weight of dates as a bonus!’

“And so Zayd b. Sa’ya, may God be pleased with him, became a Muslim. He was present with the Messenger of God at all the battles, and he died in the year of Tabuk, God bless him.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet*, Volume I, p.214.

Forgiveness (*Ghafar, Ghafur, Afu*)

*And if you pardon and forbear and forgive,
then surely Allah is forgiving, merciful.*

[64:14]

*Repel [evil] with what is best, when lo!
He between whom and you was enmity
would be as if he were a warm friend.*

[41:34]

*Strive among yourselves to attain your Sustainer's forgiveness
and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth,
which has been readied for those who are conscious of God—
who spend in His way in times of abundance and in times of hardship,
and hold in check their anger,
and pardon their fellow human beings,
because God loves those who do good;
and who, when they have committed a shameful deed
or have otherwise wronged their own souls,
remember God and pray for forgiveness for their mistakes—
for who can forgive sins but God?—
and do not knowingly persist
in doing whatever wrong they may have done.*

[3:133-5]

*And so, do not let those of you who have been graced
with God's favor and ease of circumstance
ever be neglectful of helping their near of kin, and the needy,
and those who have turned from the domain of evil for God's sake,
but let them forgive and endure.*

*Do you not desire that God should forgive you your sins,
seeing that God is Ever Ready to Forgive, and is Most Merciful?*

[24:21-22]

*Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against your own selves!
Do not despair of Allah's Compassion:
for Allah forgives all mistakes:*

*for He is Often-Forgiving, Infinitely Merciful.
Turn to your Sustainer and surrender to Him
before the suffering comes upon you:
after that you will not be helped.
And before the penalty suddenly comes upon you
without your perceiving it,
follow the best of that which your Sustainer has revealed to you!”*

[39:53-55]

*As for those who avoid the grave sins and shameful deeds,
though occasionally they may stumble—
truly, your Sustainer is vast in forgiveness.
He knows you well when He brings you out of the earth
and when you are hidden in your mother’s wombs;
so do not claim purity for yourselves—
He knows best who is conscious of Him.*

[53:29-32]

*But, truly, your Sustainer, to those who do wrong in ignorance,
but who afterwards repent and makes amends,
your Sustainer after all this is Most Ready to Forgive, Most Merciful.”*

[6:51-4]

When Allah revealed the verse, *Take to forgiveness, enjoin good and turn aside from the ignorant* [7:199], Gabriel said, “O Muḥammad, it means that you should be forbearing with the man who has insulted you, forgive the man who has wronged you and give to the man who has denied you something.”

A man once asked the Apostle to tell him about nobility of character. He said, ‘It means that you should forgive him who has wronged you, re-establish ties with him who has broken them off, give to him who has denied you something, and speak the truth even if it is against your own interests.’⁶⁸

Al-Baqir relates that the Jewess who poisoned the sheep’s flesh eaten

⁶⁸ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, p.165.

by the Prophet was brought before the Prophet (S) , who asked her, “Why did you do what you did?” She replied, “I told myself that if he is a prophet then it will not harm him, but if he is merely a tyrant, then the people will be free of him.” And according to al-Baqir, the Messenger forgave her.

According to Abu Bakr, the Messenger said: “Be forgiving, for surely forgiveness only increases a servant in nobility; be forgiving to each other, and Allah will increase you in honour.”

Forgiveness is the crown of noble qualities, [while] of all the acts of a powerful man, vengeance is the most odious. ~ Hazrat ‘Ali

The more we are able to clearly take account of our own mistakes and seek forgiveness of God for our own mistakes, the more we are able to open also to extend forgiveness to others. In the Bible, Jesus tells people rather than worrying about the mote in someone else’s eye, to take care of the beam in our own. It is often blindness to our own mistakes that veils our sight to a more understanding view of someone else’s error. When we are able to see our own limitations more clearly, and seek forgiveness for them, our hearts soften and forgiveness flows through us more readily.

There may however be instances in life when intense hurt or abuse has been experienced when forgiveness opens, but resumption of relationship may not be indicated. Muhammad’s dear uncle Hamza was killed and terribly mutilated in the Battle of Uhud. When later Hashi, the man who had killed him converted to Islam and asked to be allowed to return to Mecca, the Prophet (S) forgave him and allowed him to return to the community but asked him not to come near him, rather to stay out of his sight.

*Whatever you are given here is for the convenience of this Life:
but that which is with God is better and more enduring—
for those who have faith and put their trust in their Sustainer;
those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds
and when they are angry, even then forgive;
those who pay attention to their Instructor and are constant in prayer;
who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation;*

and who give out of the sustenance We bestow on them.

[42:36-38]

Ibn Al Musabib relates, “I entered the presence of Ibn Al Munkadir of Tyre and said quietly ‘Istaghfirullah [May God forgive me].’ Ibn Al Munkadir heard me and admonished me, “Beware of hasty repentance for it is the act of liars.” I asked him why and he replied, “Sincere repentance requires seven things: the first is to feel remorse in the heart. The second is to do what Allah has commanded. The third is to desist from what He has forbidden. The fourth is to make up for what you have let lapse. The fifth is to give each person his or her right so that you will free yourself for the Day of Reckoning. The sixth is to melt your ego with acts of obedience. The seventh is to let every member of your body taste the sweetness of obedience the way that you let them taste the sweetness of disobedience. If after all this you say ‘Istaghfirullah,’ then your repentance will reverberate in you and rise to the heavens without any veils.⁶⁹

“As I look at my life I see areas of hardness, of shallow ‘promises, promises’ which never get anywhere, areas of preoccupation with my own life, with what I want to do, what I want to be. I allow these things to put a stranglehold on my effective ministry, but its often not until I feel the life being squeezed from me that I come to my senses. It is often a very painful process, and could have been avoided if I had taken more care.

The joy is, though, that the sower does not sow once, but over and over again, year in and year out. He never gives up, because he is confident of a harvest. In the book of Isaiah there is a promise which I hold on to, and it is this:

‘My word is like the snow and the rain that come down from the sky to water the earth.... So also will be the word that I speak—it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do.’ (The Bible, Isaiah 55:10—11).

God does not give up on me or you; we get chance after chance. But how sad that we waste those chances so often, when we could have been beautiful and useful if only we had listened and received

⁶⁹ *The Mevlevi Wird*, p.71.

what he had for us.” ~ *Margaret Cundiff*⁷⁰

The Prophet Muhammad (S) said that the following prayer is among the best of all calls for forgiveness:

O God! You are my Lord. There is no God but You. You created me. I am Your servant. I shall try to fulfill my pledge with You as well as my power permits. I seek refuge with You from the evil of my deeds. Due to Your favors to me I turn to You and thank You and also confess my mistakes. Forgive me, for there is none to forgive sins but You.⁷¹

The Prophet (S) was known to ask forgiveness of God “seventy times a day.” He urged his companions to pray as he prayed and to seek forgiveness as he did. When they asked him how he sought forgiveness, he recited the following prayer:

I ask forgiveness of God for all the sins I have committed consciously or accidentally, openly or secretly. I turn to God in repentance for all my errors, those of which I am aware and those of which I am unaware.⁷²

Jesus also taught his disciples what has come to be known as “The Lord’s Prayer” seeking for forgiveness and alignment with God’s will:

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive our trespassers.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen. (The Bible, Matthew 6:9-13)

Forgiveness allows us to re-establish connection with our Lord, our Sustainer. It allows our hearts to find rest as our consciousness focuses on

⁷⁰ Dorothy Stewart, *Women of Vision*, p. 53.

⁷¹ *The Mevlevi Wird*, p.61 and notes p.71.

⁷² *The Mevlevi Wird*, p.63. and notes, p. 71.

our Sustainer and His Compassion and Mercy rather than our wounds or even our own error.

Surely in the remembrance of God, hearts find rest.

[13:28]

*“But ask forgiveness of your Sustainer
and turn to Him:
for truly, my Sustainer is infinitely merciful and loving.”*

(Words of Prophet Shu'ayb)

[11:90]

III.

Compassion (*rahman*), Mercy (*rahim*),
and Charity (*zakat*)

Compassion (*Rahman*)

*In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate, Most Merciful
 All praise is God's, the Sustainer of all worlds,
 the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful
 Sovereign of the Day of Reckoning!
 You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help.
 Guide us on the straight path—
 the path of those whom You have blessed, not of those who have earned
 Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray!*
 (Sūrah Al-Fatiha, The Opening, 1:1-7 complete)

*And so, do not repulse any of those
 who morning and evening call on their Sustainer, seeking His face.
 You are in no way accountable for them—
 just as they are in no way accountable for you—
 and you have no right to repulse them,
 for then you would be among those who do harm.
 For it is in this way that we try them through one another—
 so that they might ask, "Is it these among us whom God has favored?"
 Does God not know best those who are grateful to Him?
 And when those who have faith in our signs come to you,
 say: "Peace be with you.
 Your Sustainer has willed upon Himself
 the law of compassion—
 so that if any of you does harm out of ignorance,
 and afterwards repents and changes,
 Your Sustainer is Ever Ready to Forgive, Most Merciful."
 [6:51-4]*

*And your Sustainer says: "Call on Me; I will answer you."
 [40:60]*

*It is He Who has sent His Messenger with guidance
 and the Way of Truth,
 so that it might prevail over all false ways;
 and God is sufficient as witness.
 Muḥammad is the Messenger of God;*

*and those who are with him stand firm
when facing those who deny the Truth,
and are compassionate with each other.
You can see them bow and prostrate themselves in prayer,
seeking grace from God and His good pleasure.
On their faces are their marks, traced by prostration.
This is their parable in the Torah,
and their parable in the Gospel:
like a seed which sends forth its shoot, which grows strong,
so that it becomes thick, and then stands firm on its stem,
delighting those who sow with wonder.*

[48:27-29]

In the *Qur'an*, each *sūrah* (chapter) of the revelation begins with *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* which means “In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful.” *Rahman* speaks to the fundamental compassionate beneficence inherent in the Divine nature; *Rahim* to the particular mercy which manifests. Both words come from the same root which is the word for “womb.”⁷³ God’s compassion and mercy is always emphasized as being greater than God’s wrath; the encompassing generosity and nurturance of the Divine is the milieu in which we live. As we come to recognize the magnificence of the Compassionate Source of Life, we can come to see ourselves in harmony with that Source. We can become a conduit for that compassion.

Muhammad’s message was one of great compassion; he brought a message of integration of spirit and matter, of essence and everyday life, of recognition of the feminine as well as the masculine. Though cultural manifestations may have layered over some of the original purity of intention, the words of the *Qur'an* convey the equality of women and men before the eyes of God; at a time when the goddess-worshipping Arabian tribes were still quite barbaric, even burying infant girls alive in favor of male offspring, this new voice of the Abrahamic tradition attempted to reestablish the recognition of the Unity of Being. It tried to address the imbalances that had arisen, advising respect and honor for the feminine, for the enslaved, as well as for the graciousness and harmony of

⁷³ Refer to *Lights of Qur'an* curriculum text for further commentary.

nature. The Qur'an enjoins mutual respect and valuation of each human being regardless of sex or social status. And everyone, regardless of gender or social position, is expected to establish his or her own direct connection with the Divine.

God's Messenger was particularly compassionate towards children. When he saw a child crying, he sat beside him or her and shared his or her feelings. He felt the pain of a mother for her child more than the mother herself. Once he said:

I stand in prayer and wish to prolong it. However, I hear the cry of a child and cut the prayer short for the anxiety which the mother is feeling.

He took children in his arms and hugged them. He was once hugging his beloved grandsons, Hasan and Hussayn, when Aqra ibn Habis told him: 'I have got ten children. So far, I haven't kissed any of them.'

God's Messenger responded: "The one with no pity for others is not pitied."

According to another version, he said: "*What can I do for you if God has removed from you the feeling of compassion?*"

Once, he said: "*Take pity on those on earth so that those in the heavens should have pity on you.*"⁷⁴

According to Hamad al-Lahham, a man came to al-Sadiq saying, 'A certain son of your uncle has been talking about you, mentioning all kinds of scandal and insult.' Thereupon al-Sadiq asked his [servant] to bring him water so as to make the ablution. When he had made his ablution he returned, and al-Lahham [thought] to himself that he would make prayers against the man; but he (Abu Bakr) prayed as follows: 'O my Lord it is my right—You have granted it to me and You are more generous and magnanimous than I; thus I ask You that you may accord me this right and do not punish him because of me.' Then he was seized with compassion and continued to pray, while al-Lahham looked on him in astonishment.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ M. Fethullah Gulen, *Prophet Muhammad, the Infinite Life*, Volume II, pp. 128-129.

⁷⁵ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, pg. 167.

When Imam Ali handed over the governorship of Egypt to Muḥammad ibn Abi Bakr, he commanded him to deal justly with the citizens, saying, ‘Treat them kindly, be gracious to them, extend to them the benefits of your position and be fair in the way you regard different ranks of men, so that the powerful do not desire you to commit injustice in their favour and the weak do not despair of your justice towards them; truly Allah will ask your servants about the smallest and greatest of your deeds, about the deeds made in public and those hidden from view. Indeed, if He punishes, then you were surely worthy of the punishment, and if He forgives, then He is the most generous.’

Mu’awiyah ibn Sufyan asked Khalid ibn Mu’[^]mmar why he loved ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. He replied, ‘I love him for three qualities: for his compassion when he becomes angry, for his truthfulness when he speaks, and for his justice when he is generous.’⁷⁶

Is it really paradoxical that when we are distressed we turn to the friend who knows what distress can be like? We don't know why, but there doesn't seem much point in going for sympathy, the deep-down, understanding kind, to those other friends whose paths have always been smooth. It is as though human beings lack a whole dimension and cannot come to maturity until they have faced sorrow. There is an old Arab proverb: "Too much sunshine makes a desert," and the human heart is very often a desert. But sorrow irrigates the desert. . .

⁷⁷

On a hot summer day, a man found a thirsty dog at the edge of a well, unable to reach the water. He said to himself, “This dog must be suffering from thirst as I am now.” The man went into the well, filled his shoe with water and offered it to the dog to drink. God was pleased with him, and granted him forgiveness of his sins.⁷⁸ The Prophet (S) was asked: “Messenger of God, are we rewarded for kindness to animals?” He said, “There is a reward for kindness to

⁷⁶ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam* p.19.

⁷⁷ Cicely Saunders and Mary Craig, *Women of Vision* compiled by Dorothy Stewart, p.104.

⁷⁸ Hasan Hathout, *Reading the Muslim Mind*, p. 83.

every living thing.”⁷⁹

Nasr ibn Muḥammad reports that Junayd related that there was a sheikh in Damascus called Abu Musa al-Qumasi who was a man of Futuwwah; everyone praised him. One day, the sheikh’s house collapsed on top of him and his wife. When people began to dig in the ruins, they found his wife first. “Leave me,” she said. “Go and try to find the sheikh and save him. He was sitting in a corner over there.” They left the woman, dug where she had pointed, and found the sheikh. “Leave me,” he said. “Go and save my wife.” Each wanted the other to be saved. That is the state of those who are together for the sake of Allah and who are friends and brothers in the name of Allah. They are in that compassionate state at all times.⁸⁰

St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio

One of the most beloved saints of Christianity, St. Francis of Assisi of the thirteenth century, was known for his great compassion. A favorite story about St. Francis is that of the wolf of Gubbio.

The people of Gubbio were in terror of a certain huge wolf that had been devouring not only animals but also human beings. They dared not go beyond the city walls. St. Francis resolved to meet the wolf to try to alleviate the terror and heartache of the people of Gubbio. As the people watched, he went forth to meet the wolf.

The wolf ran towards him as though to devour him, too, but St. Francis called to him as “Brother wolf,” commanding him in the name of God to neither harm him nor anyone else. The wolf looked at St. Francis, closed his jaws, and approached him as meekly as a lamb. Francis then spoke to him, calling his awareness to the murderous acts he had committed, but saying to him that as a brother he would make peace

⁷⁹ From the *hadith* collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and Bayhaqi.

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 61.

between him and the people of Gubbio and call off their dogs if the wolf would agree to no longer hunt the animals and people of Gubbio. The wolf bowed his head in assent. Francis then told him that he would assure him that the people of Gubbio would then feed him every day so that he would no longer be hungry and driven to killing. St. Francis asked of him his promise that he could trust him and the wolf again indicated his assent by bowing his head and shaking his tail. St. Francis then held out his hand and the wolf placed his paw in it in pledge. Then together they returned to the city walls that all the people might see.

Everyone came out to witness this miracle. St. Francis told the people of the wolf's promise and asked if they indeed would agree to feed him. They agreed and again he asked the wolf for his pledge. Again the wolf placed his paw in St. Francis's hand and bowed his head. From then on he went peacefully about Gubbio and was fed by the inhabitants for two years until one day he passed away of old age. The people mourned him greatly because when he went about so gently among them he had been a continual reminder for them of the goodness and compassion of St. Francis calling forth something of that same quality from within themselves.

Mother Teresa

A modern day saint is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a Catholic nun who was born in Macedonia in 1910 and who passed away in 1997. With indeed a mother's love and compassion, she witnessed the deep humanity of each person and treated all with equal respect and care. From this witnessing of the essential value of each being's *fitrah*, she began work among the poor and needy of Calcutta.

Her first work was as a teacher and it was not long before her enthusiasm and tender compassion endeared her to her students and drew more to come. It was they who first began to call her "ma." She then began to visit the hospitals and slums of Calcutta to help in any way that she could. Yearning to be able to help more, she went to Patna to receive

further training in nursing. A number of young women were drawn to her side to work with her in serving the poor.

The need arose to establish a home for the young women and a center of healing and help. At last, it was a muslim who was moving to Pakistan who sold his large home to Mother Teresa for a low price who enabled the first “Mother house” to be established. The force of her compassion was such that people then came from all over the world to assist Mother Teresa in her efforts, and she herself began to travel to all parts of the globe to speak, and to help the poor and needy. Eventually she was able to establish orphanages and homes for the impoverished ill and dying, the lepers and the outcasts. She created *Shanti Nagar* (The City of Peace), where sick and healed lepers are cared for, learn a job, and can find work. Little by little others followed her lead so that she was able to form a society for service of the poor and needy throughout the world.

She would tell people, “I want you to find the poor here, right in your own home first. And begin love there. Be that good news to your own people. And find out about your next-door neighbor. Do you know who they are?”⁸¹

“We are not social workers or social assistants. We want to bring the joy and love of God to the people, we want to bring them God Himself, who gives them His love through us. At the same time we love God and show Him our love by serving Him in these people. There are a lot of institutions caring for the sick. We do not want to be one among them. We are not one or another organization of social service. We have to be more, to give more, we have to give ourselves. We have to bring Gods’ love to the people by our service. And the poor people have taught us what it really means to love and to serve God—although our full understanding will only come after we have died.”⁸²

⁸¹ Excerpt from Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech 1979 Oslo, Norway.

⁸² Mother Teresa website. www.tisv.be/mt/nobel.htm

The Shifa Clinic

For centuries, in earlier eras Muslims throughout the Middle East established clinics and hospitals for the treatment of the ill and impoverished at little or no cost to the patients. Today, in Sacramento California, Muslims have coordinated efforts with the local university and students of medicine there to begin a free clinic for the poor and needy in their area. God willing, more and more of these compassionate efforts may blossom and yield good fruit of service throughout our world.

It may be a drop in the ocean, but the ocean is made up of drops.
~*Mother Teresa of Calcutta*⁸³

⁸³ Dorothy Stewart, *Women of Vision*, p. 131.

Mercy (Rahim)

God is the Best Protector and the Most Merciful of those to show Mercy.

[Sūrah Yusuf, Joseph, 12:64]

We sent thee not except as a mercy to the worlds.

[21:107]

‘A’isha asked [Muhammad (S)]: ‘Does one come to Paradise only by the mercy of Allah?’ He repeated three times over: ‘No one comes to Paradise except by the mercy of Allah!’ ‘Not even you, Messenger of Allah?’ she asked. ‘Not even I, unless Allah enfolds me in His mercy.’

He told his companions: ‘When Allah completed the creation He wrote the following, which is with him above His Throne: “My mercy takes precedence over My wrath”,’ and this *hadith* is decisive for Muslims; it states categorically that all the ‘names’ and attributes by which the Qur’an indicates various aspects of the divine nature as they relate to humanity are subordinate to this supreme and essential attribute. . . . Speaking in the first person in the Qur’an, God says: ‘*My mercy embraceth all things.*’ [7:156], and this mercy communicates itself to those who are receptive: “*Indeed, those who believe and do good, the Merciful will endow them with loving kindness (wuddan)*’ [19:96]; and: “*Who else but those who have lost their way could despair of the mercy of their Lord?* [15:56].⁸⁴

According to the *hadith qudsi*, in which God Himself speaks through the mouth of the Prophet (S), “My Mercy takes precedence over My wrath.” Without Mercy, nothing would be; it is through Mercy alone that God creates the worlds. In the words of another *hadith qudsi*, “I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known, so I

⁸⁴ Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, p 67.

created the world that I might be known.”⁸⁵

Our very existence is a free gift of God’s compassionate generosity. God has also given us prophets and messengers to guide us to Him helping us to be better able to receive the mercy that is intended for us. The more we respond to the guidance of our Sustainer, the more Mercy is able to reach us and be received by us.

The path He has laid out for us to return to Him is a Mercy: the word *shari’ah* literally means “a path that leads to water, to refreshment.” Even the dire warnings that appear in the Qur’an are essentially nothing but the protective words of a Friend who doesn’t want to see us lose our way and come to grief. And if our existence is a gift, and God’s guidance a further Mercy, what better way to show gratitude for Our existence, and for God’s sustenance and protection, than to extend Mercy to all creation?

One of Muḥammad’s titles is the ‘Key to Mercy.’ Perhaps the Prophet’s greatest act of Mercy was his clemency to his former enemies, the Quraysh, after his conquest of Mecca.⁸⁶

Rather than returning as a proud victor, he rode into Mecca with head bowed, in humility before his Lord as an instrument of His mercy:

Mounted on Qaswa, Muḥammad rode into his birthplace unopposed and immediately proclaimed a general amnesty. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is the Day of Mercy, the day upon which Allah hath exalted Quraysh.’ He had come, not to destroy, but to rectify, and a noble people had been reborn. The historical consequences of this act of clemency were incalculable. Over the succeeding centuries no conquering Muslim general could enter a territory or city without knowing himself subject—on pain of damnation—to the obligation of mercy and the necessity to follow the example set that day; and this in turn led to countless conversions among people

⁸⁵ Charles Upton, contributor.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

who learned forbearance from his example.⁸⁷

It is a great mercy from God that He has communicated to us, and told us that He will listen to our call upon Him and respond. *And if My servants ask you about Me—witness, I am near; I respond to the call of the one who calls, whenever he calls Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and have faith in Me, so that they may follow the right way.* [2:186] Sometimes a response to our prayer may be delayed as sometimes we *pray for things that are harmful as if they were praying for that which is good: for people are inclined to be hasty.* [17:11]

*Yet always does He give you something
out of what you may be asking of Him,
and if you tried to count God's blessings,
you could never compute them.*

[14:32-34].

The supplicant's realization that he stands in constant need of Allah's help, his confidence in a positive response to his prayers, his trust in Allah's providential care, and his avoidance of any spite or ill-will, or other attendant negative feelings, all impact directly on a person's practical behavior. For example, the feeling that I am completely dependent on Allah makes me hope and fear. I look forward hopefully for His mercy, but also fear His displeasure. This psychological state should make me more eager and careful to abide by His will in my practical life.

When a person is in distress, his supplications tend to be more urgent and vehement. This urgency and vehemence, with all the repetition involved, forge a sense of commitment on both intellectual and behavioral levels.

My confidence that Allah does listen to my prayers makes me love Him and adore Him, and commits me in practice to what I beseech of Allah in my supplications. If I am sure of the answer to my prayers; then I do tend to behave accordingly.

When I pray for forgiveness and feel sure that my prayer will be

⁸⁷ Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, p 127.

granted, I become more careful and try not to repeat anything that could blemish my purity and state of innocence attained through supplication for forgiveness. Similarly if I pray for success in life, I must try to mold my approach and conduct in whatever way is essential to achieve a higher degree of excellence in my work. In this way, supplication instills in my mind love of work, mastery and perfection in work, and love for Allah, which latter is of prime importance as a result of my greater confidence in Him.

Reposing one's trust in Allah and entrusting one's affairs to His providential care is an effective way to engender enthusiasm and love for one's work, because it strikes a balance between what man cherishes and actually achieves and what he desires but cannot realize in practice.

Successful undertakings and critical situations, such as wars and other emergencies and momentous events, whether happy or sad, undoubtedly call for fortitude, calm, and forbearance. Perhaps the most important of these undertakings is the struggle to change one's self and the community or society in which one lives for the benefit and betterment of all people.

