

SUFI WISDOM

A Source of Inspirational and Traditional Islamic Knowledge

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TAWHID

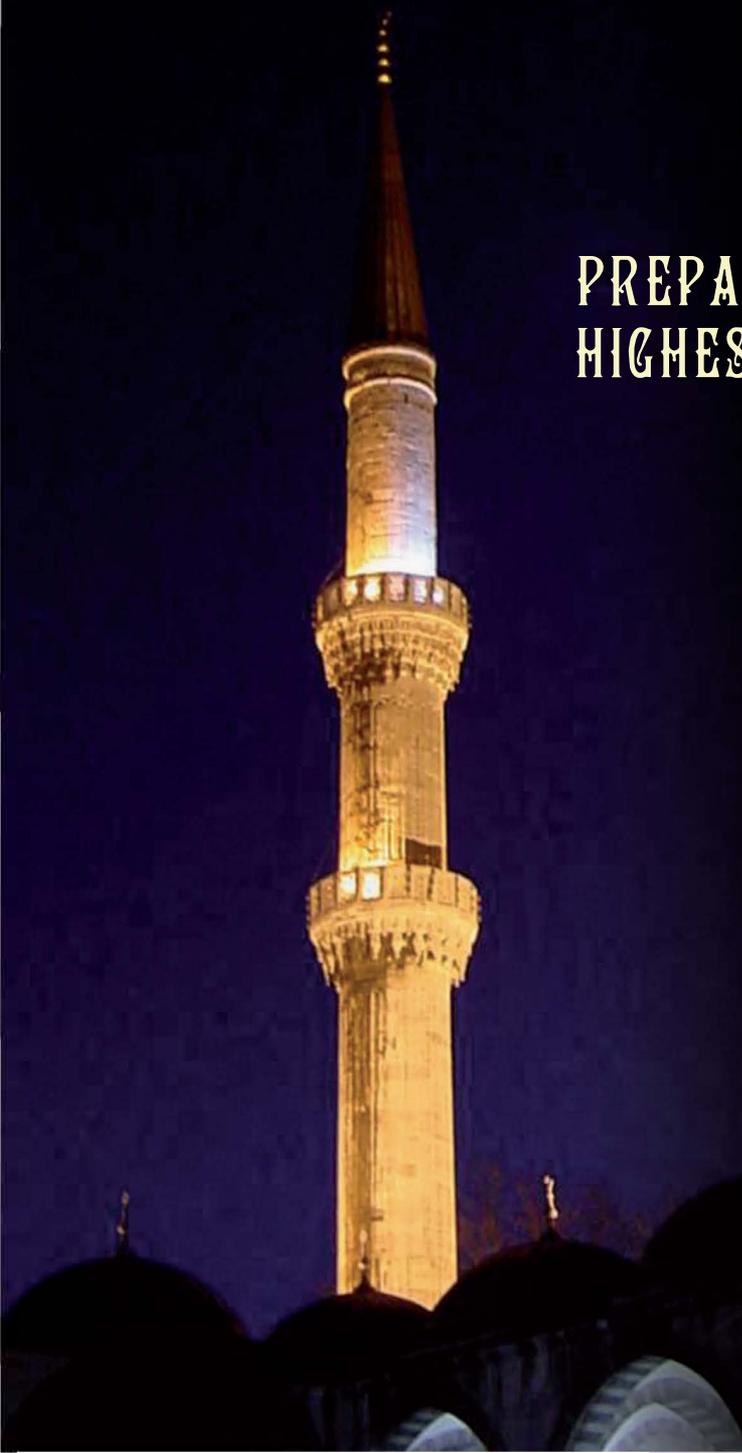
PREPARING THE SOUL TO THE
HIGHEST SPIRITUAL STATIONS

OSMAN NURI EFENDI
THE STORY OF THE NEY

AHMET TASGETIREN
**TASAWWUF: AN EDUCATION OF
TAWHEED**

ABDULLAH SERT
THE LAST DAYS OF MUSA EFENDI

JACQUELINE V. FRANK
**TAWHEED, ALLAH,
THE SOLE THE UNIQUE**





Dear Readers,

"Here is a Message for mankind: let them take warning therefrom and let them know that He is (no other than) One Allah: let men of understanding take heed." (Ibrahim, 14/52)

Because Tawheed is the foundation of Islam, setting it apart from other religions, this issue has been dedicated to Allah's Oneness, or Tawheed.