The injunction that one's supplication must be free of any spite, ill-will, or desire to harm others is conducive to creating a healthy and sound relationship between a man and his fellow men.⁸⁸

The *sunnah* [example] of the Prophet, peace be upon him, exemplifies a perfect harmony between supplication and its practical manifestations. Once a Companion from among the Ansar came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and complained to him about his needs and poverty. Thereupon the Prophet, peace be upon him, mercifully taught him in a practical way how to overcome his difficulties and live up to the higher ideals of supplication wherein a Muslim seeks refuge with Allah from incapacity and laziness.

"Haven't you got anything in your house?" he asked him. "Yes, I have a piece of old cloth which we use as a dress as well as a floor-cover, besides a pot that we use for drinking water."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, publicly auctioned these articles among his Companions. They were sold for less than two dirham. He

⁸⁸ Hasan Al-Anani. *Freedom and Responsibility*, p. 199-201.

then ordered the Ansari companion to buy food for his family with one dirham, and an axe with the other. He then ordered the man not to come to see him for a fortnight, and advised him to spend all this time in cutting wood and selling it. Two weeks later, the Ansari companion came to see him. Now he had ten dirhams. Thereupon the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him, “This is better for you than coming on the Day of Judgement with your face marked (and disfigured) with beggary.”⁸⁹

The mercy that Allah created in human beings prompts us to sympathize with those who fall ill. Al-Bukhari narrated a hadith by Abu Huraira that the Prophet emphasized that human mercy is a minute continuation of the mercy of Allah. The Prophet (S) said: “Allah divided mercy into a hundred portions. He kept ninety-nine portions for Him, and released one portion on the earth. It is from this portion that creatures have mercy [towards each other], that a mare would lift her hoof lest it hit her child.”⁹⁰

On the authority of Abu Hurayra (may God be pleased with him) someone stated, “O Messenger of God, call [the wrath of] God down upon the polytheists!” He replied, “I was sent as a mercy; I was not sent as a punishment.”⁹¹

The Mercy of the Prophet

When the prophet was an infant a bedouin woman by the name of Halima took him as her foster child to care for him and nurse him in the desert. This was the custom among the noble Meccan tribes. Muhammad (S) stayed with her for six years, though each year he was brought back to

⁸⁹ Hasan Al-Anani. *Freedom and Responsibility*, p. 205.

⁹⁰ Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, p.89

⁹¹ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p.247

his grandfather and mother for a visit. When he was six Halima returned him to his mother who cared for him until she died two years later.

Thereupon his grandfather ‘Abd al-Muttalib took charge of him, but he too died when the Prophet (SAAS) was ten. Then his two uncles, his father’s two brothers al-Zubayr and Abu Talib, took responsibility for him. In his early teens his uncle al-Zubayr took him to Yemen. His account states that on that journey they saw signs (of his prophethood). One of these was that a stallion camel had made its way some distance along a valley through which the party was passing. When the stallion saw the Messenger of God (SAAS) it knelt down and rubbed its chest on the ground and so he mounted it. Another sign was that they came to a stream in violent flood but God Almighty dried it up so that they could cross it. Thereafter his uncle al-Zubayr died; at that time he was fourteen and Abu Talib alone took charge of him.

What is implied here is that the blessedness of the Prophet (SAAS) came down upon Halima al-Sa ‘diyya and her family when he was young and then his virtues reverted to the people of Hawazin when he took them prisoners after their battle; that occurred a month following the capture of Mecca. They were related to him because of his being suckled among them. He therefore released them, taking pity on them, and treating them with kindness

Concerning the battle with Hawazin, Muḥammad b. Ishaq related “We were with the Messenger of God (SAAS) at the battle of Hunayn and when he seized their properties and took them prisoners, a delegation from Hawazin who had accepted Islam came to him at al-ji’rana.⁹² They said, ‘O Messenger of God, we are one family and tribe. You know well what misfortune has befallen us. Have mercy on us, and may God have mercy on you.’ Their spokesman Zuhayr b. Surad then arose and said, ‘O Messenger of God, those prisoners you have in the stockades are your aunts and your nurses who looked after you. If we had suckled Ibn Abu Shamar or al-Nu’lman b. al-Mundhir and then we were to suffer from them what we have from you, we would have hoped for their help and kindness. And yet you are the

⁹² A place between Mecca and al-Ta’if

most honourable of men.’ He then recited the verses:

‘Have pity on us, O Messenger of God, in kindness; for you are the man we plead with and implore.

Have pity on a tribe ruined by fate, their whole divided, their fortune adversely changed,

Which has left us to cry out in sorrow; a people in whose hearts there is gloom and tragedy,

Unless you ward it off with kindnesses you spread forth, O most superior of men in wisdom when it is tested.

Have pity on women you once sucked, your mouth filled with their pure milk,

Have pity on women you once sucked, for then whatever happens will sustain your reputation.

Do not make us as those who scattered and died; spare us, for we are a tribe of fame.

We give thanks for kindnesses even if not redeemed, and after this day we will have a store (of good will).”

. . . Dress in forgiveness those you used to suck, your mothers; for acts of forgiveness become widely known.

We hope for forgiveness from you; dress these people in it, if forgive you will, and then be triumphant.

So forgive and may God forgive you from whatever you fear on Judgement Day when victory shall be given you.’

“The Messenger of God (SAAS)) then said, ‘Whatever prizes were due myself or the family of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, that goes to God and to you all.’ Al-Ansar⁹³ then said, ‘And what was to be for us we give to God and to his Messenger (SAAS).”

It will be later told how he set them free; they were 6,000, men and women combined. He gave them many camels and people. So that Abu al-Husayn b. Faris said, “The value of what he gave them that day totalled 500,000 dirhams.”⁹⁴

⁹³ *Al-ansar* is a term denoting the Muslims of Medina who granted the Prophet refuge following his migration from Mecca.

⁹⁴ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, p. 166-8.

‘Ali

There is no youth braver than ‘Ali.’

I am from ‘Ali and ‘Ali is from me.’

The truth circulates with him (‘Ali) wherever he goes.

I am the City of Knowledge and ‘Ali is its Gate (*Bab*).

~Hadith of Muhammad

*Amir al-mu‘minin Ali*⁹⁵—upon whom be peace—was the son of Abu Talib, the leader of the Banu Hashim. Abu Talib was the uncle and guardian of the Holy Prophet and the person who had brought the young Muhammad (S) to his house and raised him like his own son after the death of his grandfather. It was also Abu Talib who shielded Muhammad from tribal anger during the early days of his prophetic mission.

Ali was born ten years before the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet. When ‘Ali was six years old, due to famine in the region of Mecca, Muhammad took him into his household and guardianship. Now that he was married to the wealthy Khadija, Muhammad (S) was able to better care for his cousin and relieve some of the burden on his uncle’s household. It was here that ‘Ali became one of the first to accept the prophethood of Muhammad just after he received the first divine revelation.

Ali was always in the company of the Prophet until the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina. On the night of the migration to Medina (*hijrah*) when the angry Meccans had surrounded the house of the Prophet and were determined to invade the house at the end of the night and cut him to pieces while he was in bed, ‘Ali slept in place of the Prophet while the Prophet left the house and set out for Medina. After the departure of the Prophet, according to his wish ‘Ali gave back to the people the trusts and charges that they had left with the Prophet. Then he went on to Medina with his mother, the daughter of the Prophet, and two other women. In Medina, also, ‘Ali

⁹⁵ The “prince of the faithful.”

was constantly in the company of the Prophet in private and in public. The Prophet gave Fatimah, his beloved daughter from Khadijah, to 'Ali as his wife and when the Prophet was creating bonds of brotherhood among his companions he selected Ali as his brother.

Ali was present in all the wars in which the Prophet participated, except the battle of Tabuk when he was ordered to stay in Medina in place of the Prophet.⁴² He did not retreat in any battle nor did he turn his face away from any enemy. He never disobeyed the Prophet, so that the Prophet said, "Ali is never separated from the Truth nor the Truth from 'Ali."

'Ali was almost completely cut off from public affairs. He retreated to his house where he began to train competent individuals in the Divine sciences and in this way he passed the twenty-five years of the caliphate of the first three caliphs who succeeded the Prophet. When the third caliph was killed, people gave their allegiance to him and he was chosen as caliph. [He governed] for four years and nine months.⁹⁶

. . . According to the testimony of friend and foe alike, Ali had no shortcomings from the point of view of human perfection. And in the Islamic virtues he was a perfect example of the upbringing and training given by the Prophet. . . . In science and knowledge Ali was the most learned of the companions of the Prophet, and of Muslims in general. In his learned discourses he was the first in Islam to open the door for logical demonstration and proof and to discuss the "divine sciences" or metaphysics (*ma'drif-i ildhiyah*). He spoke concerning the esoteric aspect of the Quran and devised Arabic grammar in order to preserve the Quran's form of expression. He was the most eloquent Arab in speech.

The courage of 'Ali was proverbial. In all the wars in which he participated during the lifetime of the Prophet, and also afterward, he never displayed fear or anxiety. Although in many battles such as those of Uhud, Hunayn, Khaybar and Khandaq the aides to the Prophet and the Muslim army trembled in fear or dispersed and fled, he never turned his back to the enemy. Never did a warrior or soldier engage Ali in battle and come out of it alive. Yet, with full chivalry he would never slay a weak enemy nor pursue those who fled. He would not

⁹⁶ Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 191-192

engage in surprise attacks or in turning streams of water upon the enemy. . . .

Ali was also without equal in religious asceticism and the worship of God. . . . Abu Darda', one of the companions, one day saw the body of 'Ali in one of the palm plantations of Medina lying on the ground as stiff as wood. He went to Ali's house to inform his noble wife, the daughter of the Prophet, and to express his condolences. The daughter of the Prophet said, "My cousin (Ali) has not died. Rather, in fear of God he has fainted. This condition overcomes him often."

There are many stories told of Ali's kindness to the lowly, compassion for the needy and the poor, and generosity and munificence toward those in misery and poverty. Ali spent all that he earned to help the poor and the needy, and himself lived in the strictest and simplest manner. Ali loved agriculture and spent much of his time digging wells, planting trees and cultivating fields. But all the fields that he cultivated or wells that he built he gave in endowment (*waqf*) to the poor. His endowments, known as the "alms of Ali," had the noteworthy income of twenty-four thousand gold dinars toward the end of his life.⁹⁷

He, too, was a mercy to other human beings.

The story is told of how an enemy spat in the face of the Prince of the Faithful, 'Ali, may God honor his person, and how when anger then arose in 'Ali, he put down his sword:

Learn how to act sincerely from 'Ali:
 know that the Lion of God ('Ali) was purged of deceit.
 In fighting he got the upper hand of a warrior,
 and quickly drew a sword and made haste to slay him.
 That warrior spat on the face of 'Ali,
 the pride of every prophet and every saint;
 He spat on the countenance before which the face of the moon
 bows low in the place of worship.
 'Ali at once threw his sword away
 and relaxed his efforts in fighting him.
 That champion was astounded by this act

⁹⁷ Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 191-194.

and by his showing forgiveness and mercy without need.
 He said, “You lifted your keen sword against me:
 why have you flung it aside and spared me?
 What did you see that was better than combat with me,
 so that you have become slack in killing me?
 . . . What did you see, that from seeing only its reflection
 a flame appeared in my heart and soul?
 What did you see, beyond this existence and space,
 that was better than life?—and so you gave me life.
 In bravery you are the Lion of the Lord:
 in generosity who indeed knows what you are?
 In generosity you are like Moses’ cloud in the desert,
 whence came the dishes of food and bread incomparable.”
 . . . “O ‘Ali, thou who art all mind and eye,
 relate a little of that which you have seen!
 Since the moon even without speech is showing the way,
 when it speaks it becomes light upon light.
 . . . Since you are the gate of the city of Knowledge,
 since you are the beams of the sun of Clemency,
 Be open, O Gate, to him that seeks the gate,
 so that by means of you the husks may reach the core.
 Be open unto everlasting, O Gate of Mercy,
 O Entrance-hall to *None is like unto Him*.”
 Every air and mote is indeed a place for vision (of God),
 (but so long as it is) unopened, who says “Yonder is a door”?
 Unless the Watcher open a door, this idea never stirs within.
 When a door is opened for someone, he becomes amazed,
 grows wings, and begins to fly. . . .⁹⁸

How the Prince of the Faithful responded:
 For God’s sake, for Reality
 whose slave I am, I wield this sword.
 The body does not command me,

⁹⁸ *The Mathnawi of Jalalu’d-din Rumi*, books I & II, Reynold A. Nicholson, London, Luzac and Company, Ltd., 1982. Pages 202–204 (v.3721–3768) adapted by Camille Helminski.

nor does the lion of craving
 overcome the lion of God.
 Like a sword wielded by the sun,
 I embody these words in war:
Thou didst not throw when thou threwest.
 I've dropped the baggage of self.
 That which is not God is nothing.
 God is the sun, and I am a shadow.
 Jewelled with the pearls of Union,
 my sword brings life in battle, not death.
 Blood will not dull my shining sword;
 nor will the wind blow my sky away.
 I am not chaff but a mountain of patience.
 What fierce wind could lift a mountain?
 What the wind blows away is trash,
 and winds blow from every side—
 the winds of anger, lust, and greed
 carry away those who do not keep the times of prayer.
 I am a mountain, and my being is His building.
 If I am tossed like a straw, it is His wind that moves me.
 Only His wind stirs my desires.
 My Captain is love of the One.
 Anger is a king over kings, but anger, once bridled, may serve.
 A gentle sword struck the neck of anger.
 God's anger came on like mercy.
 My roof in ruins; I drown in light.
 Though called "the father of dust," I have grown like a garden.
 And so I must put down my sword,
 that my name might be *He loves for God's sake*,
 that my desire may be *He hates for God's sake*,
 that my generosity might be *He gives for God's sake*.
 My stinginess is for God, as are my gifts.
 I belong to God, not to anyone else;
 and what I do is not a show,
 not imagined, not thought up, but seen.
 Set free from effort and searching,
 I have tied my sleeve to the cuff of God—
 if I am flying, I see where I fly;
 if I am whirling, I know the axis on which I turn;

if I am dragging a burden, I know to where.
I am the moon, and the sun is in front of me.
I cannot tell the people more than this.
Can the river contain the Sea?⁹⁹

⁹⁹ ~ Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, *Mathnawi*, I:3787-3810 translated by Kabir Helminski,
Love Is a Stranger, p. 82-83.

Charity (Zakah)

*And yet, they have been commanded no more than this:
to worship God, sincere in their devoted faith in Him alone;
turning away from all that is false;
and to remain constant in prayer;
and to practice regular charity:
and that is the true and straight Way.*

[Sūrah Al-Bayannah, 98:5]

*O you who have faith!
Spend on others out of the good things which you may have acquired,
and out of that which We¹⁰⁰ bring forth for you out of the earth;
and do not choose for your spending
anything bad which you yourselves would not accept
without averting your eyes in disdain.
And know that God is the One Who is Rich,
the One Worthy of Praise.
Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty
and bids you to be stingy,
while God promises you His forgiveness and abundance;
and God is infinite, all knowing,
granting wisdom to whom He wills:
and whoever is granted wisdom
has indeed been granted abundant wealth,
but none bears this in mind
except those who are gifted with insight.*

[2:267-9]

*“Establish for us what is good in this world
as well as in the life to come:
see how we have turned to You in repentance!”
God answered: “With My stringency I try whom I will—
but My mercy overspreads everything,*

¹⁰⁰In the revelation of the Qur'an, the Divine Source sometimes chooses to speak or refer to Itself from the first person singular, *I/Me*, sometimes as the third person singular, and sometimes as the first person plural, *We*. Some commentators suggest that the usage of *We* refers to the attributes of God.

*and so I shall confer it upon those who are conscious of Me
and spend in charity, and who have faith in Our signs.”*

[7:156]

*Witness that you are those invited to spend freely in the Way of God;
but among you are some who are stingy.
But any who are stingy are so at the expense of their own souls.
But God is free of all wants and it is you who are needy.*

[47:36-38]

*I call to witness this land
in which you are free to dwell,
and the bond between parent and child:
truly, We have created the human being to labor and struggle.
Does he think that no one has power over him?
He may boast: “I have spent abundant wealth!”
Does he think that no one sees him?
Haven't We made a pair of eyes for him?
And a tongue and a pair of lips?
And shown him the two ways?
But he has not quickened along the path that is steep.
And what will explain to you what the steep path is?—
the freeing of one who is enslaved,
or the giving of food in time of need
to the orphan with claims of relationship,
or to the helpless, lowly one in the dust,
and being of those who have faith and encourage patience,
and who encourage deeds of kindness and compassion.
These are the companions of the right hand.*

[90:2-18]

*Truly, those who live in awe of their Sustainer;
those who have faith in the signs of their Sustainer;
those who do not attribute divinity to any but your Sustainer;
and those who distribute their charity
with their hearts trembling with awe
because they will return to their Sustainer—
it is these who quicken in every good work
and these who are at the forefront.*

*On no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear;
with Us is a record which clearly shows the truth:
never will they be wronged.*

[23:57-62]

*Those saved from the covetousness of their own souls,
they are the ones who achieve prosperity.*

[59:9]

*Let the person of means spend according to his means:
and the one whose resources are restricted,
let him spend according to that which God has given.
God puts no burden on any soul beyond what He bestows.
Surely, after hardship God will bring ease.*

[65:7]

There are numerous verses in the Qur'an encouraging human beings to help each other by any means given.

In Islam man, spiritually speaking, does not own anything. He is given everything, even his own life, as a [loan] from God. Almsgiving is a reminder of this fact and it is a kind of purification for every other thing he has. It is also as in the other Revelations an expression of attaching oneself to God through being a channel for His Mercy and support to others who are less fortunate in their worldly life. It is remarkable that whenever prayer is mentioned in the Qur'an, almsgiving, *zakah*, follows. The reason is that both prayer and almsgiving are related. When man is attached to the Higher Source he feels that what he gives is not his. It is the "right" of others. In so doing he attaches himself to the higher source. The Qur'an describes those who have that feeling:

*In whose wealth is a recognized right for the (needy) who asks
and him who is deprived. [70:24-25]*

In Islamic teachings, almsgiving, *zakah*, is the religious practice that gives a person a chance to be purified through a regular divine duty to the whole of society. Islamic teaching [instructs a person to give in charity] 2.5 percent of the amount he has saved in that year to the needy. As for people who earn their living from agriculture, if

they depend on rain, they must give one tenth of their harvested crop to the poor; if they irrigate their land, then one twentieth.¹⁰¹

*For it is He who has brought into being gardens—
both the cultivated ones and those growing wild—
and the date-palm, and fields bearing all manner of produce,
and the olive, and the pomegranate:
all resembling one another and yet so different!
Eat of their fruit when it ripens,
and contribute appropriate portions on harvest day.
And do not be wasteful:
truly, He does not love those who are wasteful!*

[6:141]

Take heed that you do not do your alms before men,
to be seen of them:
otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
Therefore when you do your alms,
do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do
in the synagogues and in the streets,
that they may have glory of men.
Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.
(The Bible, Matthew: 6:1,2)

This leads us to still another consideration. What one wants for oneself, one must also desire for others. Islam induces man to share the good things of life with his fellowmen as his brothers. Islam teaches us that the more general a supplication is, the more likelihood there is of its acceptance. There are many sayings of the Prophet, peace be upon him, that corroborate this. For example, he told us that the prayer of a brother for his brother without his knowledge is always granted; and that the angels also supplicate for the sake of those who supplicate for the sake of others, saying, 'And may you also be granted a similar good.'

When a Muslim supplicates for others and wishes for them what he wishes for himself, and continues to do so over a long period, he

¹⁰¹ Ali, Alia, and Aisha Rafea, *Beyond Diversities*, p. 98.

benefits personally. It brings him nearer to Allah as well to his fellowmen. And he gradually attains to a state where his likes and dislikes merge and become one with the pleasure and displeasure of Allah. In addition, he is saved from moral diseases, like malice, envy, spite, and hatred of others. Good and healthy feelings eventually become the hall-mark of his social behavior, so he is eager to help others and overlook their faults and is ready to forgive them.

He who helps his brother, will be helped by Allah. Another *hadith* as narrated by Anas reports that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, “None of you can be a true believer unless he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”¹⁰²

To be a channel of the higher power is not limited to giving money. Every act that emerges out of love, compassion, and sympathy exposes man to God’s Blessings.

A good word is considered a gift. To take away a stone out of a traveler’s way is counted as charity. (H)

A kind word with forgiveness is better than almsgiving followed by injury. Allah is Absolute, the Kind. [2:263]

The teaching puts a minimum regular contribution of man’s [portion] to his fellow brethren as a symbol of responsibility, yet almsgiving is unlimited and encouraged. . .¹⁰³

*The parable of those who spend their substance in the Way of Allah
is that of a grain of corn: it grows seven ears,
and each ear has a hundred grains.
Allah gives manifold increase to whom He pleases,
and Allah cares for all, and He knows all things.*

[2:261]

Imam Ali has said, ‘Take care of faith by giving away in charity, protect your wealth by giving the poor-rate, and avert the waves of misfortune by prayer.’¹⁰⁴

The Messenger said, ‘Do you know the rights of the neighbour?’

¹⁰² Hasan Al-Anani. *Freedom and Responsibility*, p. 200.

¹⁰³ Ali, Alia, and Aisha Rafea, *Beyond Diversities*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁴ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, p.171.

Methinks you know but little. Surely a man does not believe in Allah and the Last Day if he does not protect his neighbour from harm. If he asks for a loan then he should lend it to him; if something good happens to him he should congratulate him; if something evil, he should console him. He should not construct a high building in such a way as to cut off the wind except with his permission. If he desires fruit, then he should be given it, for if the fruit is taken in secrecy and neither he nor his children are given any of it then they will be vexed. There are three types of neighbour: those who have three rights—the rights of Islam, the right of being a neighbour, and the right of kinship; those who have two rights—the rights of Islam and that of the neighbour; and those who have one right—the unbeliever who has the right of the neighbour.’¹⁰⁵

Do good as you would like good to be done to you (H)

When a child of Adam dies, he is completely cut off (from this world) in the hereafter except for three things (whose blessings shall reach him): a perpetual charity, useful knowledge that others continue to gain from, and a pious child praying for him. (H)¹⁰⁶

A man asked, “O Prophet of God, which is the best part of Islam?”

He said, “That you give food [to the hungry] and extend greetings to all whom you know and whom you do not know.”

Some poor Muslims complained to the Prophet:

“The affluent have made off with (all) the rewards: they pray as we pray, fast as we fast, and they give away in charity from their money (and this we can’t match).” The Prophet said:

“Has not God made things for you to give away in charity? Every praise to God of His perfection is a charity. Every thankfulness to God is a charity. Every utterance that there is no God but God is a charity. To enjoin good and forbid evil is charity.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Shaykh Fadhilalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam* p. 216.

¹⁰⁶ Hasan Hathout, *Reading the Muslim Mind*, p. 85

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 87.

And a smile is also charity . . .

Know happiness and joy in your relationships with your brethren. ‘Abdul-’Aziz ibn ja’far of Baghdad reports that al-Husayn ibn Zayd said to Ja’far ibn Muḥammad, “Tell me, did our beloved Prophet ever joke?” He answered, “Allah bestowed on him the best manner of joyfulness. Allah sent other prophets who had suffering and distress, but He sent Muḥammad (s.a.w.s.) for mercy and compassion. One of the signs of his kindness and love for his people was that he joked with them. He did this so that they would not stay away from him out of awe. My father, Muḥammad, told me that his father, ‘Ali, was told by his father, al-Husayn, that he heard the Messenger of Allah say: “Allah hates those who make disagreeable and sad faces at their friends.”¹⁰⁸

The Messenger of God (may God’s blessing and peace be upon him) said, “You will not be able to give happiness by means of your wealth, so do it by means of a cheerful expression and good character.”¹⁰⁹

Fatima

Fatima (c. 608–633 C.E.), may God preserve her secret, was called the “resplendent one” (*az-Zuhra*) because of her luminous face, which seemed to radiate light.¹¹⁰ It is said that when she stood for prayer, the *mihrab*¹¹¹

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¹⁰⁹ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 242.

¹¹⁰ *Alim, CD Rom*: see “Fatima.” It is interesting to note that one of the most important appearances of the Virgin Mary in recent times is “Our Lady of Fatima.” Mary appeared to three young children in Portugal in 1917, near the small village of Fatima, named after the Prophet Muḥammad’s daughter, and was subsequently witnessed there by tens of thousands of people. Since that event, numerous Christians worldwide address the Virgin Mary in prayer as “Our Lady of Fatima,” further interweaving the strands of the Abrahamic faiths. This brief biography of Fatima is excerpted from *Women of Sufism, A*

would reflect the light of her countenance. She was also called al-Batul (“the virgin” or “the devoted one”) because of her asceticism. She spent a great deal of her time in prayer and worship, in recitation of the Qur’an, in fasting, and in service to the growing Muslim community. The youngest daughter of Khadija and Muḥammad, she was born just around the time of the opening of his prophethood, and so she grew up under the dynamic influence of the new message that was being conveyed.

As his youngest child, she would often accompany Muḥammad as he moved about the Meccan community, handling the family errands, praying at the Kaaba, or visiting Muslim friends and families, continually speaking of the new faith. During these early years of Islam, she witnessed countless episodes of persecution and would staunchly defend her father and care for him. Some years later, after the death of her mother, when she was the only one of his own children still living at home with him, witnessing his sorrow, this loving concern for her father intensified and so earned her the title Umm Abi-ha (“the mother of her father”). Some also refer to this title as being indicative of the fact that his familial line was carried forward through her.

Fatima’s fine manners and gentle speech were part of her lovely and endearing personality. She was especially kind to poor and indigent folk and would often give all the food she had to those in need even if she herself remained hungry. She had no craving for the ornaments of this world nor for the luxury and comforts of life.¹¹²

After enduring extreme hardship during the Meccan boycott, two years after the community emigrated to Medina, and three years after the death of her beloved mother, at the age of approximately sixteen, Fatima married ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib (the son of Muḥammad’s dear uncle Abu Talib), who had been living with the family since the death of his father some years earlier and who had been among the first to become a Muslim.

Hidden Treasure by Camille Helminski, p.

¹¹¹ The *mihrab* is the prayer niche, which indicates the direction of prayer. It is also the word for “sanctuary”; see Sūrah Al-‘Imran 3:37.

¹¹² *Alim, CD Rom*: see “Fatima.”

‘Ali was known for his courage, virtue, and piety. He and Fatima soon had a hut of their own near the Prophet in Medina. Two sons were born to them, Hasan and Husain, and two daughters, Umm-i-Kulthum and Zaynab. A third child of theirs, a son, Muhsin, died in infancy. The line of the family of the Prophet traces itself through Fatima, Hasan and Husain, and their children.

The marriage of Fatima and ‘Ali, although inspired by the Angel Gabriel,¹¹³ also, like many marriages, had its vicissitudes. One day when Fatima and ‘Ali were at odds with each other, Muḥammad came to visit them. It is said that he lay down between them and had each of them place a hand on his belly. He told them to breathe with him and to remain together in that position until peace came to both of them. Sometime later he left their hut, smiling broadly. A companion who witnessed the difference in his countenance from when he had entered questioned him as to why he was now smiling. He responded that he was now smiling because the two people most beloved by him were now at peace.¹¹⁴

Fatima’s life with ‘Ali was as simple and frugal as it had been in her father’s household. To relieve their extreme poverty, ‘Ali, when he was not called to battle to defend their faith, worked as a drawer and carrier of water and she as a grinder of grain. One day Fatima told ‘Ali, “I have ground grain until my hands are blistered.”

“And I’ve drawn water until my chest is aching,” said ‘Ali. He suggested to her that she ask her father, whose power and influence had grown since coming to Medina, to give her a servant.

Reluctantly, she did go to the Prophet, but when he inquired what had brought her to him, she could only respond, “I came to give you greetings of peace,” and could not bring herself to ask for what she had intended.

When she returned home, she told ‘Ali she had been ashamed to ask, so they went together to the Prophet and asked him for assistance, but the Prophet felt that others were in greater need, especially the *Ahl as-Suffāh*, the “People of the Bench.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ See H. A. Rose and John P. Brown, *The Darvishes*, pp. 397–400.

¹¹⁴ See Muḥammad Ibn Sa’d, *The Women of Madina*, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ These were impoverished Muslims who lodged on a bench at the entryway to the

‘Ali and Fatimah returned home somewhat dejected, but then that night, after they had gone to bed, they heard the voice of the Prophet asking permission to enter. Welcoming him, they both rose to their feet, but he told them: “Stay where you are,” and sat down beside them. “Shall I not tell you of something better than that which you asked of me?” he asked and when they said yes, he said: “Words which Jibril [Gabriel] taught me, that you should say: Subhaan Allah--Glory be to God’ ten times after every Prayer, and ten times ‘Al hamdu lillah--Praise be to God,’ and ten times ‘Allahu Akbar--God is Great.’ And that when you go to bed you should say them thirty-three times each.” ‘Ali used to say in later years: “I have never once failed to say them since the Messenger of God taught them to us.”¹¹⁶

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It was often to the “word of God” that they turned for nourishment and well-being.

It is said that Fatima greatly resembled her father and that her ways of sitting and standing and speaking were quite similar.

She inherited from Muḥammad a persuasive eloquence that was rooted in wisdom. When she spoke, people would often be moved to tears. She had the ability and the sincerity to stir the emotions, move people to tears and fill their hearts with praise and gratitude to God for His grace and His inestimable bounties.¹¹⁷

mosque in Medina. Fatima and others of the Prophet’s family and community did their best to care for them. They were devoted servants of God, purifying their hearts of all but Him. Many among them learned the Qur’an by heart and the Prophet often stopped to engage in *muhabbat* (affectionate conversation) with them. The Prophet was known to have said, “Poverty (*fâqr*) is my pride.”

¹¹⁶ *Alim*: see “Fatima.” See also Ibn Sa’d, *The Women of Madina*, pp. 17–18. “Ali is also reported to have said: ‘The Prophet of God has taught me a thousand doors of knowledge, each of which has opened to me a thousand others’” (Rowe and Brown, *The Darvishes*, p. 432).

¹¹⁷ *Alim, CD Rom*: see “Fatima.”

‘A’isha, the later wife of the Prophet, said of her: “I have not seen any one of God’s creation resemble the Messenger of God more in speech, conversation, and manner of sitting than Fatimah, may God be pleased with her. When the Prophet saw her approaching, he would welcome her, stand up and kiss her, take her by the hand and sit her down in the place where he was sitting.” She would do the same when the Prophet came to her. She would stand up and welcome him with joy and kiss him.¹¹⁸

The Prophet had a special love for Fatima. He once said: “Whoever pleases Fatima has indeed pleased God and whoever has caused her to be angry has indeed angered God. Fatima is a part of me. Whatever pleases her pleases me and whatever angers her angers me, and whoever injures her injures me.” When he went on a journey the last person of whom he took leave was Fatima, and when he returned from the journey the first person he would see was Fatima.¹¹⁹

The Prophet extolled her as one of the four most exemplary women in history along with Mary, mother of Jesus; her own mother, Khadija; and the wife of Pharaoh, who rescued and raised Moses. These four women are considered the four holiest women of Islam.

One day while the Prophet was ill, he whispered something to Fatima and she cried, and then he whispered again in her ear and she smiled. After the Prophet’s death, ‘A’isha asked her what Muḥammad had whispered to her. She answered that at first he had told her of his impending death, but then he had told her that she would be among the first to join him in paradise.

It was Fatima who eloquently delivered her father’s eulogy. She deeply mourned the death of the Holy Prophet and is later reported to have said: “It is not surprising that whoever catches the fragrance of Muḥammad’s tomb will never know another perfume. Destiny injured me with a bereavement so sorrowful, and so dark, that if it had fallen on the days they would have been turned into eternal nights.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *Alim, CD Rom*. see “Fatima.”

Then, six months after the death of her beloved father, after a prolonged illness, she arose one morning smiling and called for a mat to be placed in the open courtyard of their home. She asked her companion, Salma, for assistance in washing and perfuming herself, and then with her face turned towards the heavens, she asked for her husband, 'Ali.

He was taken aback when he saw her lying in the middle of the courtyard and asked her what was wrong. She smiled and said: "I have an appointment today with the Messenger of God." 'Ali cried, and she tried to console him. She told him to look after their sons, al-Hasan (age seven) and al-Husayn (age six), and advised that she should be buried without ceremony. She gazed upwards again, then closed her eyes and surrendered her soul to the Mighty Creator.¹²¹

She was twenty-nine years old when she passed from this world in 633 C.E.

'Ali used to visit the grave of Fatima frequently, and used to write verses to express his grief. On one occasion he wrote:

O thou grave, to thee I resort for paying homage to thee.
 O thou, the repository of my beloved, thou answer me not.
 O thou beloved tomb, what ails thee—
 Thou respondeth not to my supplications.
 Art thou, out of humor, Because of the love that I bear thee?¹²²

Though there is a sepulcher referred to as Fatima's tomb near the Prophet's tomb in Medina, she most probably rests in al-Baqi cemetery on the outskirts of Medina, and it was probably here that often 'Ali would go for solace.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

IV

Patience, Perseverance, and Forbearance

Patience

*O you who have attained to faith!
Seek help through steadfast patience and prayer:
for observe, God is with those who are patient.*

[2:153]

*And if you are patient and guard against evil,
truly that is an affair of great resolve.*

[3:186]

*And the messengers whom We sent before you were all human beings
who ate food and walked through the streets;
We have made some of you as a test for others.*

*Will you have patience?
For God is One Who sees.*

[25:20]

*Surely I have rewarded them this day because they were patient,
and they indeed are the triumphant.*

(23:111)

*Surely, It is We Who have sent down the Qur'an to you step by step.
So be constant in patience with the command of your Sustainer
and do not yield to the one who is in error or is ungrateful.
And mention your Sustainer's Name morning and evening,
and during the night prostrate yourself before Him
and praise Him throughout the long night.*

[76:23-26]

The journey of revelation of the Qur'an was a long one for Muhammad (S). The first revelation, the first portion of the Qur'an that was conveyed was only a few lines long. It was over a period of twenty-three years that the words of the Qur'an unfolded. A time came when people challenged Muhammad, questioning God's power and asking him why he didn't just convey the Qur'an as a whole. An *ayat*, a verse or sign, was then revealed explaining that the Qur'an was conveyed in stages in

order to strengthen his heart. The power of God is infinitely great, capable of any feat, but for our sake and our needs our learning and development is gradual. It takes nine months for a child to mature in the womb before it is ready to be born. If we rush such a process, we can cause harm. Patience with God's measure allows the fruit of our being and our work to mature appropriately.

Imam Ali has said, 'Bear patiently a task whose reward is indispensable to you, and desist from action whose punishment you are not capable of bearing; withstand the judgment of someone who has nothing but that on which to rely and take refuge in. If trials are met with contentment and patience they are a constant blessing, and if blessings are devoid of gratitude they are an ever-present trial.' 878 He also said, 'There are two kinds of patience: patience in misfortune is a fine and beautiful thing, but better than this is patience when Allah deprives you of something. Remembrance is of two kinds also: remembrance of Allah in misfortune, and better than this is remembrance of Allah when He deprives you of something and impedes you.'¹²³

Al-Sadiq said, "When the believer enters his grave, prayer is on his right, zakat on his left, righteous actions are spread over him and patience bends down at his side, and if he enters the place of questioning, patience says to prayer, zakat and righteous actions, "Take heed of your companion: if you fail him, then I am beneath him'."

Al-Sadiq said, "patience has the same relation to faith as the head to the body; if the head is removed the body dies, and if patience is removed faith dies."¹²⁴

'Ali b. Abi Talib (may God be pleased with him) observed, "Patience is a mount that never stumbles."¹²⁵

It is often said that, "Patience is the key to joy."¹²⁶

¹²³ Shaykh Fadhllalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam* p.181.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.182.

¹²⁵ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 149.

¹²⁶ Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi.

The Desert of Waiting

Joyce called a laughing good-bye after them, but, as she stood shading her eyes with her hand to watch them ride away, all the brightness seemed to die out of the mid-afternoon sunshine.

“How much I should have enjoyed it!” she thought. “I could ride as well as Jack if I had his pony, and shoot as well as Lloyd if I had her rifle, and would enjoy the trip to the river as much as either of them if I could only leave the work.

But I’m like that old Camelback Mountain over there. I’ll never get away. It will be this way all the rest of my life.”

Through the blur of tears that dimmed her sight a moment, the old mountain looked more hopeless than ever. She turned and went into the house to escape the sight of it. Presently, when the loaves were in the oven, and she had nothing to do but watch the baking, she brought her portfolio out to the kitchen and began looking through it for a sketch she had promised to show to Lloyd. It was the first time she had opened the portfolio since she had left Plainsville, and the sight of its contents made her fingers tingle. While she glanced over the sketches she had taken such pleasure in making, both in water-colours and pen and ink, her mother came into the kitchen.

“Joyce,” she said, briskly, “don’t you suppose we could afford some cookies while the oven is hot? I haven’t baked anything for so long that I believe it would do me good to stir around in the kitchen awhile. I’ll make some gingersnaps, and cut them out in fancy shapes, with a boy and girl apiece for the children, as I always used to make. Are there any raisins for the eyes and mouths?”

It seemed so much like old times that Joyce sprang up to give her mother a squeeze. “That will be lovely!” she cried, heartily. “Here’s an apron, and I’ll beat the eggs and help you.”

“No, I want to do it all myself,” Mrs. Ware protested. “And I want you to take your sketching outfit, and go down to the clump of willows where Jack put the rustic bench for me. There are lovely reflections in the irrigating canal now, and the shadows are so soft that you ought to get a

very pretty picture. You haven't drawn any since we left home, and I'm afraid your hand will forget its cunning if you never practice."

"What's the use," was on the tip of Joyce's tongue, but she could not dim the smile on her mother's face by her own hopeless mood, and presently she took her box of water-colours and started off to the seat under the willows. Mary and Norman, like two muddy little beavers, were using their Saturday afternoon playtime in building a dam across the lateral that watered the side yard. Joyce stood watching them a moment.

"What's the use of your doing that?" she asked, impatiently. "It can't stay there. You'll have to tear it down when you stop playing, and then there'll be all your work for nothing."

"We don't care, do we, Norman?" answered Mary, cheerfully. "It's fun while we're doing it, isn't it, Norman?"

As Joyce walked on, Mary's lively chatter followed her, and she could hear her mother singing as she moved about the kitchen. She was glad that they were all happy, but somehow it irritated her to feel that she was the only discontented one. It made her lonely. She opened her box and spread out her material, but she was in no mood for painting. She couldn't get the right shade of green in the willows, and the reflections in the water were blotchy.

"It's no use to try," she said, finally. "Mamma was right. My hand has already lost its cunning."

Leaning back on the rustic seat, she began idly tracing profiles on the paper, scarcely conscious of what she was doing. People's faces at first, then the outline of Camelback Mountain. Abstractedly, time after time, she traced it with slow sweeps of her brush until more than a score of kneeling camels looked back at her from the sheet of paper.

Presently a cough just behind her aroused her from her fit of abstraction, and, turning hastily, she saw Mr. Ellestad, the old Norwegian, coming toward her along the little path from the house. He had been almost a daily visitor at the Wigwam since they moved into it, not always coming in, usually stopping for only a moment's chat under the pepper-trees, as he strolled by. But several times he had spent an entire morning with them, reading aloud, while Joyce ironed and her mother sewed, and Norman built block houses on the floor beside them. Once he had taken tea with them. He rarely came without bringing a book or a

new magazine, or something of interest. And even when he was empty-handed, his unfailing cheerfulness made his visits a benefaction. Mary and Norman called him "Uncle Jan," such a feeling of kinship had grown up between them.

"Mary said you were here," he began, in his quaint, hesitating fashion, "so I came to find you. I have finished my legend at last, the legend I have made about Camelback Mountain. You know I have always insisted that there should be one, and as tradition has failed to hand one down to us, the task of manufacturing one has haunted me for three winters. Always, it seems, the old mountain has something to say to me whenever I look at it, something I failed to understand. But at last I have interpreted its message to mankind."

With a hearty greeting, Joyce moved over to make room for him upon the bench, and, as he sat down, he saw the sheet of paper on her lap covered with the repeated outlines of the old mountain.

"Ah! It has been speaking to you also!" he exclaimed. "What did it say?"

"Just one word," answered Joyce, "Hopeless! Everything out here is hopeless. It's useless to try to do anything or be anything. If fate has brought you here, kneel down and give up. No use to struggle, no use to hope. You'll never get away."

He started forward eagerly. "At first, yes, that is what I thought it said to me. But now I know it was only the echo of my own bitter mood I heard. But it is a mistake; that is not its message. Listen! I want to read it to you."

He took a note-book from his pocket. "Of course, it is crude yet. This is only the first draft. I shall polish it and study every word, and fit the sentences into place until the thought is crystallized as a real legend should be, to be handed down to future generations. Then people will not suspect that it is a home-made thing, spun from the fancy of one Jan Ellestad, a simple old Norwegian, who had no other legacy to leave the world he loved. This is it:

Once upon a time, a caravan set out across the desert, laden with merchandise for a far-distant market. Some of the camels bore in their packs wine-skins that held the richest vintage of the Orient. Some bore tapestries, and some carried dyestuffs and the silken fruits of the loom. On

Shapur's camel was a heavy load of salt.

The hope of each merchant was to reach the City of his Desire before the Golden Gate should close. There were other gates by which they might enter but this one, opening once a year to admit the visiting rajahs from the sister cities, afforded a rare opportunity to those fortunate enough to arrive at the same time. It was the privilege of any who might fall in with the royal retinue to follow in its train to the ruling rajah's palace, and gain access to its courtyard. And wares displayed there for sale often brought fabulous sums, a hundredfold greater sometimes than when offered in the open market.

Only to a privileged few would the Golden Gate ever swing open at any other time. It would turn on its hinges for any one sent at a king's behest, or any one bearing something so rare and precious that only princes could purchase. No common vender could hope to pass its shining portal save in the rear of the train that yearly followed the rajahs.

So they urged their beasts with all diligence. Foremost in the caravan, and most zealous of all, was Shapur. In his heart burned the desire to be first to enter the Golden Gate, and the first one at the palace with his wares. But, half-way across the desert, as they paused at an oasis to rest, a dire lameness fell upon his camel, and it sank upon the sand. In vain he urged it to continue its journey. The poor beast could not rise under its great load.

Sack by sack he lessened its burden, throwing it off grudgingly and with sighs, for he was minded to lose as little as possible of his prospective fortune. But even rid of its entire load, the camel could not rise, and Shapur was forced to let his companions go on without him.

For long days and nights he watched beside his camel, bringing it water from the fountain and feeding it with the herbage of the oasis, and at last was rewarded by seeing it struggle to its feet and take a few limping steps. In his distress of mind at being left behind by the caravan, he had not noticed where he had thrown the load. A tiny rill, trickling down from the fountain, had run through the sacks and dissolved the salt, and when he went to gather up his load, only a paltry portion was left, a single sackful.

“ ‘Now, Allah has indeed forgotten me!’ he cried, and cursing the day that he was born, he rent his mantle, and beat upon his breast. Even if his camel were able to set out across the desert, it would be useless to seek a

market now that he had no merchandise. So he sat on the ground, his head bowed in his hands. Water there was for him to drink, and the fruit of the date-palm, and the cooling shade of many trees, but he counted them as naught. A fever of unrest consumed him. A baffled ambition bowed his head in the dust.

When he looked at his poor camel kneeling in the sand, he cried out: "Ah, woe is me! Of all created things, I am most miserable! Of all dooms, mine is the most unjust! Why should I, with life beating strong in my veins, and ambition like a burning simoom in my breast, be left here helpless on the sands, where I can achieve nothing, and can make no progress toward the City of my Desire?"

One day, as he sat thus under the palms, a bee buzzed about him. He brushed it away, but it returned so persistently that he looked up with languid interest. "Where there are bees, there must be honey," he said. "If there be any sweetness in this desert, better that I should go in its quest than sit here bewailing my fate."

Leaving the camel browsing by the fountain, he followed the bee. For many miles, he pursued it, till far in the distance he beheld the palm-trees of another oasis. He quickened his steps, for an odor rare as the perfumes of Paradise floated out to meet him. The bee had led him to the Rose Garden of Omar.

Now Omar was an alchemist, a sage with the miraculous power of transmuting the most common things of earth into something precious. The fame of his skill had traveled to far countries. So many pilgrims sought him to beg his wizard touch that the question, 'Where is the house of Omar?' was heard daily at the gates of the city. But for a generation that question had remained unanswered. No man knew the place of the house of Omar, since he had taken upon himself the life of a hermit. Somewhere, they knew, in the solitude of the desert, he was practising the mysteries of his art, and probing deeper into its secrets, but no one could point to the path leading thither. Only the bees knew, and, following the bee, Shapur found himself in the old alchemist's presence.

Now Shapur was a youth of gracious mien, and pleasing withal. With straightforward speech, he told his story, and Omar, who could read the minds of men as readily as unrolled parchments, was touched by his tale. He bade him come in and be his guest until sundown.

So Shapur sat at his board and shared his bread, and rose refreshed by his wise words. And at parting, the old man said, with a keen glance into his eyes: "Thou thinkest that because I am Omar, with the power to transmute all common things to precious ones, how easily I could take the remnant of salt that is still left to thee in thy sack and change it into gold. Then couldst thou go joyfully on to the City of thy Desire, as soon as thy camel is able to carry thee, far richer for thy delay."

Shapur's heart gave a bound of hope, for that is truly what he had been thinking. But at the next words it sank.

"Nay, Shapur, each man must be his own alchemist. Believe me, for thee the desert holds a greater opportunity than kings' houses could offer. Give me but thy patient service in this time of waiting, and I will share such secrets with thee that, when thou dost finally win to the Golden Gate, it shall be with wares that shall gain for thee a royal entrance."

Then Shapur went back to his camel, and, in the cool of the evening, urged it to its feet, and led it slowly across the sands. And because it could bear no burden, he lifted the remaining sack of salt to his own back, and carried it on his shoulders all the way. When the moon shone white and full in the zenith over the Rose Garden of Omar, he knocked at the gate, calling: "Here am I, Omar, at thy bidding, and here is the remnant of my salt. All that I have left I bring to thee, and stand ready now to yield my patient service."

Then Omar bade him lead his camel to the fountain, and leave him to browse on the herbage around it. Pointing to a row of great stone jars, he said: "There is thy work. Every morning before sunrise, they must be filled with rose-petals, plucked from the myriad roses of the garden, and the petals covered with water from the fountain."

"A task for poets," thought Shapur, as he began. "What more delightful than to stand in the moonlit garden and pluck the velvet leaves." But after awhile the thorns tore his hands, and the rustle and hiss underfoot betrayed the presence of serpents, and sleep weighed heavily upon his eyelids. It grew monotonous, standing hour after hour, stripping the rose-leaves from the calyxes until thousands and thousands and thousands had been dropped into the great jars. The very sweetness of the task began to cloy upon him.

When the stars had faded and the east begun to brighten, old Omar

came out. "Tis well," he said. "Now break thy fast, and then to slumber with thee, to prepare for another sleepless night."

So long months went by, till it seemed to Shapur that the garden must surely become exhausted. But for every rose he plucked, two bloomed in its stead, and night after night he filled the jars.

Still he was learning no secrets, and he asked himself questions sometimes. Was he not wasting his life? Would it not have been better to have waited by the other fountain until some caravan passed by that would carry him out of the solitude to the dwellings of men? What opportunity was the desert offering him greater than kings' houses could give?

And ever the thorns tore him more sorely, and the lonely silence of the nights weighed upon him. Many a time he would have left his task had not the shadowy form of his camel, kneeling outside by the fountain, seemed to whisper to him through the starlight: "Patience, Shapur, patience!"

Once, far in the distance, he saw the black outline of a distant caravan passing along the horizon where day was beginning to break. He did no more work until it had passed from sight. Gazing after it with a fierce longing to follow, he pictured the scenes it was moving toward—the gilded minarets of the mosques, the deep-toned ringing of bells, the cries of the populace, and all the life and stir of the market-place. When the shadowy procession had passed, the great silence of the desert smote him like a pain.

Again looking out, he saw his faithful camel, and again it seemed to whisper: "Patience, Shapur, patience! So thou, too, shalt fare forth to the City of thy Desire."

One day in the waning of summer, Omar called him into a room in which he had never been before. "Now at last," said he, "hast thou proven thyself worthy to be the sharer of my secrets. Come! I will show thee! Thus are the roses distilled, and thus is gathered up the precious oil floating on the tops of the vessels.

"Seest thou this tiny vial? It weighs but the weight of one rupee, but it took the sweetness of two hundred thousand roses to make the attar it contains, and so costly is it that only princes may purchase. It is worth more than thy entire load of salt that was washed away at the fountain."

Shapur worked diligently at the new task till there came a day when Omar said to him: "Well done, Shapur! Behold the gift of the desert, its

reward for thy patient service in its solitude!”

He placed in Shapur’s hands a crystal vase, sealed with a seal and filled with the precious attar.