As written in the pages of the scriptures of the other monotheistic religions, the message of every Prophet from the very beginning was that "Your God is One God"; Islam does not differ in this message, not to the slightest degree.

Furthermore, in order to keep the iman (belief) of every Muslim fresh, it is recommended that for the sake of the heart and the peace of the ruh (spirit) one renews their faith regularly; this is one of the focuses of tafakkur (contemplation). So, to that end we have included many articles on this topic, examining it from various aspects, so that no matter your interest level or background you will be able to find something to refresh your faith.

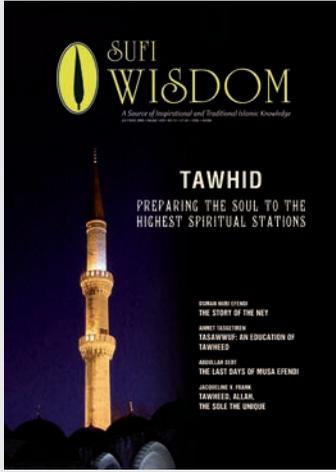
Our Teacher Osman Nuri Efendi writes on the subject of the steps to refine the heart and the stages on the path to perfection as he explains some of the writings of the great lover, Mawlana Jalaladdin Rumi.

Ahmet Tasgetiren also writes on the Tawheed and how it relates to tasawwuf, in that the source of tasawwuf is Allah and it calls us all to the continued remembrance of Allah, because He alone is our Lord.

In order to focus attention on the fact that Tawheed must be applied to the daily life of Muslims in all ways, Mustafa Sheikh's article discusses the necessity of combining sincerity with belief in Tawheed in order to create an effective tool against the nafs and to purify the heart.

Finally, we would like to turn the attention of our readers to the spiritual heart of this issue in an article by Abdullah Sert in which he recollects some of the recollections about the manners and behavior of our Grand Sheikh, Musa Topbas Efendi.

As always, we hope you enjoy reading this issue and May Allah grant you happiness and peace in your life in this world, and the next life. Amen!



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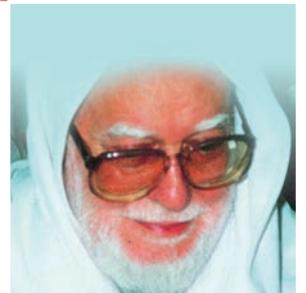
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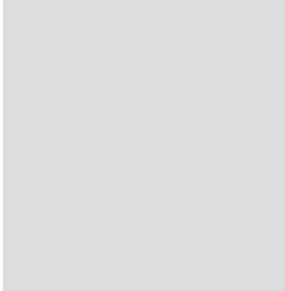
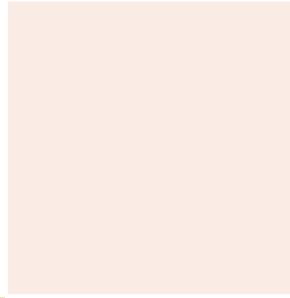
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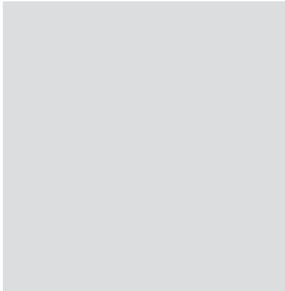
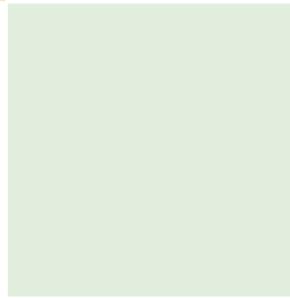
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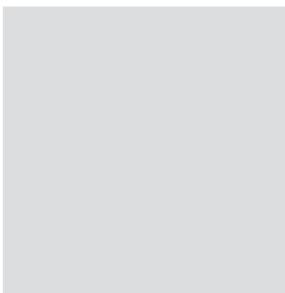


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The Story Of The Ney

The Ney (flute) that is mentioned in Rumi's stories in fact represents the perfect human. The stages a reed goes through from the reed bed to becoming a ney portrays the maturation of a human being, a representation of the steps of purifying the nafs (lower self) and refining the heart.

In the same way that the ney is severed from the reed bed and this separation causes it to lament in pain, the perfect human, who has come from the realm of souls and enters a body made out of clay, known as the cage made of flesh, yearns for the original realm. Through this yearning a human being goes through ascetic discipline (riyazat), meditation (murakaba), reflection (tafakkur), divine love and tribulations until they reach maturity and find the level of perfection.

The ney that is removed from the reed bed is carefully cut by the craftsman. Then the inside is removed and the reed is left to dry. Later, holes are burnt through and rings are placed at the top and bottom. After being left in this state for some time, when the neyzen breathes into it, the ney starts to send out beautiful tunes, as well as wonder and wisdom, in accordance with the listener's spiritual level.

A human being goes through similar stages on the path to perfection. Perfect humans are chosen from among other humans according to certain criteria. One of the most important attributes of a prophet is that they are "chosen". They are cleansed of mortal bonds and preoccupations through



various methods of nurturing. On the path of special religious training they face hardship, misfortune and trials, which are necessary to gain patience, and they mature by following the path of "revelation".

Finally, they become instruments in which Allah's art, wisdom and might are manifested. People yield to the spiritual wisdom that emanates from them and they start to proceed in the direction of unity with the beloved.

A figurative story is narrated in the Mawlawi sources about the first appearance of the ney, this instrument that shares the same fate as humans, and its use:

The Prophet (pbuh) entrusted a drop of the ocean of secrets and wisdom that had been bestowed upon him by Allah Almighty to Sayyidina Ali, who is known as the Gate of Knowledge, strictly warning him not to reveal these secrets.

Ali could not bear what had been entrusted to him and was crushed by its great weight. He took to the desert. He revealed what he had kept inside him down a black well. In time, the well flowed with water. Reeds started to grow in the water that overflowed from the well.

A shepherd, realizing that these reeds made beautiful sounds when the wind blew through them, cut one and made a ney.

The sound coming from this ney is so heartfelt and emotional that everyone fell in love with the deep, poignant and soulful tunes. They started laughing and crying at the sound. Soon this shepherd's reputation spread and the Arab tribes started to gather around to listen to him. (Ahmed Eflaki, Stories of the Wise, V II, 440)

Hence, Mawlana's Mathnawi is the written form of these pleasant tunes and the mystery they carry within them. For this reason, those who read the Mathnawi find themselves forced to admit that as the meanings deepen, they carry multifold mysteries and wisdom.

Mawlana, who observed the profound ocean contained in a small drop, exhibits this to us in accordance with our capacity, and there are great seas and even oceans in these verses, each of which is considered to be a small drop.

Although the Mathnawi carries deep meanings and wisdom, Mawlana is lamenting the fact that he cannot explain his secrets as he wishes. In this direction, contemplating the first recipient of Mathnawi, he says: "I wrote this Mathnawi for Husameddin!"

Another time, pointing out the infinity of Allah's knowledge and wisdom, he says: "I had the Mathnawi written down as an abstract. If I were to further interpret the mysteries and the wisdom, forty donkeys would have difficulty carrying them."

To explain the inability of most humans to grasp the spiritual meanings in this work, a sage who dearly loved Mawlana said:

"We listened to the cries of Rumi's ecstasy. It is impossible to see the depths of the sea of passion that he dove into.

We only see what has come to the surface from the depths. We only acquire the cries of love that he has uttered, but not his love. It is this alone that we are trying to explain while we lisp. Only Rumi has been able to dive into the sea of peace. We are left with the sounds that come through the storm of his ecstasy. Alas! We think he is Mawlana!"

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THE SPIRITUAL ECHO OF THE PERFECT HUMAN ACCORDING TO MATHNAWI

The crying of the ney

Mathnawi: "If you were to pour the sea of sustenance into a pitcher, how much would it hold? Only as much as it is capable of... that is, the portion of every creature that has been preordained for them alone...." (v.1, 20)

It is Allah Almighty Who preordains a sufficient sustenance for all creatures. It is absurd to be ambitious in securing this sustenance. In a hadith it is said: "Like death, sustenance will find the person." (ibn Hibbân, Sahih, VIII, 31). This means no creature's life will come to an end before it uses up the sustenance that has been preordained for it. Like other things that are predestined by Allah Almighty, sustenance is connected to means; effort and action are a necessity, a responsibility and are mandatory in reaching these means. But to think that the result, which is the sustenance, is from oneself is great heedlessness. Means produce results according to their relevance. Therefore, the wise human being knows that sustenance comes from Allah Almighty Who has created the means; it comes through His predestination, not through the means that one is pursuing.