“Wherever thou goest this sweetness will open for thee a way and win for thee a welcome. Thou camest into the desert a vender of salt. Thou shalt go forth an apostle of my alchemy. Wherever thou seest a heart bowed down in some Desert of Waiting, thou shalt whisper to it: “Patience! Here, if thou wilt, in these arid sands, thou mayst find thy Garden of Omar, and from these daily tasks that prick thee sorest distill some precious attar to sweeten all life! So, like the bee that led thee to my teaching, shalt thou lead others to hope.”

Then Shapur went forth with the crystal vase, and his camel, healed in the long time of waiting, bore him swiftly across the sands to the City of his Desire. The Golden Gate, that would not have opened to the vender of salt, swung wide for the Apostle of Omar.

Princes brought their pearls to exchange for his attar, and everywhere he went its sweetness opened for him a way and won for him a welcome. Wherever he saw a heart bowed down in some Desert of Waiting, he whispered Omar’s words and tarried to teach Omar’s alchemy, that from the commonest experiences of life may be distilled its greatest blessings.

At his death, in order that men might not forget, he willed that his tomb should be made at a place where all caravans passed. There, at the crossing of the highways, he caused to be cut in stone that emblem of patience, the camel, kneeling on the sand. And it bore this inscription, which no one could fail to see, as he toiled past toward the City of his Desire:

Patience! Here, if thou wilt, on these arid sands, thou mayst find thy Garden of Omar, and even from the daily tasks which prick thee sorest mayst distill some precious attar to bless thee and thy fellowman.

A thousand moons waxed and waned above it, then a thousand, thousand more, and there arose a generation with restless hearts, who set their faces ever westward, following the sun toward a greater City of Desire. Strange seas they crossed, new coasts they came upon. Some were satisfied with the fair valleys that tempted them to tarry, and built their

homes where the fruitful hills whispered stay. But always the sons of Shapur pushed ahead, to pitch their tents a day's march nearer the City of their Desire, nearer the Golden Gate, which opened every sunset to let the royal Rajah of the Day pass through. Like a mirage that vision lured them on, showing them a dream gate of opportunity, always just ahead, yet ever out of reach.

As in the days of Shapur, so it was in the days of his sons. There were those who fell by the way, and, losing all that made life dear, cried out as the caravan passed on without them that Allah had forgotten them; and they cursed the day that they were, born, and laid hopeless heads in the dust.

But Allah, the merciful, who from the beginning knew what Desert of Waiting must lie between every son of Shapur and the City of his Desire, had long before stretched out His hand over one of the mountains of His continent. With earthquake shock it sank before Him. With countless hammer-strokes of hail and rain-drops, and with gleaming rills He chiselled it, till, as the centuries rolled by, it took the semblance of that symbol of patience, a camel, kneeling there at the passing of the ways. And to every heart bowed down and hopeless, it whispers daily its message of cheer:

Patience! Thou camest into the desert a vender of salt, thou mayst go forth an Alchemist, distilling from Life's tasks and sorrows such precious attar in thy soul that its sweetness shall win for thee a welcome wherever thou goest, and a royal entrance into the City of thy Desire!"

There was a long silence when Mr. Ellestad closed his note-book. Joyce had turned her face away to watch the mountain while he read, so he could not see whether the little tale pleased her or not. But suddenly a tear splashed down on the paper in her lap, and she drew her hand hastily across her eyes.

"You see, it seems as if you'd written that just for me," she said, trying to laugh. "I think it's beautiful! If ever there was a heart bowed down in a desert of waiting, I was that one when I came out here this afternoon. But you have given a new meaning to the mountain, Mr. Ellestad. How did you ever happen to think of it all?"

"A line from Saadi, one of the Persian poets, started me," he

answered. “ ‘Thy alchemist, contentment be.’ It grew out of that—that and my own unrest and despondency.”

“Look!” she cried, excitedly. “Do you see that? A bee! A bee buzzing around my head, as it did Shapur’s, and I can’t drive him away!”

She flapped at it with her handkerchief. “Oh, there it goes now. I wonder where it would lead us if we could follow it?”

“Probably to some neighbor’s almond orchard,” answered Mr. Ellestad.

“Oh, dear!” sighed Joyce. “I wish that there was a bee that I could follow, and a real rose garden that I could find. It sounds so beautiful and easy to say, ‘Out of life’s tasks and sorrows distill a precious attar in thy soul,’ and I’d like to, heaven knows, but, when it comes to the point, how is one actually to go about it? If it were something that I could do with my hands, I’d attempt it gladly, no matter how hard; but doing the things in an allegory is like trying to take hold of the girl in the mirror. You can see her plainly enough, but you can’t touch her. I used to feel that way about ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ and think that if I only had a real pack on my back, as Christian had, and could start off on a real road, that I could be sure of what I was doing and the progress I was making. I wish you’d tell me how to begin really living up to your legend.”

She spoke lightly, but there was a wistful glance in the laughing eyes she turned toward him.

“You will first have to tell me what is the City of your Desire.”

“Oh, to be an artist! It has always been that. To paint beautiful pictures that will live long after I am gone, and will make people better and happier. Then the work itself would be such a joy to me. Ever since I have been old enough to realize that I will have to do something to earn my own living. I’ve hoped that I could do it in that way. I have had lessons from the best teachers we could get in Plainsville, and Cousin Kate took me to the finest art galleries in Europe, and promised to send me to the Art League in New York if I finished my high school course creditably.

“But we had to come out here, and that ended everything. I can’t help saying, like Shapur, ‘Why should I, with life beating strong in my veins, and ambition like a burning simoom in my breast, be left here helpless on the sands, where I can achieve nothing and make no progress

toward the City of my Desire? It seems especially hard to have all this precious time wasted, when I had counted so much on the money I expected to earn—enough to keep mamma comfortable when she grows old, and to give the other children all sorts of advantages.”

“And you do not believe that these ‘arid sands’ hold anything for you?” said Mr. Ellestad.

Joyce shook her head.

“It takes something more than a trained hand and a disciplined eye to make an artist,” he answered, slowly. “Did you ever think that it is the soul that has to be educated? That the greater the man behind the brush, the greater the picture will be? Moses had his Midian before he was worthy to be ‘Lawgiver’ to his people. Israel had forty years of wilderness-wandering before it was fit for its Promised Land. David was trained for kingship, not in courts, but on the hillsides with his flocks.

“This is the secret of Omar’s alchemy, to gather something from every person we meet, from every experience life brings us, as Omar gathered something from the heart of every rose, and out of the wide knowledge thus gained, of human weaknesses and human needs, to distil in our own hearts the precious oil of sympathy. That is the attar that will win for us a welcome wherever we go—sympathy. The quick insight and deep understanding that help us to interpret people. And nobody fills his crystal vase with it until he has been pricked by the world’s disappointments and bowed by its tasks. No masterpiece was ever painted without it. A man may become a fine copyist, but he can never make anything live on canvas until he has first lived deeply himself.

“Do not think your days wasted, little friend. Where could you learn such lessons of patience and courage as here on this desert where so many come to die? Where could you grow stronger than in the faithful doing of your commonplace duties, here at Lionic, where they all need you and lean upon you?

“You do not realize that, if you could go on now to the City of your Desire, the little you have to offer the world would put you in the rank of a common vender of salt—you could only follow, in the train of others. Is not waiting worth while, if it shall give you wares with which to win a royal entrance? “

“Oh, yes,” answered Joyce, in a quick half-whisper, as the musical

voice paused. She was looking away toward the mountain with a rapt expression on her uplifted face, as of one who sees visions. All the discontent had vanished now. It was glowing with hope and purpose.

As Mr. Ellestad rose to go, she turned impulsively to thrust both outstretched hands into his. "I can never thank you enough!" she exclaimed. "Old Camelback will be a constant inspiration to me after this instead of an emblem of hopelessness. Please come in and read the legend to mamma! And may I copy it sometime? Always now I shall think of you as Omar. I shall call you that in my thoughts."

"Thank you, little friend," he said, softly, as they walked on toward the house. "I have failed to accomplish many things in life that I had hoped to do, but the thought that one discouraged soul has called me its Omar makes me feel that I have not lived wholly in vain."¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Excerpted from *The Little Colonel in Arizona* by Annie Fellows Johnston, p.139-161.

Perseverance

*O you who have come to faith!
Be patient, and persevere in patience,
and keep your connection,
and remain conscious of God,
so that you might attain felicity.*

[3:200]

*But those who have faith and do good deeds,
to them shall We give a home in the Garden—
lofty mansions beneath which rivers flow—
to dwell there always,
an excellent reward for those who act rightly—
those who persevere in patience
and put their trust in their Sustainer.*

[29:56-59]

*In the Name of God,
the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful
Consider time
Truly, human beings are in loss
except those who have faith and do righteous deeds
and encourage each other in the teaching of Truth
and of patient perseverance.*

[103:1-3]

*And We will certainly bestow on those who patiently persevere
their reward according to the best of their actions.
Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith,
truly, to Him will We give a new life, a life that is good and pure,
and We will bestow on such their recompense
according to the best of their actions.*

[16:96-97]

The early years of the Muslim community were extremely difficult

and challenging times, yet Muḥammad (S) never waived in his mission and in his service to his community. In the later years of his life when his community had strengthened and grown and his position held a great deal of power, still his abiding stance was that of servanthood. Whether persecuted or powerful, he persevered in keeping his focus with his Sustainer and encouraged his family members and all of the faithful to do the same. Whether in the midst of contraction (*qabd*) or expansion (*bast*) his reliance was on God alone.

Fatima many times had to watch her father ridiculed and reviled by the Meccans as they sought to discredit his prophecy. When she was about ten years old, she often accompanied her father to the Kaaba to pray. On one occasion, while she was standing in prayer at her father's side, Abu Jahl began inciting those nearby to ridicule the Prophet. 'Uqbah left, and soon returned with the filthy entrails of a slaughtered animal which he flung on the shoulders of the prophet while he was prostrating in prayer. It was Fatima who had to tenderly remove it; she spoke strongly to those gathered and she and her father returned home. Many incidents like this occurred in the early days and such circumstances, including increasing hunger and hardship were endured for years before at last revelation came granting the hijrah. *And God will always prepare a way of emergence* [65:2]. . . .

God Most High says, *Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger* (2:155). Then, at the close of the verse, He says, *But give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere*. So He gave glad tidings to them of beautiful reward for patience in enduring hunger.¹²⁸

*You shall most certainly be tried in your possessions and in yourselves;
and indeed you shall hear much that will cause you grief
from those to whom revelation was granted before your time,
as well as from those
who have come to attribute divinity to others beside God.
But if you persevere and remain conscious of Hu—
see how this is something on which to set one's heart.*

[3:186]

¹²⁸ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 79.

*And remember Job when he cried out to his Sustainer:
 “Truly, affliction has seized me,
 but You are the Most Merciful of those who are merciful.”
 So We listened to him: We removed his distress
 and We restored his people to him, doubling their number
 as a Grace from Ourselves
 and as a remembrance for all who serve Us.*

[21:83-84]

Ibn ‘Uyayna commented as to the meaning of the words of God Most High, “*And We appointed them leaders giving guidance under Our command because they persevered in patience*” [32:24], [that is] “Because they grasped the essential concern, We appointed them leaders.” I heard the master Abu ‘Ali ad-Daqqaq declare, “The condition of patience is that you not object to what has been decreed, and as for letting trials become apparent, but without complaining, this does not negate patience. God Most High says in the story of Job, ‘*Truly We found him patient. How excellent in servitude! Ever did he turn [to Us]*’ [38:44], despite what God Most High has said about him, that he said, ‘*Distress afflicts me*’ [21:83]. And I heard him state, God elicited these words from Job so that they might be a way of escape for the weak ones of his community.”¹²⁹

It is very appropriate to say prayers for the sick. One should ask Allah to bless them with recovery and help them through their sickness. Al-Bukhari and Muslim reported that A’isha said: “If someone fell sick, the Prophet would pass his right hand over them while saying the following prayer: ‘O Allah, Lord of mankind, take away the suffering, bring about the recovery, no cure except your cure leaves no illness.’ In another hadith reported by Al-Bukhari, Ibn Abbas said that the Prophet when visiting a sick person would say: “Be patient, may Allah cleanse you.”¹³⁰

If you become ill, remember that without illness you would not recognize the blessings of good health. Even sickness could bring

¹²⁹ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 154.

¹³⁰ Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, p.90

blessings that only later you will become aware of. It could bring about a period of reflection and review of your life-style and the way you conduct your affairs. Many go through difficult and testing times to discover later that indeed, their illness was a blessing in disguise.¹³¹

You may mention the words of Allah: “And give glad tidings to those who patiently endure; who say, when afflicted with a disaster: ‘Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him is our return.’ They are those on whom descend blessings and mercy of their Lord, and they are the guided ones.”¹³²

The following excerpts are from the autobiography of Lance Armstrong, the world class cyclist who at the age of twenty-five was suddenly diagnosed with testicular cancer which quickly metastasized to his lungs and his brain. He engaged in the battle against cancer and with amazing perseverance came through the terminal cancer to not only race again and become a three time winner of the Tour de France, but to become a husband, a father, and a first class human being.

In the early days of his racing career, patience and perseverance were not easy for the impetuous Lance to learn: “I still struggled with impatience at times. I would ride smart for a while, and then backslide. I just couldn’t seem to get it through my head that in order to win I had to ride more slowly at first. It took some time to reconcile myself to the notion that being patient was different from being weak, and that racing strategically didn’t mean giving less than all I had.”¹³³ Cancer taught him much more . . .

It’s Not about the Bike

My illness was humbling and starkly revealing, and it forced me to

¹³¹ Ibid, p.93.

¹³² Ibid, p.98.

¹³³ Ibid, p.60.

survey my life with an unforgiving eye. There are some shameful episodes in it: instances of meanness, unfinished tasks, weakness, and regrets. I had to ask myself, “If I live, who is it that I intend to be?” I found that I had a lot of growing to do as a man.

I won’t kid you. There are two Lance Armstrongs, pre-cancer, and post. Everybody’s favorite question is “How did cancer change you?” The real question is how didn’t it change me? I left my house on October 2, 1996, as one person and came home another. I was a world-class athlete with a mansion on a riverbank, keys to a Porsche, and a self-made fortune in the bank. I was one of the top riders in the world and my career was moving along a perfect arc of success. I returned a different person, literally. In a way, the old me did die, and I was given a second life. Even my body is different, because during the chemotherapy I lost all the muscle I had ever built up, and when I recovered, it didn’t come back in the same way.

The truth is that cancer was the best thing that ever happened to me. I don’t know why I got the illness, but it did wonders for me, and I wouldn’t want to walk away from it. Why would I want to change, even for a day, the most important and shaping event in my life?

People die. That truth is so disheartening that at times I can’t bear to articulate it. Why should we go on, you might ask? Why don’t we all just stop and lie down where we are? But there is another truth, too. People live. It’s an equal and opposing truth. People live, and in the most remarkable ways. When I was sick, I saw more beauty and triumph and truth in a single day than I ever did in a bike race—but they were *human* moments, not miraculous ones. I met a guy in a fraying sweatsuit who turned out to be a brilliant surgeon. I became friends with a harassed and overscheduled nurse named LaTrice, who gave me such care that it could only be the result of the deepest sympathetic affinity. I saw children with no eyelashes or eyebrows, their hair burned away by chemo, who fought with the hearts of Indurains.

I still don’t completely understand it.

All I can do is tell you what happened.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Lance Armstrong, *It’s Not about the Bike*, p.4-5.

What are my chances? It was a question I would repeat over and over. But it was irrelevant, wasn't it? It didn't matter, because the medical odds don't take into account the unfathomable. There is no proper way to estimate somebody's chances, and we shouldn't try, because we can never be entirely right, and it deprives people of hope. Hope that is the only antidote to fear.

Those questions, Why me? What are my chances? were unknowable, and I would even come to feel that they were too self-absorbed. For most of my life I had operated under a simple schematic of winning and losing, but cancer was teaching me a tolerance for ambiguities. I was coming to understand that the disease doesn't discriminate or listen to the odds—it will decimate a strong person with a wonderful attitude, while it somehow miraculously spares the weaker person who is resigned to failure. I had always assumed that if I won bike races, it made me a stronger and more worthy person. Not so.

Why me? Why anybody? I was no more or less valuable than the man sitting next to me in the chemo center. It was not a question of worthiness.

What is stronger, fear or hope? It's an interesting question, and perhaps even an important one. Initially, I was very fearful and without much hope, but as I sat there and absorbed the full extent of my illness, I refused to let the fear completely blot out my optimism. Something told me that fear should never fully rule the heart, and I decided not to be afraid.

I wanted to live, but whether I would or not was a mystery, and in the midst of confronting that fact, even at that moment, was beginning to sense that to stare into the heart of such a fearful mystery wasn't a bad thing. To be afraid is a priceless education. Once you have been that scared, you know more about your frailty than most people and I think that changes a man. I was brought low, and there was nothing to take refuge in but the philosophical: this disease would force me to ask more of myself as a person than I ever had before, and to seek out a different ethic.

A couple of days earlier, I had received an e-mail from a military guy stationed in Asia. He was a fellow cancer patient, and he wanted to tell me something. "You don't know yet," he wrote, "but we're the lucky

ones.”¹³⁵

One thing you realize when you're sick is that you aren't the only person who needs support—sometimes you have to be the one who supports others. My friends shouldn't always have to be the ones saying: “You're going to make it.” Sometimes I had to be the one who reassured them, and said, “I'm going to make it. Don't worry.”¹³⁶

One afternoon LaTrice pointed out that I was still asking her questions, but the nature of them had changed. At first, the questions I had asked were strictly about myself, my own treatments, my doses, my particular problems. Now I asked about other people. I was startled to read that eight million Americans were living with some form of cancer; how could I possibly feel like mine was an isolated problem? “Can you believe how many people have this?” I asked LaTrice.

“You've changed,” she said, approvingly. “You're going global.”

Dr. Nichols told me that there was every sign now that I was going to be among the lucky ones who cheated the disease. He said that as my health improved, I might feel that I had a larger purpose than just myself. Cancer could be an opportunity as well as a responsibility. Dr. Nichols had seen all kinds of cancer patients become dedicated activists against the disease, and he hoped I would be one of them.

I hoped so, too. I was beginning to see cancer as something that I was given for the good of others. I wanted to launch a foundation, and I asked Dr. Nichols for some suggestions about what it might accomplish. I wasn't yet clear on what the exact purpose of the organization would be; all I knew was that I felt I had a mission to serve others that I'd never had before, and I took it more seriously than anything in the world.

I had a new sense of purpose, and it had nothing to do with my recognition and exploits on a bike. Some people won't understand this, but I no longer felt that it was my role in life to be a cyclist. Maybe my role was to be a cancer survivor. My strongest connections and feelings were with people who were fighting cancer and asking the same question I

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.95-96.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.110.

was: “Am I going to die?”

I had talked to Steve Wolff about what I was feeling, and he said, “I think you were fated to get this type of illness. One, because maybe you could overcome it, and two, because your potential as a human was so much greater than just being a cyclist.”¹³⁷

[I thought of creating a foundation for cancer research.] I wanted the foundation to manifest all of the issues I had dealt with in the past few months: coping with fear, the importance of alternate opinions, thorough knowledge of the disease, the patient’s role in cure, and above all, the idea that cancer did not have to be a death sentence. It could be a route to a second life, an inner life, a better life.¹³⁸

The foundation seemed like the perfect answer to the limbo I was in: I had completed chemo, and beaten back the cancer for the time being, but I had to figure out what to do next. To work on something outside myself was the best antidote. I was a cancer survivor first and an athlete second, I decided. Too many athletes live as though the problems of the world don’t concern them. We are isolated by our wealth and our narrow focus, and our elitism. But one of the redeeming things about being an athlete—one of the real services we can perform—is to redefine what’s humanly possible. We cause people to reconsider their limits, to see that what looks like a wall may really just be an obstacle in the mind. Illness was not unlike athletic performance in that respect: there is so much we don’t know about our human capacity, and I felt it was important to spread the message.¹³⁹

But I think we are supposed to try to face it (death) straightforwardly, armed with nothing but courage. The definition of courage is: the quality of spirit that enables one to encounter danger with firmness and without fear.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.150-151.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.152.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.158.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.266.

It's another fact of cancer that the more informed and empowered patient has a better chance of long-term survival.

What if I had lost? What if I relapsed and the cancer came back? I still believe I would have gained something in the struggle, because in what time I had left I would have been a more complete, compassionate, and intelligent man, and therefore more alive. The one thing the illness has convinced me of beyond all doubt—more than any experience I've had as an athlete—is that we are much better than we know. We have unrealized capacities that sometimes only emerge in crisis.

So if there is a purpose to the suffering that is cancer, I think it must be this: it's meant to improve us.

I am very firm in my belief that cancer is not a form of death. I choose to redefine it: it is a part of life. One afternoon when I was in remission and sitting around waiting to find out if the cancer would come back, I made an acronym out of the word: Courage, Attitude, Never give up, Curability, Enlightenment, and Remembrance of my fellow patients.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.267.

Forbearance

*Have We not expanded your chest,¹⁴²
and removed from you the burden
which weighed down your back,
and increased your remembrance?
So, truly, with every difficulty comes ease;
truly, with every difficulty comes ease.
So when you are free from your task continue to strive,
and to your Sustainer turn with loving attention.*

[94:1-8]

*But He will call you to account for what your hearts have earned,
and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.*

[2:225]

*Bear with patience what they say
and remember Our servant David,
he who was endowed with inner strength: for he always turned to Us.
It was We Who made the hills declare Our praises in unison with him
at nightfall and at break of day.
And the birds gathered: all with him did turn.
We strengthened his dominion
and gave him wisdom and sound judgment in speech and decisions.*

[38:17-20]

*For the one who remains conscious of God;
He always prepares a way of emergence
and He provides for Him in ways He could never imagine.
And if anyone puts his trust in God, sufficient is God for Him.
For God will surely accomplish His purpose:
truly, for all things has God appointed an appropriate measure.*

[65:2-3]

¹⁴² It is reported that the angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet Muḥammad, opened his chest, and removed the impurities remaining in his heart. See the section "Purification of the Heart."

A great part of Mercy is simply to restrain anger, whether or not it seems justified. This is called “forbearance.” The Qur’an says, *And know that Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.* [2:235]; *And certainly Allah has pardoned them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.* [3:155]; *And those who restrain their anger and pardon men; and Allah loves the virtuous* [3:134]. The Prophet Muhammad said:

“The most intelligent of people are those who are strictest in matters of courtesy and friendship; and the most prudent of them are those who most restrain their anger.”

“A believer will, by his forbearance and gentleness, attain the rank of a scholar who is struggling to solve problems of jurisprudence.”

“There are no two things which combine better than forbearance and knowledge.”¹⁴³

Imam Ali said, “Four things are most difficult to achieve: to forgive when angry, to be forbearing in the face of oppression, to be generous in times of scarcity and to be abstinent when alone.”¹⁴⁴

Another *hadith* . . . tells us that once a man came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, anxious to learn and follow the teachings of Islam. But he wanted something brief and to the point which he could easily understand and put into practice. He got what he wanted. Abu Hurairah said, “A man came to the Prophet, peace be on him, and said to him, ‘Teach me something brief and to the point, so that I can easily understand and follow it.’ The Prophet, peace be on him, said, ‘Do not become angry and furious.’ The man asked the same (question) again and again, and each time the Prophet, peace be on him, replied, ‘Do not become angry and furious.’”

This is how the *sunnah* promotes perfect harmony between a man’s verbal supplication and his practical life. The Prophet, peace be upon him, not only taught us to supplicate to Allah for help in restraining our anger, but at the same time admonished us to take comparable and necessary practical steps to achieve the desired end by keeping our tempers cool and remaining patient and steadfast under

¹⁴³ Charles Upton, contributor.

¹⁴⁴ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *The Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p. 166.

difficult conditions.¹⁴⁵

Suffering uncovers human frailties and literally pushes the reasonable person to his knees, so to speak, at Allah's door, in quest of relief and the mercy of his Lord. The true believer is expected to seek refuge in Allah in every trouble which befalls him, regardless of how insignificant it may seem. The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, said:

“Let each of you turn unto Allah in every troublesome matter; even when you are pained by the thong of your sandal, for even that is a trial.”

In other words, the Muslim must rely, in all of his affairs, upon Allah's assistance, and not suppose that any of these affairs can be settled except by His leave. The greater the misfortune, the more ardent the Muslim's desire for refuge in Allah, and the more protracted his entreaty.¹⁴⁶

A person of fine sensibilities is inevitably distressed by personal or intellectual problems. Indeed, life for such a person would appear more constricting than even the eye of a needle. And the riches of the world, were they offered to him, would be of no consolation to him at all. This is the way that Muhammad lived until Revelation came upon him unexpectedly.

In reference to his state at that time, the Almighty said:

Have We not opened up your heart? (al-Sharh 94: 1).

That is, by inspiring you with spiritual truths.

And lifted from you the burden that had weighed so heavily on your back (al-Sharh 94: 2-3).

The burden was such that you were forced to flee the society of others, and grieve for yourself and for them, alone and bewildered, and suffer through your incapacity and your exile from your native surroundings.

Then Allah chose you; and who could be more exalted than one chosen by the Lord of the heavens and earth to be His instrument of guidance for all the world?

¹⁴⁵ Hasan Al-Anani. *Freedom and Responsibility*, p. 206.

¹⁴⁶ Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Remembrance and Prayer*, p.91.

And have We not raised you high in dignity? (al-Sharh 94: 4).

And so is human life:

And, behold, with every hardship comes ease: and, \^ verily, with every hardship comes ease (al-Sharh 94:5-6).

Finally, what is sought of you, after you have finished **your** work, is to begin it afresh:

Hence, when you are freed (from distress), remain steadfast, and unto your Lord turn with love (al-Sharh 94: 7-8).

And thus we witness accommodation after estrangement, guidance after confusion and hesitation, sufficiency after want. Without a doubt the deprivations suffered by the Prophet, upon him be peace, in his own lifetime made him all the more sensitive to the troubles of others. Thus, he shared their grief, and always did his best to eliminate, or at least to lessen, the troubling factor, regardless of whether the trouble was material or spiritual in nature. His desire was to free his life of it, and the lives of others.

And whose countenance and succour are sought in times of hardship and tribulation? Allah, and none other! Surely, He is the secure refuge, the fortified sanctuary!¹⁴⁷

. . . The neighbors of the Prophet who were opposed to him, under the leadership of Abu Lahab and his wife, intensified their campaign of persecution. The Prophet used to remove the unclean refuse which they repeatedly threw inside his yard and in front of his door, complaining in a markedly restrained voice:

“What kind of neighborhood is this, O Sons of Abu Manaf?”

But the worst incident of persecution which the Prophet experienced after the death of Abu Talib is narrated by Ibn Ishaq as follows:

“Then Khadijah bint Khuwaylid and Abu Talib died in the same year. Misfortunes continued to befall the Messenger of Allah, *salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, as they could not hope to inflict upon him during Abu Talib’s life. One of their insolent mob even heaped dust and earth upon his gracious head. As he entered his home, one of his daughters wept passionately as she wiped the dust from her father’s head.

¹⁴⁷ Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Remembrance and Prayer*, p.94-95.

“Do not cry, my daughter,” he said, “for Allah shall protect your father.”¹⁴⁸

The Prophet, upon him be peace, regularly remembered his Lord, and supplicated Him earnestly and with civility. And, when he took the name of the Lord in fervent prayer, he was urging the multitude: this is the way, so follow it; this is the goal, so seek after it.¹⁴⁹

Bilal

Bilal b. Rabah was a slave born of a foreign mother belonging to the Banu Jumah. Bilal began to hear of the faith of Muḥammad and it inspired his heart with an intense love of the One God. When his master learned of his profession of faith in the then controversial faith of Islam, he began to torture him. As with other muslim converts at the time, he was tied down and left in the heat of the sun. His master ‘Umayya b. Khalaf would place him outside at heat of noon, then order that a huge rock be placed on his chest. He would then tell him, “By God, you’ll stay like this till you die, unless you disavow Muḥammad and pray to al-Lat and al-Uzza!”

Bilal, while in this state would say only, “One! One!”¹⁵⁰

. . . he, however, attached no importance to himself in suffering in God’s cause. His people considered him valueless, so they handed him over to the children who began parading him through the streets of Mecca, while he shouted, ‘One! One!’¹⁵¹

At last, Abu Bakr who still was a wealthy man bought Bilal to save him from this torture, and set him free. Later, when the community had settled in Medina and built the first mosque, Bilal became the first muezzin, with his strong and beautiful voice calling all to prayer. It was he who added the phrase to the call for early morning prayer, “Prayer is better

¹⁴⁸ Zakaria Bashier, *Makkan Crucible*, p. 180.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Upton, contributor.

¹⁵⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Imam Abu al-Fida’ Isma’il*, p.356-357

¹⁵¹ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Volume I, p. 316-317.

than sleep.” He would make the call to prayer from the roof of the tallest house next to the mosque in Medina; early in the morning he would come to this house belonging to ‘Urwa b. al Zubayr of the Bani al Nayjar. She later told of how Bilal would arrive and sit in prayer on the roof waiting for the moment to call the time of prayer for the community. During the lifetime of the Prophet, Bilal never missed a morning and remained one of the most devoted.

He Who Seeks the Truth Chooses the Good and Holds It Fast

Kung Fu-tzu (551-497 B.C.), known in the west as Confucius, can truly be called the founder of Chinese culture [– or at least of the culture that grew up in China after his death, due largely to his influence.] Confucius, though not a prophet, was the great renewer of Chinese civilization, basing his teaching on the “example of the ancients.” No man who was strictly a scholar—neither the founder of a religion nor a great conqueror—has ever had anything remotely resembling the wide and deep influence of Confucius on later generations, though during his own lifetime his efforts often seemed fruitless. In a time of political disunity and feudal warfare, he tried to secure appointment as minister to the rulers of various petty states in order to institute governmental reforms for the relief of the people. He did not succeed, but the circle of scholars which slowly gathered around him during his “unsuccessful” career, and those who followed them, planted the seeds of profound cultural and ethical renewal in the years and centuries following his death.

Confucius chose to concentrate on sharing the ideal of an encompassing community, through which the human being might become a true human being. His passion was for beauty, order, truthfulness, and happiness in the world. He was cautious and reserved, yet not from fear, but from a sense of responsibility and the will to true mastery.

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers has this to say about the character and teachings of Confucius:

All goodness, truth, beauty are combined in the ideal of the superior man (Chun-tzu). Noble both in birth and endowment, he has the manners of a gentleman and the wisdom of a sage.

The superior man is no saint. The saint is born; he is what he is; the superior man becomes what he is through self-discipline. "To have the truth is the path of heaven, to seek the truth is the path of men. He who has the truth finds the right action without pains, achieves success without reflection." But he who seeks the truth chooses the good and holds it fast. He investigates, he questions critically, he ponders the truth and resolutely acts on it. "Perhaps others can do it the first time; I must do it ten times; perhaps others can do it the tenth time; I must do it a thousand times. But he who really has the perseverance to go this way--be he foolish, he will become clearheaded; be he weak, he will become strong."

The character, cast of thought, gestures of the superior man are described. He is contrasted with the inferior man. The superior man is concerned with justice, the inferior man with profit. The superior man is quiet and serene, the inferior man always full of anxiety. The superior man is congenial though never stooping to vulgarity; the inferior man is vulgar without being congenial. The superior man is dignified without arrogance; the inferior man is arrogant without dignity. The superior man is steadfast in distress; the inferior man in distress loses all control of himself. The superior man goes searching for himself; the inferior man goes searching in others. The superior man strives upward; the inferior man strives downward. The superior man is independent. He can endure long misfortune as well as long prosperity, and he lives free from fear. He suffers from his own inability, not from others' failure to understand him. He avoids all competition, but if it must be, then only in archery. He is slow in words and quick in action. He is careful not to let his words outshine his deeds: first act, then speak accordingly.

The superior man does not waste himself on what is distant, or on what is absent. He stands in the here and now. "The superior man's path is like a long journey; you must begin from right here."

"The superior man's path begins with the concerns of the common man and woman, but it reaches into the distance, penetrating heaven and

earth.”

We have statements that Confucius made about himself, and others that his disciples attributed to their master:

He was conscious of his vocation. In a situation of mortal peril, he said: “Since King Wen is no more, has culture been entrusted to me? If heaven had wished to destroy this culture, a latecomer could not have received it. But if heaven does not wish to destroy this culture, what can the men of K’uang do against me?”

Despite his consciousness of his mission, he was a modest man. No doubt, he believed, he could compete with others in learning, but he recognized that he had not attained the level of the superior man who can transform his knowledge into action. “Of myself I can only say that I have striven insatiably to become so, and that I teach others untiringly.”

When a disciple describes the master’s dejection in rather drastic terms, Confucius replies approvingly: “Like a dog in the house of morning, you’ve hit it, you’ve hit it.” To a disciple whom a prince has questioned about him, Confucius says: “Why did you not answer thus: He is a man who learns the truth without tiring, who instructs men indefatigably, who is so zealous that he forgets to eat, who is so serene that he forgets all cares, and consequently does not notice the gradual approach of old age.”

Confucius sees his own failure. In a situation of dire peril, he asks his pupils: “Is my life wrong? Why does such distress come upon us?” The first says that men do not trust him because he has not yet attained true goodness, nor do what he says because he has not yet attained true wisdom. But Confucius replies: Saints and wise men of the past have met with the most terrible ends. Clearly goodness is not necessarily rewarded with confidence, nor wisdom with obedience. The second says the master’s doctrine is so great that no one on earth can endure it. The doctrine must be reduced a little in stature. In reply to this, Confucius says: The good husbandman can sow but not bring forth the harvest. The superior man can fashion his doctrine but not cause it to be accepted. To concern oneself with its acceptance is not to look into the distance. The third says: “Your doctrine is very great, therefore the world cannot grasp

it. But continue to act in accordance with it. What matter that it is not accepted? In that he is not understood, thereby the superior man is known.” Confucius smiled.

Confucius did not always calmly accept his failure, but scrutinized and interpreted it. His attitude was not determined in advance and was not always the same.

He could lament: “The superior man suffers that he must leave the world and that his name is not mentioned. My way is not followed. Whereby shall I be known to posterity?” “Ah, no one knows me!” But he quickly consoles himself: “I do not grumble against heaven, I am not angry with men. I have searched here below and I am in communication with heaven. Heaven knows me.”

He contents himself with his lot: “To learn and unceasingly practice, does that not give satisfaction? And if companions come to you from far away, is not that too a ground for rejoicing? And not to grow embittered if men do not know you, is not that too noble?” “I will not grieve that men do not know me; I should grieve only if I do not know the others.”

The fool calls out to him: “Give up your vain striving. He who wishes to serve the state today only flings himself into peril.” And Lao-tzu says to him: “The shrewd and clever are close to death, for they love to judge other men.” But he persists in his task of helping to build a human order in the world. Success is not decisive. To be humane means to bear your part of responsibility for the state of the community. “A man of humanity does not strive for life at the cost of injuring humanity. No, there have been men who, to perfect their humanity, have given their body to death.”

His basic attitude is one of readiness. “If they use you, be active; if they turn their backs on you, remain in retirement.”

But here is the essential: “The one thing over which a man is master is his own heart. Good or ill fortune is no yardstick of a man’s value.” Not always is outward misfortune an evil; it can be “a test” (Hsun Tzu). Even in extreme affliction hope remains. “There are cases in which men

rise from desperate circumstances to the highest calling.”¹⁵²

¹⁵² “He Who Seeks the Truth Chooses the Good and Holds It Fast” was compiled by Charles Upton, contributor. (footnote excerpts re permissions . . .)**

V.

Modesty (*Haya*);
Discretion (*Husn al-Tadbir*),
and Humility (*Tawadhu*)

Modesty (*Haya*)

O children of Adam!
Indeed, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness,
and as a thing of beauty;
but the garment of God-consciousness is the best of all.
This is one of God's messages—
that human beings might take it to heart.

[7:26]

Tell the men of faith to lower their gaze
and to be mindful of their chastity:
this will help to increase their purity—
truly, God is aware of all that they do.
And tell the women of faith to lower their gaze
and to be mindful of their chastity,
and not to display their charms beyond what may readily be apparent.

[24:30-31]

“O my dear son!” continued Luqman,
“If there were anything the weight of even a mustard-seed,
and it were within a rock or in the heavens or on earth,
God will bring it to light:
for God comprehends the subtlest mysteries and is All-Aware.
O my dear son! Be constant in prayer,
encourage what is just, and forbid what is wrong,
and bear with patient perseverance whatever comes to you;
witness, this is something upon which to set one's heart.
And do not turn away from people with pride
nor walk in insolence on the earth;
for God does not love the arrogant boaster.
And be modest in your bearing and lower your voice;
for without a doubt, the harshest of sounds is the braying of the ass.”

[31:16-19]

Al-Baqir said, “Allah loves the modest and forbearing.”¹⁵³

“Modesty is not present in anything but that it adorns it, and evil is not present in anything but that it makes it ugly. Every religion has its character, and the character of Islam is modesty.”; He also said, “Modesty is from faith, and lack of modesty is disbelief.”¹⁵⁴

Al-Sadiq relates that the Messenger said, “Allah has mercy on the slave who feels true modesty in the face of his Lord, who protects his mind and what it perceives, and his stomach and its desires, who remembers the grave . . . and remembers the place of return in the next world.”¹⁵⁵

“True obedience is that which is accompanied by taking the self to account—it is incumbent on everyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day that he be aware of the states of his self, both when he is awake and active and when he is asleep or at rest; moreover, every morning he should empty his heart of all that is other than Him, before he takes up contact with those around him; he should also give advice to seven parts of his body; to his eyes, his ears, his tongue, his stomach, his genitals, his hands and his legs. . . .

“As for the eyes, he should guard them from looking at the private parts of [others], or from looking at [them] with contempt, and use them instead to look at the wonders of Allah’s creation and in reading books of wisdom and knowledge. . . .

“As for the tongue, he should control it and prevent it from talking behind people’s backs, lying, backbiting, praising the self, disdainng others or criticizing, cursing or calling evil upon them; he must not speak hypocritically of them but rather allow his tongue to move only in remembrance of Allah and reminding others to do the same; he should use his tongue to teach and guide the servants of Allah to the straight path, and to make amends between disputing parties.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.166.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.170.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 169.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p.699;700,701.

Remember that you are a servant of Allah and should not regard yourself and your actions highly, nor should you expect a return for your actions. We hear from Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Razi that someone asked Abul-’Abbas ibn ‘Ata’, “What thing most attracts Allah’s anger?” He replied, “When one considers himself and his actions highly, and worse still, expects a return for his good deeds.”¹⁵⁷

God does not love the arrogant [31:18]. . .

The most troubled of people are the kings, the most hated the proud, and the most abased are those who treat others with contempt.¹⁵⁸

When the Prophet (S) said: “He will not enter Paradise who has a grain of arrogance in his heart,” a man asked: “A man may like his dress to be nice and his shoes to be nice?” The Prophet answered: “Allah is beautiful and likes beauty. Arrogance is to deny rights and look down upon people.”

Therefore, a Muslim ought to be recognized by neat dress, cleanliness and graceful manners.¹⁵⁹

It is narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Prophet (may peace be upon him) said, “*Iman* has over seventy branches, and modesty is a branch of *Iman*.” He also said, “There are two kinds of modesty: the modesty of the intellect and the modesty of foolishness. The modesty of the intellect is knowledge; the modesty of foolishness is ignorance.”

. . . In the words of the Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, “Be as modest before Allah as you would before one of your people who is spiritually advanced.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁸ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.172.

¹⁵⁹ Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, p.25.

¹⁶⁰ Charles Upton, contributor.

Principles for the Musician

The most important thing in playing an instrument is tuning. Learn how to tune your instrument and always be sure that your instrument is in tune before you begin to play. This will help to increase your ability to hear the true notes and enable you to match your playing to the right pitch.

Don't waste time. Always pick up your instrument with an intention; don't play idly, randomly, as very little real progress will occur in that way.

Play the piece you are practising as it has been indicated. Play the piece at the indicated tempo. Learn section by section, then play the piece wholly, from beginning to end. Then practice again sections that need the most work, and again play it as a whole. It is also helpful to be able to sing the piece you are trying to play as it will deepen your knowledge of it and make the playing of it more easily mastered.

Each time you play exert effort to stretch your ability. Each time you play, challenge yourself with a piece that is a bit more difficult rather than remaining with the familiar. If using a metronome, begin at slower speeds and increase bit by bit.

Never focus on the audience. You will lose your concentration.

Always play as though you are singing to someone who really knows music. Never forget that though there may be many people listening, the music is played for those who can really hear music and appreciate it.

Don't play or listen to "non-music" music. It will spoil your ear and your sensitivity.

Never add to someone's composition. Later you can compose your own work.

Don't play for everyone who asks. Only play for those who are really interested.

Never miss a chance to play together with other musicians and lovers of music. Join an ensemble, a chorus, an orchestra, accompany soloists, etc.

But stay away from those who degenerate music, those who continually play poor music, and who play without respect.

Learn to be able to write the notes of a melody you hear. Practice also reading the written notes so that you can sing or play written music. Keep trying and improving this ability.

Pay attention to being able to distinguish the color of different notes played on different strings.

Learn the history of the field of music in which you are involved.

Develop a good knowledge of the overall history and a knowledge of the forms. This will help you to understand the spirit of the work and give you more of an opportunity to improve your own performance.

Always be modest. Never let your increasing knowledge and talent in music make you proud.

Never look down upon others. Never disdain those who can't play as well or who are less informed.

Don't hide your knowledge, but always help those who really want to learn. By helping others, your own level will be raised.

Never forget about your instrument. Remember that as you care for your instrument and improve its quality, your work will also improve. Always aim to have a fine instrument.

Become informed about scales. Learning to recognize the makam one hears is a necessity and will increase one's musicality.

Aim to have a healthy philosophy and culture of music. Having this as a basic aim will help you to understand others and to be understood by them.

Recognize that music and literature are two parts of an inseparable whole. In addition to spending time with music, also read appropriate literature, ie. the classics of the tradition.

Remember that the appreciation of crowds is never a criteria. The appreciation of those who are experts in music is more important.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ “Principles for the Musician” is excerpted from *Oud Method #1*, translated from the Turkish by Refik Algan and Camille Helminski.

Discretion (*Husn al-Tadbir*)

*Those who lower their voice in the presence of God's Messenger,
their hearts God has tested for consciousness of Himself:
theirs shall be forgiveness and a great reward.*

*Those who shout out to you from outside the Inner Rooms,
most of them lack understanding.*

*If only they had patience until you could come out to them
it would be best for them.*

Yet God is Often-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

[49:4-5]

*Say: "Invoke God,
or invoke the Most Gracious:
by whichever name you invoke Him,
His are all the attributes of perfection."
And do not be too loud in your prayer
nor speak it in too low a voice, but follow a middle way.*

[17:110]

*And know that among you is God's Messenger:
were he in many matters to follow your inclinations,
you would surely fall into misfortune;
but God has caused faith to be dear to you,
and has made it beautiful within your hearts,
and He has made hateful to you lack of faith, wickedness,
and rebellion against that which is good.
Such indeed are those who walk in righteousness—
through God's grace and favor;
and God is All-Knowing, Truly Wise.*

[49:7-8]

Commenting on Allah's words, *And say to the people words of kindness* [2:83] al-Baqir said, 'Say to the people kinder words than you yourself would like to hear, for Allah hates those who curse much, who insult and defame the believers, the profligate and the

obscene in speech, and the one who molests with his questioning; but He loves the modest, the gentle, the chaste and the abstemious.¹⁶²

Always remember the *hadith* of the Prophet reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should say something good or remain silent.”¹⁶³

It is an inappropriate manner to whisper to someone sitting next to you if you are in a group of three. The third person will feel isolated and will harbor the worst of thoughts. The Messenger of Allah disapproved of this. Imam Malik and Abu Dawud reported that he said: “No two shall exchange whispers in the presence of a third person.” The Prophet used “No two...” in an assertive negative form, indicating that such a mistake is not only inappropriate but unimaginable and instinctively despicable. Another *hadith* in Al-Bukhari says: “If you were three, two of you should not whisper to each other till you join other people, lest the third feels offended.” Abdullah ibn Umar was asked: “What if they were four?” “Then it does not matter,” he answered; meaning it would not be then offensive.¹⁶⁴

Manners are based on common sense and could be developed by socializing with prominent and tactful individuals. By observing how they act and behave, you will be able to enhance your common sense, good manners, and graceful behavior.

You might be called to a gathering where you are the youngest. In such cases, do not sit before you are invited to do so. Do not sit if you will be crowding out others, or forcing them to leave their seats for you. If you are invited to sit, do not proceed to the best place if others deserve it and be prepared to give your seat to them. Doing this on your own, before being prompted to do so, will enhance admiration and respect for you.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Shaykh Fadhalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.204.

¹⁶³ Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, p.46.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.43.

In *Sūrah Al-Hajj*, Allah described the believers: *And they have been guided to the purest of talk; and guided to the path of Him who is worthy of all praise.* When you talk during your visit, say only what befits the situation and be brief. If you are the youngest among those present, don't speak unless you are asked to, or unless you know that your talk will be well received and will please the host and the other guests. Don't prolong your speech, your talk should be clear, concise and to the point, do not talk and talk and talk. Al-Bukhari reported that Anas said: "The Prophet's speech was clear and succinct, neither too long nor too short, and he disliked chattering and ranting." Similarly al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated a *hadith* in which 'A'isha said: "The Prophet spoke [so few words] that you could count his words."¹⁶⁶

Al-Haitham ibn Adi¹⁶⁷ . . . said: "It is an ill manner to overwhelm someone while speaking and to interrupt them before they end their talk."

If a colleague did not understand an issue and asked a scholar or an elder to explain, you should listen to what is being said. The repeated explanation may give you additional insights to what you already know. Never utter any word belittling your colleague, nor allow your face to betray such an attitude.

When an elder or a scholar speaks, listen attentively. Never busy yourself with a talk or discussion with other colleagues. Do not let your mind wander elsewhere, keep it focused on what is being said.¹⁶⁸

Never interrupt a speaker. Never rush to answer if you are not very confident of your answer. Never argue about something you do not know. Never argue for the sake of argument. Never show arrogance with your counterparts especially if they hold a different opinion. Do not switch the argument to belittle your opponent's views. If their misunderstanding becomes evident, do not rebuke or scold them. Be modest and kind. A poet once said:

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.51.

¹⁶⁷ A known scholar, historian, and a member of the court of four Khalifāhs: Abu Jafar al-Mansur, Al-Mahdi, AlHadi, and Al-Rashid.

¹⁶⁸ Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, p.55.

Who could get me a friend?
 Who if I offend will remain calm?
 Who would listen intently to what I have to say
 When he knows it better than I do?¹⁶⁹

If a colleague was asked about something that you know, do not rush to answer. Instead, you should not say anything until you are asked. This is a better manner and a nobler attitude. It generates interest in what you say, while enhancing your respect.

The honorable Tab'i Muja'hid ibn Jabr recalled that Luqman the Wise said to his son: "If another person was asked a question, never hasten to give the answer, as if you are going to gain booty or to win a precious prize. By doing so, you will belittle the questioner, will offend the questioned and will join obnoxious people with your stupidity and ill-manners."¹⁷⁰

If you speak to a guest or any other person, whether in a gathering or alone, make sure that your voice is pleasant, with a low but audible tone. Raising your voice is contrary to proper manners and indicates a lack of respect for the person to whom you are talking. This manner should be maintained with friends, peers, acquaintances, strangers, the young and the old. It is more important to adhere to this with one's parents or someone of their status, or with people for whom you have great respect. If appropriate, smile while talking to others. . . .¹⁷¹

Khalid ibn Safwan al-Tarmini . . . said: "If a person tells you something you have heard before, or news that you already learned, do not interrupt him to exhibit your knowledge to those present. This is rude and ill mannered." The honorable Imam Abdullah ibn Wahab al-Qurashi al-Masri, . . . said: "Sometimes a person would tell me a story that I have heard before his parents had wed. Yet, I listened as if I have never heard it before." Ibrahim ibn al-Junaid said: "A wise man said to his son: 'Learn the

¹⁶⁹ Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners* p.56

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.56.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.52-53.

art of listening as you learn the art of speaking.” Listening well means maintaining eye contact, allowing the speaker to finish the speech, and restraining your urge to interrupt his speech. Al-Hafiz al-Khatib al-Baghdadi said in a poem:

Never interrupt a talk
Though you know it inside out.¹⁷²

Muslim and al-Tirmidhi reported that the honorable companion of al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad said: “We used to keep for the Prophet his share of milk, and when he would come at night he would greet us with a voice loud enough for those awake to hear, without disturbing those who were asleep. “ In addition, whenever the Prophet (S) used to pray at night, he would recite the Qur’an with a voice that pleased those awake, without disturbing those who were asleep.¹⁷³

Treat poor acquaintances or guests with honor and respect. Talk pleasantly to them, using the best of language. Again, poverty is not a vice, many who are poor are more honorable than the wealthy, and many who are penniless are preferred to the rich.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ibid, p.54.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.30.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p.73.

Humility (*Tawadhu*)

*And always bear in mind your God is the One and Only God:
and so, surrender yourselves to Hu.
And give the glad tidings of God's acceptance to all who are humble—
all those whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned,
and all who patiently bear whatever ill befalls them,
and all who are constant in prayer
and spend on others
out of the sustenance We have provided for them.*

[22:32-35]

*And the servants of the Infinitely Compassionate One
are those who walk on the earth in humility
and when the ignorant address them they say, "Peace!"—
those who spend the night in adoration of their Sustainer
in prostration and standing straight.*

[25:63-64]

One of the virtues most closely related to Poverty is Humility (*Tawadhu*). According to the *hadith*, "My Lord gave me the choice of being one of two things: either to be a slave and a messenger, or a king and a prophet, and I did not know of which of the two to choose. At my side was the angel Gabriel, and when I raised my head he said, 'Be humble to your Lord,' so I replied, 'A slave and a messenger.'"

Humility is based on a clear sense that, in the presence of God, we are as nothing—and that we are never not in the presence of God: to realize one's nothingness in the face of God is the root of Islam. We may work to develop such humility because we recognize that it is praiseworthy, or that it is one of the virtues of the Prophet that we wish to imitate, but only the sense of God's real presence can bring this virtue to perfection. And even if we don't feel the keen sense of God's presence, we can still act as if we did. In the Prophet's words, "pray to God as if you saw Him, because even if you don't see Him, He sees you." Furthermore, if you know that you are in the presence of God right now, you will realize that, as far as you are concerned, all

things, persons, and situations are signs of God which have something to say to you, while you yourself are far from perfect in your ability to pay attention to them.

Al-Ghazali names “fawning” and “ostentatious self-abasement” as among the vices; neither has anything to do with real humility. To make submission to another person’s ego is not truly humble, since it is almost always done for some kind of personal advantage, besides being a form of idolatry in itself.

In the words of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, “The most troubled people are the kings, the most hated the proud, and the most abased those who treat others with contempt.”¹⁷⁵

The Messenger said, ‘Good fortune is theirs who are humble—but not through poverty, who spend of their wealth which they have gained lawfully, who have mercy on the abased and poor and who keep company with the scholars of law and the wise.; No one humbles himself before Allah but that He raises him.’ . . .

The Messenger said to some of his companions, ‘Why is it that I do not see the sweetness in your worship?’ When they asked him what sweetness of worship was, he replied, ‘Humility.’ . . .

‘There are three things by which Allah only increases a man in goodness: by humility Allah will only increase a man in elevation, by submission of the self He will only increase a man in honour, and by chastity He will only increase a man in wealth.’¹⁷⁶

Successful indeed are the faithful, who are humble in their prayers.

[23:1-2]

. . . being lowly before Allah, they do not take a small price for the communications of Allah. [3:199]

They used . . . to call upon Us, hoping and fearing; and they were humble before Us. [21:90]

Had We sent down this Qur’an on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder because of the fear of Allah. [59:21]

¹⁷⁵ Charles Upton, contributor.

¹⁷⁶ Shaykh Fadhalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.172.

So certainly evil is the dwelling place of the proud.

[16:129]

Thus does Allah set a seal over the heart of every proud, haughty one

[40:35]¹⁷⁷

And among His signs is this, that you see the earth still [humble],

[41:39]¹⁷⁸

Qarun was doubtless among the people of Moses;

but he acted insolently towards them:

such were the treasures We had bestowed on him

that their very keys would have been a burden

to a body of strong men.

Witness, his people said to him: "Don't gloat,

for God does not love those who take pride in riches.

But with that which God has bestowed on you

seek the Home of the Hereafter,

yet do not forget your portion in this world—

do good as God has been good to you

and do not seek to do harm in the land:

for God does not love those who act harmfully."

[28:76-77]

Call to your Sustainer humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts.

Truly, He does not love those who go beyond the bounds

of what is right.

And so, do not spread corruption on earth

after it has been so well ordered.

And call to Him with awe and longing:

truly, God's grace is very near those who do good.

[7:55-56]

Hasn't the time come for the faithful

that their hearts in all humility

should engage in the remembrance of God

and of the truth which has been revealed,

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p.244.

¹⁷⁸ ibid, p.106.

*and that they should not become like those
 to whom revelation was given but whose hearts have hardened
 with the passing of time
 so that many among them now rebel
 against that which is right?
 Know that God gives life to the earth after it has been lifeless!
 We have indeed made Our signs clear to you
 that you might learn wisdom.*

[57:16-17]

[It is agreed] that the locus of humility is the heart. When one of the Sufis saw a man who was downcast in his outward manner, with lowered eyes and slumped shoulders, he told him, "O so-and-so, humility is here," and he pointed to his breast, "not here," and he pointed to his shoulders.

And it is said, "Humility is the melting and hiding of the heart in the presence of the Sovereign of Truth." It is also said, "Humility is the prelude to being overpowered by awe." Or, "Humility is a tremor that comes upon the heart suddenly at the unexpected disclosure of the Truth."

Fudayl b. Tyad asserted, "It is offensive that there should be seen in the outward appearance of man more humility than what is in his heart."¹⁷⁹

'Umar

The ambassador of Rum came to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Umar, may God be well-pleased with him, and witnessed the gifts of grace with which 'Umar, may God be well-pleased with him, was endowed. . . .

He said, "O attendants, where is the palace of the Caliph, that I may take my horse and baggage there?"

The folk said to him, "He has no palace; 'Umar's only palace is an illumined spirit. Though he is famous as Commander of the Faithful,

¹⁷⁹ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 87.

his only dwelling is a hut, like the poor. O brother, how will you behold his palace, when hair has grown in the eye of your heart? Purge your heart's eye of hair and defect, and then hope to behold his palace.¹⁸⁰

'Umar b. al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) used to walk at a quick pace, and he would explain that such walking would bring him swiftly to attend to [legitimate] needs and keep him far from vanity.

'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz (may God be pleased with him) was writing something one night when there was a guest with him. Seeing that the lamp was about to go out, the guest offered, "I will go to the lamp and adjust it." But 'Umar replied, "No. It is not generous to use the guest as a servant." He suggested, "Then I will call the servant." 'Umar declined, "No, he has just gone to sleep." So he went to the container of oil and filled the lamp. The guest exclaimed, "You did it yourself, O Commander of the Believers!" So 'Umar told him, "I left and I was 'Umar, and I returned and still I am 'Umar."¹⁸¹

'Urwa b. az-Zubayr related, "When I saw 'Umar b. al-Khattab [may God be pleased with him] with a full waterskin on his shoulder, I told him, 'O Commander of the [Faithful], this is not fitting for you.' He responded, 'When deputations came to me, listening and obedient, a certain arrogance entered my soul, and I wished to break it.' So he proceeded with the waterskin to the chamber of a woman from the Ansar and emptied it into her water jug."

'Abdallah ar-Razi explained, "Humility is the abandonment of distinctions in serving."

'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz heard that one of his sons had purchased a valuable jewel for one thousand dirhams. So 'Umar wrote to him, "I have heard that you have bought a gem for one thousand dirhams. When this letter reaches you, sell the ring and fill one thousand stomachs. Then make a ring out of two dirhams, make its stone out of Chinese iron, and write upon it, 'God has mercy upon the one who

¹⁸⁰ Jalaluddin Rumi, *Mathnawi* Book I: 1390-1395.

¹⁸¹ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 88.

knows his true value.”¹⁸²

Humility opens us to God's Grace

The Holy Qur'an mentions how the prophets are chosen, it explains that the Divine does not confine "choice" to prophets alone, rather the Divine, by revealing the journey of the prophets towards truth, opens the door to all humans to expose themselves to God's graces so that they might be chosen when they are in full harmony with the law of choice. To expose oneself to God's graces implies that one opens one's heart and soul to the power of light on earth; the light that all prophets and messengers of God left visible and that will always remain as a Home for all souls who long for their Lord. That is what the Holy Qur'an clarifies when guiding believers to obey Allah and His Messenger.

All who obey Allah and the Messenger are in the Company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah, of the Prophets (who teach), the sincere (lovers of Truth), the witnesses (who testify), and the righteous (who do good): ah! what a beautiful Fellowship! [Qur'an 4: 69]

To follow the path of the prophets is not to make of their teachings new dogmas and literal forms and images. To obey them is not to make of one's religious affiliation an excuse for showing superiority over others. To follow their paths is essentially to give a chance to the soul to engage in a journey of spiritual transformation through which it expresses itself fully. It is because of that the Prophet Muhammad says, "make yourselves accessible to God's graces."¹⁸³ However, how can a soul make himself accessible to God's graces?¹⁸⁴

Although we have been endowed with profound resources of character, we see that, left to our egos, we are nonetheless weak,

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 91.

¹⁸³ Narrated by Al Tabarani

¹⁸⁴ Excerpted from "The Soul's Longing" by Aisha Rafea from *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, p

powerless and in need.

All Muslims have a chance to deepen their understanding of the perishable nature of creation, and the eternity of God's face, during the fast of Ramadan; nothing humbles us, and shows us our essential nothingness, like physical weakness. If even a change in our eating schedule can confront us with our inherent poverty, how poor we must be—except as we are rich in Him.

Perhaps the Creator wanted us to realize that we would only find strength in the help and support of a higher Source.¹⁸⁵

The Humility of Muhammad

The master of the people is the one who serves them. In the words of 'Ali, 'among people, [Muhammad] was one of them;. When he reached Quba accompanied by Abu Bakr during Hijra, some people of Madina who had not seen him before, tried to kiss the hands of Abu Bakr because, outwardly, there was no sign to distinguish the Prophet from Abu Bakr.

In the construction of the Mosque in Madina after the Hijra, he carried two sun-dried bricks while everybody else carried one. In the digging of the ditch around Madina to defend the city in Battle of the Ditch, the companions bound a stone around their bellies because of hunger, but God's Messenger himself bound two, because he was more hungry than anybody else. Once, a man saw him and due to his awe-inspiring appearance began to tremble out of fear. The Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, calmed him, saying: 'Brother, don't be afraid! I am a man, like you, whose mother used to eat dry bread.'

Again, a woman suffering from insanity pulled him by the hand and said: 'Come with me and do my housework.' God's Messenger went with the woman and did the work. As reported by 'Aisha, mother of believers, God's Messenger patched his clothes, repaired his shoes and helped his wives with the housework.

Although his modesty elevated him to 'the highest of the high,'

¹⁸⁵ Charles Upton, *contributos*.

he regarded himself as an ordinary servant of God. Once he said: No one can enter Paradise by his deeds. When asked whether he could not either, he answered: I cannot either, but for the Mercy of God.¹⁸⁶

Whoever is humble, God exalts him, and whoever is haughty, God abases him.¹⁸⁷

Glory be to You, we have not been able to know You as Your knowledge requires, O Known One.

Glory be to You, we have not been able to worship You as You deserve to be worshipped, O Worshipped One.

~ Prayer of Muḥammad

Muhammad's Visit to Hilal

Hilal was a devoted servant to God possessed of spiritual insight and was not a mere imitator. He had concealed himself in being a slave to God's creatures, not from helplessness but for good reason, as Luqman and Joseph and others did, who were slaves in appearance. He was a groom in the service of a certain Amir, [who] was a Moslem, but spiritually blind. "The blind man knows that he has a mother, but he cannot conceive what she is like." If, having this knowledge, he shows reverence towards his mother, it is possible that he may gain deliverance from blindness, for the Prophet has said that when God wills good unto a servant of His He opens the eyes of his heart, that He may let him see the Invisible World with them.

Since you have heard some of the excellent qualities of Bilal, now hear the story of the emaciation of Hilal. Hilal was a spiritual adept and a man of illumined Soul, though he was the groom and slave. . . . The youth served as a groom in the stable, but he was really a king of kings and a slave only in name. The Amir was ignorant of his slave's real condition,

¹⁸⁶ Gulen, M. Fethullah. *Prophet Muḥammad, the Infinite Light*, Volume II, pp. 144-145.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.147.

for he had no discernment He saw the clay, but not the treasure in it: he saw the five senses and the six directions, but not their source.

By Divine destiny Hilal became ill and weak: divine inspiration acquainted Mustafa with his condition, but his master was unaware of his illness, for in his eyes he was worth little. Such a well-doer¹⁸⁸ lay ill in the stable for nine days, and none took notice of his plight. But he who was a the Emperor of all personages, he whose oceanic mind reaches every place, to him came the inspiration: “Such-and-such a one who longs for you has fallen ill.” So Mustafa went to visit the noble Hilal.

The Prophetic Moon was running behind the Sun of inspiration, while the Companions followed behind him, like the stars. The Moon is saying, “My Companions are stars –a model for those who follow them in the night-journey, and shooting stars hurled at the disobedient.”

When the Amir was told of the arrival of that spiritual Sultan, he sprang up, beside himself with joy; he clapped his hands joyously, thinking that the spiritual emperor had come on his account. When he came down from the upper chamber, he was ready to lavish his soul on the messenger as a reward for the news he had brought. Then he kissed the earth before the Prophet and greeted him; with delight he made his countenance like a rose. “In God’s name,” he said, “bestow honor on the house by entering it, so that this assembly-place may become a Paradise, and that my palace may surpass heaven in glory, saying, ‘I have seen the Pole on which Time revolves.’”

The venerable Prophet said to him by way of rebuke, “I have not come to visit you.”

He replied, “My spirit belongs to you what, indeed, is my spirit before you? Oh, say on whose account is this solicitude, that I may become dust for the feet of the person who is planted in the orchard of your favor.”

Then the Prophet said to him, “Where is that new-moon (*Hilal*) of the highest heaven? Where is he that in his humility is spread as moonbeams like a carpet on the ground that king who is disguised as a slave and has come down to this world as a witness? Do not say, ‘He is my slave and stableman’: know this, that he is a treasure buried in ruins. Oh, I

¹⁸⁸ *Le.* one who worships God as though he were seeing Him.

wonder to what state he has been reduced by sickness that new-moon by which thousands of full-moons are trodden underfoot.”

The Amir said, “I have no knowledge of his illness, but he hasn’t been at the palace-gate for several days. He keeps company with the horses and mules: he is a groom, and this stable is his dwelling-place.”

The Prophet went eagerly into the stable to look for him and began to search. The stable was dark, foul, and dirty, but all this vanished from Hilal’s mind when friendship arrived. That fierce spiritual lion scented the Prophet just as the scent of Joseph was perceived by his father Jacob. . . . Hilal was awakened: he said to himself, “A stable full of dung’ and this kind of scent within it!”

Then through the legs of the riding-beasts he saw the holy skirt of the peerless Prophet, and that spiritual hero Hilal came creeping out of a corner in the stable and laid his face upon his feet. Then the Prophet laid his face against Hilal’s face and kissed his head and eyes and cheeks.

“O Lord,” he cried, “what a hidden pearl you are! How are you, O heavenly stranger? Are you better?”

Hilal answered, “One whose sleep was disturbed with grief, how then is he when the Sun of Prophecy comes into his mouth? The thirsty man who eats clay to slake his thirst, how is he when the Water of Life lay’s him on its surface and bears him happily along?”

...

The New-moon (Hilal) and the Full-moon (the Prophet) are in oneness; the new moon’s apparent imperfection is a sign of gradual increase. Night by night the new-moon gives a lesson in gradualness: with deliberation it says, “O hasty one, only step by step can one ascend to the roof.”

A skillful cook lets the pot boil slowly; the stew boiled in a mad hurry is of no use. Wasn’t God able to create heaven in one moment by the word “Be”? Without a doubt He was. Why, then, O you who seek to be taught, did He extend the time to six days—every day as long as a thousand years? Why is the creation of a child completed in nine months? Because gradualness is a characteristic of the action of that King.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Jalaluddin Rumi, *Mathnawi*, Book VI, 1109-1215. Translation adapted from R.A. Nicholson p320-326.

Flow Like Water

Perfect mastery works like water:
 A boon to every living creature,
 In adverse relation never;
 At home where most can not abide,
 Closest to the Way it lies.
 For position, favor lower ground;
 For thought, profundity;
 For engaging, gentility;
 For speaking, credibility;
 For ruling, authority;
 For service, capability;
 For action, suitability.
 Avoiding confrontation
 Eliminates accusation.
 There is no other way.

COMMENT: Like heaven and earth, water has no self-interest and thus flows downward to the lowest point to serve the interests of other things without confronting or contending with them. Water “goes where others will not go, does what others will not do . . . Water is adaptable but unchanging, always itself, unitary; it does not become its opposite, though it may alter all it touches. Thus water is an apt and recurring metaphor for *Dao*. . . . *Analects* 6.21 says “the wise rejoice in water.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Laozi, *Dao de Jing, the Book of the Way*, Translation and Commentary by Moss Roberts, Stanza 8. pp. 45-46.

VI. Purity

1.Purification of the Heart

2.Purification of the Mind

3.Purification of the Body:

Physical cleanliness, Moderation in eating,
Physical discipline and sports

Purification of the Heart

*This Book of blessings We have sent down to you—
so that they may meditate on its signs
and that people of insight might take them to heart.*

[38:29]

*O humankind! there has come to you a direction from your Lord
and a healing for your hearts
and for those who have faith, guidance and grace.
Say: "In the abundance of God and in His grace,
in that let them rejoice;
that is better than whatever they may hoard."*

[10:57-58]

*Truly in this is a Message of remembrance for people of insight.
Is one whose heart God has opened to surrender
so that he is illumined by a light from his Sustainer
no better than one who is hard-hearted?
Woe to those whose hearts are hardened
against remembrance of God!
They obviously wander astray!
God has revealed the most beautiful message in the form of a Book
consistent within itself, repeating its teaching in various guises—
the skins of those who stand in awe of their Lord tremble with it;
then their skins and their hearts soften with the remembrance of God.
Such is God's guidance:
with it He guides the one who wills to be guided,
but those whom God lets stray have none to guide them.*

[39:20-23]

*Purify your inmost heart!
And turn away from all that is unclean!
And do not expect in giving any increase for yourself!
But for your Sustainer's sake be patient and steadfast!*

[74:5-7]

*Whoever purifies himself does so for the benefit of his own soul;
and all are journeying to God.*

[35:20]

*Do not attribute purity to yourselves;
He knows best who is the most pious.*

[53:32]

*Consider the soul and the order and proportion given to it,
and its enlightenment as to that which is wrong and right:
truly, the one who purifies it shall reach a happy state
and the one who corrupts it shall truly be lost!*

[91:7-9]

*And be constant in prayer at both ends of the day
and at the coming of the night,
for good deeds repel those that are evil.
Let this be a reminder to those who remember God.*

[11:114]

*Let me not be in disgrace on the Day when we will be raised up,
the Day when neither wealth nor children will be of use,
but only the one who brings to God a sound heart.*

(Prayer of Abraham) [26:88-89]

*And anyone who honors the symbols set up by God—
truly, these derive their value
from the God-consciousness within the heart.
In that God-consciousness you shall find benefits
until a determined time is fulfilled,
and its goal and end is the Most Ancient Temple.¹⁹¹*

[22:32-35]

The Holy Qur'an demonstrates that all prophets guided people to a way that supports a soul who longs for a truthful life in fulfilling its longing. They tell people that they need to purify their hearts so that

¹⁹¹The Most Ancient Temple (*Sūrah* 22:34), which signifies in locality, the Kaaba and in subtlety, the heart of the human being.

they might be able to receive the guidance from within and from a higher source. The Holy Qur'an explains that when the heart is not pure, a human being cannot listen to, or see, the truth: . . . *they have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).* [Qur'an 7: 179]. It also asserts that a "sound heart" leads a person to understanding of the truths of life, and those who do have "blind hearts" cannot understand or respond to the divinity within or around: *Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts* [22:46].

The Divine teachings to the Prophet Muḥammad also reveal that purification of the heart is possible when the soul is attached to a higher source of guidance. The guidance to "perform ritual prayers" on a regular basis is a means to attain attachment to a higher source. The symbol of that higher source is the Holy Home that Muslims direct their faces towards during the performance of ritual prayers. To direct one's face towards the Holy Home transcends the physical dimension; it is a symbol for the Divine Light that was manifested through all prophets, and that sustains any searching soul with Light. The need to purify one's existence of the egoistic inclinations of selfishness, greed, and covetousness is expressed in the guidance towards charity. The need for preparing oneself to listen to the divinity within is expressed in the guidance towards fasting where one stops all the desires of the physical body in one way or another for a period of time. It is because of the human need for such truths forever that the Holy Qur'an confirms that all prophets guided their followers to "Prayers, fasting, and charity or *zakat*." Many verses in the Holy Qur'an point to that fact. Jesus, for instance says about his Lord, "*And He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live.*" [Qur'an 19: 31]. And about Ishmael the Holy Qur'an says, *He used to enjoin on his people Prayer and Charity, and he was most acceptable in the sight of his Lord.* [Qur'an 19: 55]¹⁹²

¹⁹² Alia Rafea, excerpted from "The Soul's Longing," *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, p.

The Prophet Muḥammad (S) was known as TaHa, Safiyy, Mutahhir, Muzakka, the Most Pure. One of his frequent prayers was:

“O Allah! Grant my soul consciousness of You and purify it. You are the Best to purify. You are the soul’s Compassion and its Master.”¹⁹³

The Apostle said, “If a man’s heart is sound, then his whole body is sound; if his heart is sick, then his whole body is sick.”¹⁹⁴

Commenting on the words of Allah, *Thereupon their hearts became hardened until they were as stones or even harder* [2:74], the Messenger said, “Beware of talking too much without remembrance of Allah, for surely too much talking without remembrance of Allah hardens the heart, and the people furthest away from Allah are those with hardened hearts.” *The human being was born restless; but Truly in the remembrance of God hearts find rest.* [13:28]¹⁹⁵

It is useful to pause periodically during the day to witness the condition of our heart and to open to the remembrance that refreshes and restores. The Prophet (S) continually worked to clear his heart of any cloudiness that might enter.

[‘A’isha] said, “The Prophet of Allah, upon whom be peace, for as long as I knew him, never slept without first seeking refuge from cowardice and indolence, boredom, parsimony, undue pride, embarrassment in family or financial affairs, the chastisement of the grave, and from Satan and associating him (with the Almighty).”

Thus the Prophet sleeps; but not before making the night come alive with purity and *dhikr*, so that after no more than an hour of sleep he awakes for the dawn prayer and prepares to meet another twenty-four hours with the following *du’a’*:

“We have awoken, and the domain belongs to Allah. Praise to

¹⁹³ Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Remembrance and Prayer*, p.97.

¹⁹⁴ Shaykh Fadhilalla haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p. 145.

¹⁹⁵ Shaykh Fadhilalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.101.

Allah! He has no partner. There is no God but Him; and to Him is the final issuing.¹⁹⁶

There are also five faults from which one should cleanse oneself: hypocrisy, argument, affectation, artificiality, and love of property and rank; and five curses from which one should free oneself: miserliness, ambition, anger, greed, and gluttony.

You can correct your state by correcting your actions. Abul-'Abbas ibn al-Khashshab reports that Dhu Nun al-Misri said: "The one who settles his affairs finds peace and comfort; the one who strives to come closer, comes closer; the one who keeps pure--becomes cleansed; the one who trusts in God finds security; the one who mixes himself into affairs that do not concern him may lose the things that should concern him."¹⁹⁷

Behavior becomes fixed in the self as certain actions are repeated and actions issue from the heart by means of the limbs—each limb being capable of good actions which in turn lead to laudable behavior; if wrong actions appear which in turn produce bad behavior, then the movements of the heart and limbs must be checked until good is produced, and they are prevented from doing evil. Man's most fatal enemies are the desires of the stomach, sex, and tongue.¹⁹⁸

'Longing for this world brings worry and sadness, doing without in this world brings ease to the heart and body.'¹⁹⁹

The Commander of the Faithful said, 'Tears dry up when the heart hardens, and the heart only hardens because of the number of one's wrong actions.'²⁰⁰

'Surely the heart of man becomes weary as the body becomes weary and bored. Seek out rarities of wisdom for it, for surely the heart's nature is to pursue and retreat: when it is in pursuit, then urge it to extra acts of worship; and when it is retreating, then limit

¹⁹⁶ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Remembrance and Prayer*, p.45-46.

¹⁹⁷ Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁸ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.162.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.183.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p.145.

yourself to the obligatory acts.”²⁰¹

‘Just as a person’s teeth are kept bright with the tooth-stick, so Allah has created the heart pure and clear and has made remembrance, reflection, awe and respect of Him a means of nourishing it; if the purity of one’s heart is defiled by negligence and distress it is made clean by turning to Him and is purified by entrusting oneself to Him—in this way it returns to its original state. Thus Allah says, “*Surely Allah loves those who turn much [to Him], and He loves those who purify themselves.*” [2:222].²⁰²

Muhammad (S) relayed God’s encouraging message (*hadith Qudsi*), “Heaven and earth cannot contain me, but the heart of My willing servant can contain Me,” and in the Qur’an conveyed a prayer to help keep us oriented:

O our Sustainer!
Do not let our hearts swerve from the truth
after You have guided us;
and bestow on us the gift of Your grace:
truly, You are the Giver of Gifts.
[3:8]

Purifying the Heart of a Prophet

Twice during the lifetime of the Prophet, he experienced angels coming to him to assist in the cleansing and purifying of his heart:

Abu ‘Amr b. Hamdan related . . . from ‘Utba b. ‘Abd Allah, as follows: A man asked the Prophet (SAAS), “What was it happened to you first, O Messenger of God?” He replied, “My wet-nurse [Halima]

²⁰¹ Ibid, p.146.

²⁰² Shaykh Fadhllalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.162.

was from the Banu Sa'd b. Bakr. One time a son of hers and I went off with our flock without taking any food with us. So I said, '[O] brother, go back and get us some food from our mother's home.' So my brother hurried away while I stayed with the animals. Then two white birds like eagles came along and one said to the other, 'Is that he?' 'Yes,' the other replied. Then they both swooped down, took hold of me and laid me out on my back. They then split my abdomen, extracted my heart, cut it open, and took out from it two black clots. One bird said to his companion, 'Bring me some ice water.' And with it they cleaned my insides. The first bird then said, 'Now get some cold water.' With that they washed my heart. Then the bird said, 'Bring me *al-sakina* (quietude).' This they sprinkled into my heart. The one said to the other, 'Sew it up.' So he did that and then placed on my heart the seal of prophethood. After that one bird said to the other, 'Place him in one balance scale and a thousand of his people in the other.' And when I looked up, there were the thousand above me, and I was concerned that some of them might tumble down on to me. Then the bird said, 'If his whole nation were balanced against him, he would still outweigh them.' Then both birds went away, leaving me there. I was tremendously afraid and raced off to my foster-mother and told her what had happened. She was afraid I'd lost my mind and exclaimed, 'God protect you!' Then she got an ass of hers ready for travel and put me on it. She rode behind me and we traveled till we reached my mother. She then said, 'Well, I've fulfilled my pact and agreement.' She then told my mother what had happened, but it didn't shock her. She said, 'What I saw was that a light came from inside me that lit up the castles of Syria.'"

. . . [Abu Dharr al-Ghifari] asked, 'O Messenger of God, how were you informed that you were a prophet and when did you become convinced that you were one?' He replied, 'O Abu Dharr, two angels came to me when I was in one of the valleys of Mecca. One of them dropped down to the ground, while the other remained suspended between heaven and earth. One said to the other, "Is that he?" "Yes, it's he." The one said, "Weigh him against another man." He did so, and I outweighed him.'"

He then told it till the end, recounting how his chest was opened and sewn up and the seal was placed between his shoulders. He then said, "Then finally they turned away from me, as if their work was fully done."

. . . Prayer was prescribed in Medina and two angels came to the Messenger of God (SAAS), took him to zamzam, split open his abdomen, took out his insides and put them in a basin of gold, washed them in zamzam water then filled his insides with wisdom and knowledge.

And the tradition also comes through Ibn Wahb, . . . from Anas, who said, “The Messenger of God (SAAS) was visited three nights. (A voice) said: ‘Take him who is the best of them and their leader.’ So they took the Messenger of God (SAAS), conducted him to *zamzam*, opened his abdomen, brought a gold bowl, washed out his insides then filled them with wisdom and faith.”

In the two sahih collections it is given . . . from the Prophet (SAAS) in the recounting of al-Isra’ (the ascension to heaven), as the story of the laying open of his chest (occurring) on that night, and its being washed with *zamzam* water.

There is no denying the probability of that occurring twice, once when he was young and once on the night of the ascension in preparation for his going to join the heavenly assemblage of angels, and of conferring with and appearing before the Lord, the Almighty, Glorious, Blessed, and Exalted One.²⁰³

²⁰³ Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Volume I, p. 167-168

Purification of the Mind

Are you not aware how God offers the parable of a good word?

*It is like a good tree, firmly rooted,
reaching its branches towards the sky,
always yielding fruit, by consent of its Sustainer.
This is how God offers parables to human beings,
so that they might consider the truth.*

*And the parable of a corrupt word is that of a corrupt tree,
torn up from its roots onto the surface of the earth,
unable to endure.*

*Even so God grants firmness to those who have come to faith
through the word that is unshakably true,
in this world as well as in the life to come.*

[14:23-27]

*O you who have faith! Stand in awe of God
and always speak a word on behalf of that which is right and true:
that He may make your behavior whole and sound
and forgive you your mistakes.*

*The one who heeds God and His Messenger
has already attained a mighty success.*

[33:70-71]

*Twice will they be given their reward
because they have persevered: they have turned aside evil with good,
and they give to others from what We have given to them.*

And when they hear vain talk they turn away from it and say:

*“To us our deeds and to you yours;
peace be with you: we do not seek the ignorant.”*

[28:54-55]

*Those will prosper who purify themselves
and remember the Name of their Sustainer and pray.*

[87:14-15]

*And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
endowed with inner strength and vision.*

*Truly, We purified them
by means of the remembrance of the Life to Come.
They were in Our sight, truly, among the elect and the Good.
And remember Ishmail, Elisha, and Zul-Kifl:
each of them was among the companions of the Good.
This is a reminder:
and truly, awaiting the God-conscious is a beautiful place of return.*
[38:45-49]

*O you who have faith!
Do not let some men among you laugh at others;
it may be that the others are better than they.
Nor let some women laugh at others;
it may be that the others are better than they.
Nor speak ill nor with sarcasm towards each other,
nor call each other by taunting names:
a name connoting wickedness is inappropriate after one has come to faith,
and those who do not stop are doing wrong.
O you who have attained to faith!
As much as you can, avoid suspicion, for suspicion in some cases is a sin;
and do not spy on each other,
nor speak ill of one another behind each other's backs.
Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?
No, you would detest it . . . but remain conscious of God:
for truly, God is Ever Turning One Towards Repentance,
Infinitely Merciful.
O humankind! We created you all out of a male and a female,
and made you into nations and tribes
that you might come to know each other.
Truly, the most highly regarded of you in the sight of God
is the one who does the most good.
And God is All-knowing and is Well-aware of all things.*
[49:11-13]

Truly, Remembrance of God is the greatest.
[29:45]

It is related that the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, would blow on his hands, on getting into bed but before sleeping, recite the

last two *sūrahs* of the Qur'an, and then run his hands over his entire body. In another version of the same *hadīth*, it is related that when the Prophet, upon him be peace, went to bed at night, he would clasp his hands together, and blow into them, and then recite *Surat al-Ikhlās* and the last two *sūrahs* of the Qur'an (*Falaq* and *Nas*), and then run his hands over as much as he could of his body beginning with his head, face, and the front of his body, repeating this three times.

The three *sūrahs* referred to mention *tawhīd* or the Unity of God, and the purity of His person and attributes. In addition, they urge one toward divine providence, and away from the evils of body and mind.²⁰⁴

In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful

Say, "He is the One God;
God the Eternal Originator;
He does not bear children, nor was He born;
and He is beyond compare."

[*Ikhlas* 112:1-4]

In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful

Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn
from the mischief of created things,
and from the evil of Darkness as it overspreads,
and from the mischief of those who blow on knots,²⁰⁵
and from the evil of the envious one as he envies."

[*Falaq* 113:1-5]

In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful

Say: "I seek refuge with the Sustainer of humankind,
the Sovereign of humankind,
the God of humankind,
from the evil whispering, elusive tempter
who whispers in the hearts of human beings—
from invisible forces as well as humans."

[*Nas* 114:1-6]

²⁰⁴ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Remembrance and Prayer*, p.206.

²⁰⁵ Those who cast spells; those who spread constriction, who exacerbate difficulties.

Just as the footprint of any creature that walks the earth can be placed in the elephant's footprint, which is the largest of all—even so, mindful attention is the one quality that ensures ease of mind at all times.

Mindful attention causes beneficial thoughts that have not yet arisen to arise. It also causes harmful thoughts that have already arisen to vanish. In the one who is mindful, the good that is to be will be realized.²⁰⁶

*And if My servants ask you about Me—witness, I am near;
I respond to the call of the one who calls,
whenever he calls Me:
let them, then, respond to Me, and have faith in Me,
so that they may follow the right way.*

[2:186]

*Be continuously mindful of prayers,
and of praying in the most excellent way;
and stand before God in devoted surrender.*

[2:238]

Al-Kashani said, “It can happen that the heart so totally submits to anger and desire that it is enslaved by them; in this way the heart dies and its course towards eternal bliss is interrupted. It is also possible, however, that the heart submits to another flank of Allah’s army: knowledge, wisdom and reflection. If the opposite happens, and the army of anger and desire conquers the self, then the man will be in great loss, which is the state of most men in this age. Their intellects have been subjected to their desires—in their very attempts to see to the needs of the desires—whereas it is the desires that should submit to the intellect whenever the latter requires this.”²⁰⁷

It is hard to be born as a human being and hard to live the life of one. It is even harder to hear of the path and harder still to awake, to

²⁰⁶ Anne Bancroft, *The Pocket Buddha Reader (Anguttara Nikaya)* p.38.

²⁰⁷ Shaykh Fadhllalla Haeri, *The Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.148.

rise and to follow. Yet the teaching is simple: “Cease to do evil, learn to do good. And purify your mind.

“Hurt none by word or deed. Be moderate in your eating. Live in inner solitude. And seek the deepest consciousness.” This is the teaching.²⁰⁸

Your perceptive mind is already luminous and shining brightly. But you color it with all your attachments. It is not easy to understand this, and many do not. They do not cultivate their perceptive mind. But that mind, luminous and brightly shining, is fundamentally free of all attachments, because they come and go. This you should understand and for you there should be cultivation of the perceptive mind.²⁰⁹

All that we are is the result of our thoughts; it is founded on our thoughts and made up of our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world. If you speak or act with a harmful thought, trouble will follow you as the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart. If you speak or act with a harmonious thought, happiness will follow you as your own shadow, never leaving you.²¹⁰

If your thought is a rose, you are a rose garden.

If your thought is thorny, you’re just fuel for the bathhouse stove.²¹¹

Al-Sadiq said, ‘If there is a group of three believers, then two of them should not converse together without involving the third, for this would cause him sorrow and pain.’ He also said, ‘Talk about your brother when he is out of your sight as you would like him to talk of you when you are out of his; leave him alone at those times when you would like to be left alone, and act like the one who knows that he is rewarded for good actions and punished for bad.’²¹²

²⁰⁸ Anne Bancroft, *The Pocket Buddha Reader*, (Dhammapada) p.70-71.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, (*Anguttara Nikaya*) p.71.

²¹⁰ Ibid, (*Dhammapada*) p.157.

²¹¹ Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, *Mathnawi*.

²¹² Shaykh Fadhllalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, p. 205.

‘A believer is a brother to the believer; he does not oppress him, abandon him or cheat him, nor does he slander him, betray him or lie to him.’²¹³

Al-Sadiq said, “The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim: he is his sight, his mirror, and his guide. He does not betray him, cheat him, oppress him, lie to him or slander him, nor does he promise him something and then go back on his promise.”²¹⁴

Abu Basir said that al-Sadiq told him this, ‘O Abu Muḥammad, be scrupulous, strive hard, speak truthfully, guard whatever is entrusted to you, be good company for whoever keeps your company and stay long in prostration, for it is the practice of those before you.’²¹⁵

“My Lord has ordered that my speech be remembrance, my silence reflection, and my looking an exhortation.”²¹⁶

Mujahid relates that the Messenger, commenting on Allah’s words, “*Woe to every slanderer, defame*” said, “The slanderer is the one who criticizes people and the defamer is the one who backbites people [lit. eats their flesh].”

Al-Sadiq said, “The most beloved of Allah’s [servants] are those who are truthful in speech, who maintain the prayer and whatever Allah has made incumbent on them—including fulfilling the trust.”²¹⁷

“All good is contained in three things: your looking, your silence and your speech. Looking without reflection is negligence, silence without meditation is unmindfulness, and speech without remembrance is idle talk. Happiness will be theirs whose looking is a lesson, whose silence is meditation, whose speech is remembrance, who weep because of their mistakes and by whose hand people are safe from evil.”²¹⁸

²¹³ Ibid, p.214.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p.219.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p.186.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p.101.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p.221.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p.101.

Your word is dependent on you until you utter it, but once you utter it, you will be dependent on it. ~ Hazrati Ali²¹⁹

The Truthful Friend

I do not wish to treat friendships daintily with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frost-work, but the solidest thing we know. For now, after so many ages of experience, what do we know of nature or of ourselves? Not one step has man taken toward the solution of the problem of his destiny. In one condemnation of folly stand the whole universe of men. But the sweet sincerity of joy and peace which I draw from this alliance with my brother's soul is the nut itself whereof all nature and all thought is but the husk and shell. Happy is the house that shelters a friend! It might well be built, like a festal bower or arch, to entertain him a single day. Happier, if he know the solemnity of that relation and honor its law! It is no idle bond, no holiday engagement. He who offers himself a candidate for that covenant comes up, like an Olympian, to the great games where the first-born of the world are the competitors. He proposes himself for contest where Time, Want, Danger, are in the lists, and he alone is victor who has truth enough in his constitution to preserve the delicacy of his beauty from the wear and tear of all these. The gifts of fortune may be present or absent, but all the hap in that contest depends on intrinsic nobleness and the contempt of trifles. There are two elements that go to the composition of friendship, each so sovereign that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named. One is Truth. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal that I may drop even those most undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and

²¹⁹ M. Fethullah Gulen, *Prophet Muhammad, The Infinite Light*, p. 168.

wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another. Sincerity is the luxury allowed, like diadems and authority, only to the highest rank, that being permitted to speak truth, as having none above it to court or conform unto.

Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds. I knew a man who under a certain religious frenzy cast off this drapery, and omitting all compliment and commonplace, spoke to the conscience of every person he encountered, and that with great insight and beauty. At first he was resisted, and all men agreed he was mad. But persisting, as indeed he could not help doing for some time in this course, he attained to the advantage of bringing every man of his acquaintance into true relations with him. No man would think of speaking falsely with him, or of putting him off with any chat of markets or reading-rooms. But every man was constrained by so much sincerity to face him, and what love of nature, what poetry, what symbol of truth he had, he did certainly show him. But to most of us society shows not its face and eye, but its side and its back. To stand in true relations with men in a false age is worth a fit of insanity, is it not? We can seldom go erect. Almost every man we meet requires some civility, requires to be humored;—he has some fame, some talent, some whim of religion or philanthropy in his head that is not to be questioned, and which spoils all conversation with him. But a friend is a sane man who exercises not my ingenuity, but me. My friend gives me entertainment without requiring me to stoop, or to lisp, or to mask myself. A friend therefore is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.

The other element of friendship, is tenderness.²²⁰

²²⁰ This selection, "The Truthful Friend," is excerpted from Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*, p.

Be Impeccable with Your Word

Be impeccable with your word. Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean.

Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others.

Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

The first agreement is the most important one and also the most difficult one to honor. It is so important that with just this first agreement you will be able to transcend to the level of existence I call heaven on earth.

The first agreement is to be impeccable with your word. It sounds very simple, but it is very, very powerful. Why your word? Your word is the power that you have to create. Your word is the gift that comes directly from God. The Gospel of John in the Bible, speaking of the creation of the universe, says, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word is God." Through the word you express your creative power. It is through the word that you manifest everything. Regardless of what language you speak, your intent manifests through the word. What you dream, what you feel, and what you really are, will all be manifested through the word.

The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The word is a force; it is the power you have to express and communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in your life. You can speak. What other animal on the planet can speak? The word is the most powerful tool you have as a human; it is the tool of magic. But like a sword with two edges, your word can create the most beautiful dream, or your word can destroy everything around you.

One edge is the misuse of the word, which creates a living hell. The other edge is the impeccability of the word, which will only create beauty, love, and heaven on earth. Depending upon how it is used, the word can set you free, or it can enslave you even more than you know. All the magic you possess is based on your word. Your word is pure magic, and misuse of your word is black magic.

The word is so powerful that one word can change a life or destroy

the lives of millions of people. Some years ago one man in Germany, by the use of the word, manipulated a whole country of the most intelligent people. He led them into a world war with just the power of his word. He convinced others to commit the most atrocious acts of violence. He activated people's fear with the word, and like a big explosion, there was killing and war all around the world. All over the world humans destroyed other humans because they were afraid of each other. Hitler's word, based on fear-generated beliefs and agreements, will be remembered for centuries.

The human mind is like a fertile ground where seeds are continually being planted. The seeds are opinions, ideas, and concepts. You plant a seed, a thought, and it grows. The word is like a seed, and the human mind is so fertile! The only problem is that too often it is fertile for the seeds of fear. Every human mind is fertile, but only for those kinds of seeds it is prepared for. What is important is to see which kind of seeds our mind is fertile for, and to prepare it to receive the seeds of love.

Take the example of Hitler: He sent out all those seeds of fear, and they grew very strong and beautifully achieved massive destruction. Seeing the awesome power of the word, we must understand what power comes out of our mouths. One fear or doubt planted in our mind can create an endless drama of events. One word is like a spell, and humans use the word like black magicians, thoughtlessly putting spells on each other.

Every human is a magician, and we can either put a spell on someone with our word or we can release someone from a spell. We cast spells all the time with our opinions. An example: I see a friend and give him an opinion that just popped into my mind. I say, "Hmmm! I see that kind of color in your face in people who are going to get cancer." If he listens to the word, and if he agrees, he will have cancer in less than one year. That is the power of the word.

During our domestication, our parents and siblings gave their opinions about us without even thinking. We believed these opinions and we lived in fear over these opinions, like not being good at swimming, or sports, or writing. Someone gives an opinion and says, "Look, this girl is ugly!" The girl listens, believes she is ugly, and grows up with the idea that she is ugly. It doesn't matter how beautiful she is; as long as she has that agreement, she will believe that she is ugly. That is the spell she is under.

By hooking our attention, the word can enter our mind and change a whole belief for better or for worse. Another example: You may believe you are stupid, and you may have believed this for as long as you can remember. This agreement can be very tricky, causing you to do a lot of things just to ensure that you are stupid. You may do something and think to yourself, "I wish I were smart, but I must be stupid or I wouldn't have done that." The mind goes in hundreds of different directions, and we could spend days getting hooked by just that one belief in our own stupidity.

Then one day someone hooks your attention and using the word, lets you know that you are not stupid. You believe what the person says and make a new agreement. As a result, you no longer feel or act stupid. A whole spell is broken, just by the power of the word. Conversely, if you believe you are stupid, and someone hooks your attention and says, "Yes, you are really the most stupid person I have ever met, the agreement will be reinforced and become even stronger.

Now let us see what the word *impeccability* means. *Impeccability* means "without sin." *Impeccable* comes from the Latin *peccatus*, which means "sin." The *im* in *impeccable* means "without," so *impeccable* means "without sin." Religions talk about sin and sinners, but let's understand what it really means to sin. A sin is anything that you do which goes against yourself. Everything you feel or believe or say that goes against yourself is a sin. You go against yourself when you judge or blame yourself for anything. Being without sin is exactly the opposite. Being *impeccable* is not going against yourself. When you are *impeccable*, you take responsibility for your actions, but you do not judge or blame yourself.

From this point of view, the whole concept of sin changes from something moral or religious to something commonsense. Sin begins with rejection of yourself. Self-rejection is the biggest sin that you commit. In religious terms self-rejection is a "mortal sin," which leads to death. *Impeccability*, on the other hand, leads to life.

Being *impeccable* with your word is not using the word against yourself. If I see you in the street and I call you stupid, it appears that I'm using the word against you. But really I'm using my word against myself, because you're going to hate me for this, and your hating me is not good for me. Therefore, if I get angry and with my word send all that emotional

poison to you, I'm using the word against myself

If I love myself I will express that love in my interactions with you, and then I am being impeccable with the word, because that action will produce a like reaction. If I love you, then you will love me. If I insult you, you will insult me. If I have gratitude for you, you will have gratitude for me. If I'm selfish with you, you will be selfish with me. If I use the word to put a spell on you, you are going to put a spell on me.

Being impeccable with your word is the correct use of your energy, it means to use your energy in the direction of truth and love for yourself. If you make an agreement with yourself to be impeccable with your word, just with that intention, the truth will manifest through you and clean all the emotional poison that exists within you. But making this agreement is difficult because we have learned to do precisely the opposite. We have learned to lie as a habit of our communication with others and more importantly with ourselves. We are not impeccable with the word.

The power of the word is completely misused in hell. We use the word to curse, to blame, to find guilt, to destroy. Of course, we also use it in the right way, but not too often. Mostly we use the word to spread our personal poison—to express anger, jealousy, envy, and hate. The word is pure magic, the most powerful gift we have as humans—and we use it against ourselves. We plan revenge. We create chaos with the word. We use the word to create hate between different races, between different people, between families, between nations. We misuse the word so often, and this misuse is how we create and perpetuate the dream of hell. Misuse of the word is how we pull each other down and keep each other in a state of fear and doubt. Because the word is the magic that humans possess and misuse of the word is black magic, we are using black magic all the time without knowing that our word is magic at all.

There was a woman, for example, who was intelligent and had a very good heart. She had a daughter whom she adored and loved very much. One night she came home from a very bad day at work, tired, full of emotional tension, and with a terrible headache. She wanted peace and quiet, but her daughter was singing and jumping happily. The daughter was unaware of how her mother was feeling; she was in her own world, in her own dream. She felt so wonderful, and she was jumping and singing louder and louder, expressing her joy and her love. She was singing so loud

that it made her mother's headache even worse, and at a certain moment, the mother lost control. Angrily she looked at her beautiful little girl and said, "Shut up! You have an ugly voice. Can you just shut up!"

The truth is that the mother's tolerance for any noise was nonexistent; it was not that the little girl's voice was ugly. But the daughter believed what her mother said, and in that moment she made an agreement with herself. After that she no longer sang, because she believed her voice was ugly and would bother anyone who heard it. She became shy at school, and if she was asked to sing, she refused. Even speaking to others became difficult for her. Everything changed in the little girl because of this new agreement: She believed she must repress her emotions in order to be accepted and loved.

Whenever we hear an opinion and believe it, we make an agreement, and it becomes part of our belief system. This little girl grew up, and even though she had a beautiful voice, she never sang again. She developed a whole complex from one spell. This spell was cast upon her by the one who loved her the most—her own mother. Her mother didn't notice what she did with her word. She didn't notice that she used black magic and put a spell on her daughter. She didn't know the power of her word, and therefore she isn't to blame. She did what her own mother, father, and others had done to her in many ways. They misused the word.

How many times do we do this with our own children? We give them these types of opinions and our children carry that black magic for years and years. People who love us do black magic on us, but they don't know what they do. That is why we must forgive them; they don't know what they do.

Another example: You awake in the morning feeling very happy. You feel so wonderful, you stay one or two hours in front of the mirror, making yourself beautiful. Well, one of your best friends says, "What has happened to you? You look so ugly. Look at the dress you are wearing; you look ridiculous." That's it; that is enough to put you all the way down in hell. Maybe this girlfriend just told you this to hurt you. And, she did. She gave you an opinion with all the power of her word behind it. If you accept the opinion, it becomes an agreement now, and you put all your power into that opinion. That opinion becomes black magic.

These types of spells are difficult to break. The only thing that can

break a spell is to make a new agreement based on truth. The truth is the most important part of being impeccable with your word. On one side of the sword are the lies which create black magic, and on the other side of the sword is the truth which has the power to break the spell of black magic. Only the truth will set us free.

Looking at everyday human interactions, imagine how many times we cast spells on each other with our word. Over time this interaction has become the worst form of black magic, and we call it gossip.

Gossip is black magic at its very worst because it is pure poison. We learned how to gossip by agreement. When we were children, we heard the adults around us gossiping all the time, openly giving their opinions about other people. They even had opinions about people they didn't know. Emotional poison was transferred along with the opinions, and we learned this as the normal way to communicate.

Gossiping has become the main form of communication in human society. It has become the way we feel close to each other, because it makes us feel better to see someone else feel as badly as we do. There is an old expression that says, "Misery likes company," and people who are suffering in hell don't want to be all alone. Fear and suffering are an important part of the dream of the planet; they are how the dream of the planet keeps us down.

Using the analogy of the human mind as a computer, gossip can be compared to a computer virus. A computer virus is a piece of computer language written in the same language all the other codes are written in, but with a harmful intent. This code is inserted into the program of your computer when you least expect it and most of the time without your awareness. After this code has been introduced, your computer doesn't work quite right, or it doesn't function at all because the codes get so mixed up with so many conflicting messages that it stops producing good results.

Human gossip works exactly the same way. For example, you are beginning a new class with a new teacher and you have looked forward to it for a long time. On the first day of class, you run into someone who took the class before, who tells you, "Oh that instructor was such a pompous jerk! He didn't know what he was talking about, and he was a

pervert too, so watch out!”

You are immediately imprinted with the word and the emotional code the person had when saying this, but what you are not aware of is his or her motivation in telling you. This person could be angry for failing the class or simply making an assumption based on fears and prejudices, but because you have learned to ingest information like a child, some part of you believes the gossip, and you go on to the class.

As the teacher speaks, you feel the poison come up inside you and you don't realize you see the teacher through the eyes of the person who gave you that gossip. Then you start talking to other people in the class about this, and they start to see the teacher in the same way: as a jerk and a pervert. You really hate the class, and soon you decide to drop out. You blame the teacher, but it is gossip that is to blame.

All of this mess can be caused by one little computer virus. One little piece of misinformation can break down communication between people, causing every person it touches to become infected and contagious to others. Imagine that every single time others gossip to you, they insert a computer virus into your mind, causing you to think a little less clearly every time. Then imagine that in an effort to clean up your own confusion and get some relief from the poison, you gossip and spread these viruses to someone else.

Now imagine this pattern going on in a never-ending chain between all the humans on earth. The result is a world full of humans who can only read information through circuits that are clogged with a poisonous, contagious virus. Once again, this poisonous virus is what the Toltecs called the *mitote*, the chaos of a thousand different voices all trying to talk at once in the mind.

Even worse are the black magicians or “computer hackers” who intentionally spread the virus. Think back to a time when you or someone you know was angry with someone else and desired revenge. In order to seek revenge you said something to or about that person with the intention of spreading poison and making that person feel bad about him- or herself. As children we do this quite thoughtlessly, but as we grow older we become much more calculated in our efforts to bring other people down. Then we lie to ourselves and say that person received a just punishment for their wrongdoing.

When we see the world through a computer virus, it is easy to justify the cruelest behavior. What we don't see is that misuse of our word is putting us deeper into hell.

For years we have received the gossip and spells from the words of others, but also from the way we use our word with ourselves. We talk to ourselves constantly and most of the time we say things like, "Oh, I look fat, I look ugly. I'm getting old, I'm losing my hair. I'm stupid, I never understand anything. I will never be good enough, and I'm never going to be perfect." Do you see how we use the word against ourselves? We must begin to understand what the word is and what the word *does*. If you understand the first agreement, *be impeccable with your word*, you begin to see all the changes that can happen in your life. Changes first in the way you deal with yourself, and later in the way you deal with other people, especially those you love the most.

Consider how many times you have gossiped about the person you love the most to gain the support of others for your point of view. How many times have you hooked other people's attention, and spread poison about your loved one in order to make your opinion right? Your opinion is nothing but your point of view. It is not necessarily true. Your opinion comes from your beliefs, your own ego, and your own dream. We create all this poison and spread it to others just so we can feel right about our own point of view.

If we adopt the first agreement, and become impeccable with our word, any emotional poison will eventually be cleaned from our mind and from our communication in our personal relationships, including with our pet dog or cat.

Impeccability of the word will also give you immunity from anyone putting a negative spell on you. You will only receive a negative idea if your mind is fertile ground for that idea. When you become impeccable with your word, your mind is no longer fertile ground for words that come from black magic. Instead, it is fertile for the words that come from love. You can measure the impeccability of your word by your level of self-love. How much you love yourself and how you feel about yourself are directly proportionate to the quality and integrity of your word. When you are impeccable with your word, you feel good; you feel happy and at

peace.

You can transcend the dream of hell just by making the agreement to be impeccable with your word. Right now I am planting that seed in your mind. Whether or not the seed grows depends upon how fertile your mind is for the seeds of love. It is up to you to make this agreement with yourself. *I am impeccable with my word.* Nurture this seed, and as it grows in your mind, it will generate more seeds of love to replace the seeds of fear. This first agreement will change the kind of seeds your mind is fertile for.

Be impeccable with your word. This is the first agreement that you should make if you want to be free, if you want to be happy, if you want to transcend the level of existence that is hell. It is very powerful. Use the word in the correct way. Use the word to share your love. Use white magic, beginning with yourself. Tell yourself how wonderful you are, how great you are. Tell yourself how much you love yourself. Use the word to break all those teeny, tiny agreements that make you suffer.

It is possible. It is possible because I did it, and I am no better than you. No, we are exactly the same. We have the same kind of brain, the same kind of bodies; we are humans. If I was able to break those agreements and create new agreements, then you can do the same. If I can be impeccable with my word, why not you? Just this one agreement can change your whole life. Impeccability of the word can lead you to personal freedom, to huge success and abundance; it can take away all fear and transform it into joy and love.

Just imagine what you can create with impeccability of the word. With the impeccability of the word you can transcend the dream of fear and live a different life. You can live in heaven in the middle of thousands of people living in hell because you are immune to that hell. You can attain the kingdom of heaven from this one agreement: *Be impeccable with your word.*²²¹

²²¹ This selection “Be Impeccable with Your Word” is excerpted from *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz, p. 27-50.

Purification of the Body

*Eat of the good things We have provided for your sustenance
but not to excess so that My Wrath might not descend on you:
for those on whom My Wrath descends
have thrown themselves into ruin!
But without doubt I am the One Who forgives again and again
those who repent, have faith, and do right,
those who turn to receive true guidance..*

[20:81-82]

*O you who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you
as it was ordained for those before you,
so that you might remain conscious of God.
And whoever does more good than He is bound to do
thereby does good to himself;
for to fast is to do good to yourselves—if you only knew it.*

[2:183-4]

The Prophet used to say in prayer: O Allah, I ask of You good health and gratitude for good health in this world and the next.²²²

In another *hadith*, the Prophet alluded to how nice it would be to remain clean, when he asked his companions: “If one of you had a river at his door and he washed himself five times a day would any dirt remain on him?” “No dirt will remain,” they answered. The Prophet (S) commented: “This is the example of the five [daily] prayers as Allah wipes with them your sins.”²²³

Within the Islamic tradition prayer and the ablution preceding it are offered to the human being as a means of purification of the body as well as the heart and mind. We are encouraged to keep our bodies clean and to eat of the good things that God has provided us to keep this bodily house

²²² Shaykh Fadhilalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.160.

²²³ Abu Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, p.26.

of Spirit in good health. Periodic fasting is also recommended for purification of body, mind, and heart.

The thirty days of prayer and fasting is akin to the *Mandala puja* of the Hindu tradition. The name “*Ramadan*” comes from the Sanscrit word *Rama-dhyan*. *Dhyan* means to meditate and *Ram* in Sanscrit means “the one who shines in the heart.” Thus Ramadan refers to a time to meditate on God.²²⁴

One of the practical requirements before a supplication is accepted is that the supplicant must pursue an honest living and earn his livelihood through lawful means. The food that he eats or the clothes that he wears, in fact all his possessions, must be lawful and acquired through lawful means. This presumes noble qualities, like honesty, good behavior, and contentment with what one has. These qualities make one the subject of others’ love and of brotherly feelings and good will. A strong will is evidently necessary to achieve all these noble qualities.

Muslim has reported Abu Hurairah as saying that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, “Verily, Allah is pure and He accepts only that which is good and pure. Allah has commanded the believers what He commanded His messengers, saying, ‘*You apostles! Enjoy (all) things good and pure, and work righteousness! For I am well-acquainted with (all) that you do.*’ Allah also says, ‘*O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you.*’”²²⁵

The voluntary poverty of the Prophet flowed naturally from the realization that *All is perishing, except His Face* [28:88]. On one occasion he said: “What have I to do with this world? I and this world are as a rider and a tree beneath which he shelters. Then he goes on its way and leaves it behind him.” In the words of Hazrat ‘Ali, “Whoever attaches himself strongly to life makes himself a target for misfortune and the vicissitudes of fate.” Such *hadith* are an expression of the virtue of Detachment, *ih̄tisab*. Detachment has nothing to do with

²²⁴ Ravishankar, Sri Sri. *Hinduism and Islam*, Bangalore, India: Vyakti Vikas Kendra: 2002, p.7.

²²⁵ Hasan Al-Anani. *Freedom and Responsibility*, p.201.

holding yourself apart from people or avoiding life, but rather with the ability to let come what God wants to send, and to let go of what God wants to take away. As the Prophet's said, "A man will not find sweetness of faith until he is heedless of the fruits of this world." He also said: "Doing without (*zuhd*) in this world does not mean wearing coarse clothes and eating coarse food, but rather curbing one's expectations."

According to Al-Ghazali, egotism and vice appear not only as excess but also as deficiency. . . .The commanding self (*nafs ammarah*) may command us to worship ourselves; it may also command us to damage and destroy ourselves. In both cases, it has made sure that we are too involved in thinking and worrying about ourselves, when we should be remembering God. Both excess and deficiency in our character will interfere with our ability to sense God's presence, which is just what the commanding self wants. Al-Ghazali therefore recommends moderation in eating, avoiding both the extremes of gluttony and self-starvation. He quotes Abu Sulayman as saying, "If something is put before you in the nature of a desire which you have renounced, then partake of it just a little, but do not give your soul all that it hopes for. In this way you will banish a desire without making it pleasurable for your soul." In the words of the Qur'an, *Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant.* [7:31]²²⁶

Muhammad had no wish to live in any less Spartan fashion than did his people. His main meal was usually a boiled gruel known as *sawiq*, with dates and milk, his only other meal of the day being dates and water, but he frequently went hungry and developed the practice of binding a flat stone against his belly to assuage his discomfort.²²⁷

Luqman the Wise said to his son, 'If the stomach is filled, then reflection falls asleep, wisdom falls silent and the limbs take rest from worship.'

The advantages of hunger are many: clarity and vigour of the heart, delight in obedience, physical weakness which stops one committing wrong or being negligent, a stilling of sexual desire, which

²²⁶ Charles Upton, contributor.

²²⁷ Charles leGai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, p.117.

becomes excessive when the stomach is full, and a driving away of sleep, which by its nature makes one languid, allows one's life to slip away and prevents one from rising in prayer at night. The Messenger said, 'The stomach is the house of disease.'

The aim, however, is to achieve a balance, to find the middle way—when the Messenger found out that some of the Muslims were fasting every day and staying up in prayer the whole night, he forbade them to do this.

Thus, it is better that a man neither feel heavy after eating nor suffer pangs of hunger; rather, that he forget his stomach and not let it influence him. The object of eating is to keep alive and to maintain our strength for worship: excessive eating prevents one from worship and pangs of hunger engross the heart and weaken the worshipper. Allah has said, '*Eat and drink and be not extravagance*,' [7:31] which verse summarizes everything mentioned above.²²⁸

The Holy Qur'an also clarifies that fasting had always been a means of purification for all souls who longed for divine guidance: *O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint*, [Qur'an 2: 183]. The Prophet Muḥammad received from the Divine a whole system for spiritual purification that he practiced, and taught to his followers. However, this is not the place to relate in detail how that system confirms and perfects the systems of prophets previous to him. Suffice it to say that all prophets, as revealed in the Holy Qur'an, existentially lived the truth that a human cannot feel the longing of the soul to lead a truthful life unless he purifies his earthly existence. Purification takes place when the soul is attached to a higher source of guidance, when the physical body's lusts are controlled, and when the divinity within is given the chance to express itself and overwhelm the earthly existence. The means to realize that purification are unveiled by the Revelation to all prophets when they were guided by the Divine to uncover the truthful path for souls who long for submission to Allah.²²⁹

²²⁸ Shaykh Fadhilalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, pp.158-159.

²²⁹ Rafea, Aisha, "The Soul's Longing," *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, p.

Al-Sadiq said, “If you fast, then fast with your hearing, sight, feeling and your skin; and stop all actions undertaken for show or actions which harm people. You should treat the fast with respect. The Messenger once heard a woman insulting her slave-girl while fasting. The Prophet then called for food, bidding her to eat, but she replied, ‘I am fasting.’ ‘How can you be fasting while you insult your slave-girl?’ Fasting is not abstention from food and drink alone.”²³⁰

If one becomes angry he should say, “I seek refuge from the accursed Satan,” for anger comes from Satan. If one of you becomes angry, then he should perform the ablution with water, for anger comes from fire. Anger is from Satan, Satan is from fire, and water extinguishes fire.²³¹

Al-Sadiq relates how the Prophet said to his companions one day, “Wealth which has not been purified [by giving away a part of it as poor-rate] is cursed, just as the body which is not purified—even if it be only once every forty days—is cursed.” He was then asked, “O Messenger, we are familiar with the purification of wealth, but what is the purification of the body?” He replied, “That it will be afflicted by disease.” Then the faces of those listening changed color. When the Messenger saw this he said, “Do you know what I meant by what I said?” They replied, “No, O Messenger!” He said, “That a man becomes anxious, is beset by misfortune, that he commits mistakes, that he is afflicted by illness, pricked by thorns, or the like, so that he suffers a throbbing pain in the eye.” The messenger said, “Everything has its means of purification, and that of the body is fasting.”²³²

Al-Sadiq said, “There is nothing more harmful to the heart of a believer than overeating. It causes two things: hardness of heart and excitement of desire. Hunger is nourishment for the believer, food for the spirit and heart, and health for the body.”²³³

Truly, the rising by night

²³⁰ Ibid, p.120.

²³¹ Ibid., p.236.

²³² Ibid, p.127.

²³³ Ibid, p.157.

*is the strongest means of governing the soul
and the most appropriate for Words of prayer.
Truly, by day there is a long chain of duties for you;
but keep in remembrance the name of your Sustainer
and devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly.
Sustainer of the East and the West, there is no god but Hu:
take Hu therefore as the guardian of your affairs.*

[73:1-9]

Abu Hanifah said to Imam al-Sadiq, “O Abu Abd Allah, what gives you patience during prayer?” He replied, “Woe to you, O Numan! Know that prayer is the sacrifice of every God-fearing man, and that the *hajj* is the struggle of every weak man; for everything there is *zakat*, and the *zakat* of the body is the fast; the best of deeds is waiting for Allah’s help in a matter; and a man who calls to Allah in word but not in deed is like an archer whose bow has no string. Remember these words, O Numan.”²³⁴

The Messenger said, “Strength is not physical combat, but rather controlling oneself when angry.”²³⁵

Thus we may conclude from the aforesaid that there are four degrees of purification: the physical cleaning of the body from defilement; the purification of the limbs from criminal or incorrect action and sin; the purification of the heart from discourteous or odious behavior; and the purification of the core of one’s self from everything other than Allah—and this is the purification of the prophets and the truthful believers.²³⁶

And your garments do purify.

[74:4]

The Prophet said, ‘Purity is half of faith; purity is the key to

²³⁴ Shaykh Fadhllalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.75.

²³⁵ Ibid, p.236.

²³⁶ Ibid, p.163.

prayer; the *Deen* [religion] has been founded on cleanliness; the worst servant [of Allah] is he who is filthy; let whoever obtains clothing make sure it is clean.²³⁷

The Prophet (S) himself helped with daily household chores, mended his own clothes and also kept the garment of his body clean and in good shape. He was quite physically fit. He was renowned at wrestling and archery, helped with the building projects of the community, and would even sometimes run races with his young wife, 'A'isha.

Archery

Know that archery is a noble skill. . . . If asked: With whom did archery originate? Say: Among our people, with Hamzah, who practiced it much. It is said that the Prophet shot arrows and there is no doubt that he used the bow. . . He encouraged bowmanship and blessed the archers . . .

If asked: How did the bow come into existence? Say: Gabriel brought it to Adam when he had cultivated some land. Birds would come and raid his sown fields. Adam would drive them away from one side while they returned from another. Frustrated, Adam did not know what to do. He appealed to God, saying: "O my God, show me a way to keep these birds away from my fields."

God sent Gabriel with a bow and three arrows. He put the grip of the bow in Adam's hand and taught him how to shoot arrows. After a few birds had been shot by the arrows, they ceased to come, and Adam's fields remained secure.

If asked: What is the first necessity for an archer? Say: A considerate master. If a person does not have a teacher, he cannot begin to master this skill. Should he try, he will get nowhere and be of no use to anyone. . . .

Should his arrow miss the target, he should not be discouraged. The first arrow that Adam shot went astray. . . .

²³⁷ Shaykh Fadhllalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam*, p.161.

He should not envy anyone who shoots straighter and more accurately than he; instead, he should praise him.

He should not delight in his own accomplishments and become haughty, for there are many upsets in victory. . . .

If asked: What is the mirror of the archer? Say: The target. He must keep his eye uninterruptedly on it from the moment of drawing the bow and setting the arrow until the arrow's release.

If asked what is the shape of the bow? Say: A semicircle.

If asked: What does the semicircle signify? Say: The degree of possibility which continually receives grace from the necessary. The meaning of these words is that in existence the possible needs the necessary. Therefore, whoever takes the bow in hand must remember his own need and recognize that he has come into existence through another power and should not be negligent in His service.

If asked: What does the bowstring signify? Say: The separating line that exists between possibility and necessity. In this there is a mystery of which it is not permissible to speak.

If asked: What does the bow say to the arrow? Say: It says: Fly straight so as to reach the desired goal. . . .

If asked: What do the letters of the bow (*kamdu* = *K*, *M*, *A*, *N*) symbolize? Say:

Kaf (*K*) indicates generosity (*karam*); that is, the archer must be generous and chivalrous.

Mim (*M*) indicates compassion (*marhamat*); that is, he must be merciful to those under his control.

Alif (*A*) indicates belief (*i'tiqad*); he must be well intentioned and correct in his faith.

Nun (*N*) indicates counsel (*nasihat*); he must not withhold his tutelage and advice from his colleagues and companions. Whoever does not possess these four attributes is not worthy of this handgrip.

If you speak Arabic, the letters are *Qaf*, *Waw*, and *Sin* (*qawsh* bow). The *Qaf* (*Q*) is for acceptance (*qabal*), the *Waw* (*W*) for piety (*wara'*), and the *Sin* (*S*) for soundness (*salamat*) of spirit; that is, the archer must make himself acceptable to hearts through service, pass his time in piety and asceticism, and have a healthy soul in order that the taking and letting go

of the handgrip of the bow be lawful.²³⁸

Zen in the Art of Archery

When drawn to its full extent, the bow encloses the “All” in itself, explained the Master, and that is why it is important to learn how to draw it properly. Then he grasped the best and strongest of his bows and, standing in ceremonious and dignified attitude, let the lightly drawn bowstring fly back several times. This produces a sharp crack mingled with a deep thrumming, which one never afterwards forgets when one has heard it only a few times; so strange is it, so thrillingly does it grip the heart. . . . After this significant introductory act of purification and consecration the Master commanded us to watch him closely. He placed, or “nocked,” an arrow on the string, drew the bow so far that I was afraid it would not stand up to the strain of embracing the All, and loosed the arrow. All this looked not only very beautiful, but quite effortless. He then gave us his instructions: “Now you do the same, but remember that archery is not meant to strengthen the muscles. When drawing the string you should not exert the full strength of your body, but must learn to let only your two hands do the work, while your arm and shoulder muscles remain relaxed, as though they looked on impassively. Only when you can do this will you have fulfilled one of the conditions that make the drawing and the shooting ‘spiritual.’” With these words he gripped my hands and slowly guided them through the phases of the movement which they would have to execute in the future, as if accustoming me to the feel of it.

Even at the first attempt with a medium-strong practice-bow I noticed that I had to use considerable force to bend it. This is because the Japanese bow, unlike the European sporting bow, is not held at shoulder level, in which position you can, as it were, press yourself into it. Rather, as soon as the arrow is nocked, the bow is held up with arms at nearly full stretch, so that the archer’s hands are somewhere above his head.

²³⁸ “Archery” is excerpted from *The Royal Book of Sufi Chivalry*, by Kashifi Sabzawari, Husayn Waiz translated by Muhtar Holland, p. 351-354.

Consequently, the only thing he can do is to pull them evenly apart to left and right, and the further apart they get the more they curve downwards, until the left hand, which holds the bow, comes to rest at eye level with the arm outstretched, while the right hand, which draws the string, is held with arm bent above the right shoulder, so that the tip of the three-foot arrow sticks out a little beyond the outer edge of the bow—so great is the span. In this attitude the archer has to remain for a while before loosing the shot. The strength needed for this unusual method of holding and drawing the bow caused my hands to start trembling after a few moments, and my breathing became more and more labored. Nor did this get better during the weeks that followed. The drawing continued to be a difficult business, and despite the most diligent practice refused to become “spiritual.” To comfort myself, I hit upon the thought that there must be a trick somewhere which the Master for some reason would not divulge, and I staked my ambition on its discovery.

Grimly set on my purpose, I continued practicing. The Master followed my efforts attentively, quietly corrected my strained attitude, praised my enthusiasm, reproved me for wasting my strength, but otherwise let me be. Only, he always touched on a sore spot when, as I was drawing the bow, he called out to me to “Relax! Relax!”—a word he had learned in the meantime—though he never lost patience and politeness. But the day came when it was I who lost patience and brought myself to admit that I absolutely could not draw the bow in the manner prescribed.

“You cannot do it,” explained the Master, “because you do not breathe right. Press your breath down gently after breathing in, so that the abdominal wall is tightly stretched, and hold it there for a while. Then breathe out as slowly and evenly as possible, and, after a short pause, draw a quick breath of air again—out and in continually, in a rhythm that will gradually settle itself. If it is done properly, you will feel the shooting becoming easier every day. For through this breathing you will not only discover the source of all spiritual strength but will also cause this source to flow more abundantly, and to pour more easily through your limbs the more relaxed you are.” And as if to prove it, he drew his strong bow and invited me to step behind him and feel his arm muscles. They were indeed quite relaxed, as though they were doing no work at all.

The new way of breathing was practiced, without bow and arrow at first, until it came naturally. The slight feeling of discomfort noticeable in the beginning was quickly overcome. The Master attached so much importance to breathing out as slowly and steadily as possible to the very end, that, for better practice and control, he made us combine it with a humming note. Only when the note had died away with the last expiring breath were we allowed to draw air again. The breathing in, the Master once said, binds and combines; by holding your breath you make everything go right; and the breathing out loosens and completes by overcoming all limitations. But we could not understand that yet.

The Master now went on to relate the breathing, which had not of course been practiced for its own sake, to archery. The unified process of drawing and shooting was divided into sections: grasping the bow, nocking the arrow, raising the bow, drawing and remaining at the point of highest tension, loosing the shot. Each of them began with breathing in, was sustained by firm holding of the down-pressed breath, and ended with breathing out. The result was that the breathing fell into place spontaneously and not only accentuated the individual positions and hand-movements, but wove them together in a rhythmical sequence depending, for each of us, on the state of his breathing-capacity. In spite of its being divided into parts the entire process seemed like a living thing wholly contained in itself, and not even remotely comparable to a gymnastic exercise, to which bits can be added or taken away without its meaning and character being thereby destroyed.

I cannot think back to those days without recalling, over and over again, how difficult I found it, in the beginning, to get my breathing to work out right. Though I breathed in technically the right way, whenever I tried to keep my arm and shoulder muscles relaxed while drawing the bow, the muscles of my legs stiffened all the more violently, as though my life depended on a firm foothold and secure stance, and as though, like Antaeus, I had to draw strength from the ground. Often the Master had no alternative but to pounce quick as lightning on one of my leg muscles and press it in a particularly sensitive spot. When, to excuse myself, I once remarked that I was conscientiously making an effort to keep relaxed, he replied: "That's just the trouble, you make an effort to think about it. Concentrate entirely on your breathing, as if you had nothing else to do!"

It took me a considerable time before I succeeded in doing what the Master wanted. But—I succeeded. I learned to lose myself so effortlessly in the breathing that I sometimes had the feeling that I myself was not breathing but—strange as this may sound—being breathed. And even when, in hours of thoughtful reflection, I struggled against this bold idea, I could no longer doubt that the breathing held out all that the Master had promised. Now and then and in the course of time more and more frequently, I managed to draw the bow and keep it drawn until the moment of release while remaining completely relaxed in body, without my being able to say how it happened. The qualitative difference between these few successful shots and the innumerable failures was so convincing that I was ready to admit that now at last I understood what was meant by drawing the bow “spiritually.”

So that was it: not a technical trick I had tried in vain to pick up, but liberating breath-control with new and far-reaching possibilities. I say this not without misgiving, for I well know how great is the temptation to succumb to a powerful influence and, ensnared in self-delusion, to overrate the importance of an experience merely because it is so unusual. But despite all equivocation and sober reserve, the results obtained by the new breathing—for in time I was able to draw even the strong bow of the Master with muscles relaxed—were far too definite to be denied.

In talking it over with Mr. Komachiya, I once asked him why the Master had looked on so long at my futile efforts to draw the bow “spiritually,” why he had not insisted on the correct breathing right from the start. “A great Master,” he replied, “must also be a great teacher. With us the two things go hand in hand. Had he begun the lessons with breathing exercises, he would never have been able to convince you that you owe them anything decisive. You had to suffer shipwreck through your own efforts before you were ready to seize the lifebelt he threw you.”²³⁹

²³⁹ “Zen and the Art of Archery” is excerpted from *Zen and the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel, p.17-23.