He is the One Who sends sustenance. We should seek the Razzak who send us this sustenance. In the Qur'an it is said: "...We ask not of thee a provision: We provide for thee..." (Tâhâ, 20/132)

Mathnawi: "The pitchers of the eyes of the covetous will never be replete. And if the mother of pearl is not content it will never be impregnated with pearls." (v.1, 21)

There is ambition in each and every creature, to varying degrees, but it is certainly there. If you give the same toy to two children, one will envy what the other has only to the degree of their innate inclination to envy. It is only possible to minimize this inclination through training the nafs. For this reason in the Qur'an it is said: "But those will prosper who purify themselves (purifying from foul inclinations)" (A'îâ, 87/14). The first condition of peace and felicity in society is to adhere to what Allah has preordained for us. This preordination

is a requirement of the destiny that is absolute and unconditional (Qadar-i Mutlak). Destiny is an ocean of secrets. It is not possible to be aware of all the wisdom that is hidden within. So it is a necessity to submit to Allah's will and to have faith in the wisdom of this will. Those who cannot obtain this state will be ruined in the whirls of the pit of hell, where all sorts of desires overflow.

Mathnawi: "The person who is relieved from the sensuality and selfishness of his nafs and is freed from the shroud of the ego through divine love is entirely cleansed from covetousness, from all kinds of disgrace and ugliness." (v.1, 22)

Those who nurture their soul and reach the pleasure of iman are free from the worries of life and fortune. They become instruments and opportunities by which the Lord Almighty's love can be reached. But this is not a maturity that can be easily reached. Through patience, determination, worship, prayer and the struggle against the nafs, one needs to show constant perseverance. Even the earth is beautified with the blessings of spring because it bears the difficulties of winter. The mother of pearl is blessed with the happiness of the presence of the pearl in its bosom through this endeavor.

Mathnawi: "Our body which has been created from dirt rose to the skies through love and became sublime." (v.1, 25)

The human body belongs to the earth. In this respect it is no different from other beings in creation. Like all of creation, humans are created from the earth; they feed on what they can attain from the earth and they are a changed form of the earth. In the end they return to the earth and are eternalized. But our spiritual qualities belong to Allah Almighty. In a

verse in the Qur'an it is said: "...and breathed into him of My spirit..." (Hijr, 15/29; Sâd, 38/72). The Lord Almighty has bestowed His servants with certain capabilities and inclinations so that they can be elevated towards Him. Those who can eliminate perverse, human tendencies and enter the path of perfection start to advance towards a divine union.

Rumi said:

"Do not care for nurturing the body in excess. In the end, it is a sacrifice that will be given to the earth. You nurture your soul! It is your soul that will be honored and reach noble places."

"Give little of the oily or sweet things to your body, because those who feed on it to excess fall into the wills of the nafs and are disgraced in the end."

"Give your soul spiritual nourishment. Give it mature thinking, fine judgment and spiritual provision so it can go to its destination as an eternal traveler that is strong and powerful."

Mathnawi: Those who are only familiar with their own language and soul would be speechless and silent when removed from the people who understand their expressions and resolve, even if they were to know hundreds of languages and tunes." (v.1, 28)

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Talk to people according to their level of understanding" (Bukhari, Ilm, 49). Regardless of their nobility, words and expressions that are beyond the listener's comprehension are of no benefit. From this point of view, people who witness the deep and refine feelings that come from the soul must also be people of the soul, because being with people who are immersed in the corruption of sins blinds the eyes of the body and the soul. Words that are spent on senseless and

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ignorant people are wasted. These are like rare flowers that bloom on the edges of sidewalks, condemned to be trampled and perish.

Although Mawlana took a path that would bring his great work of the Mathnawi into existence so that it would be beneficial to both the common and the distinguished (havas) people, he said: "I will die longing for a man of insight..."

On the other hand, there has to be mutual love for any teaching to bring about the desired outcome in the respondent. Love is such a magical instrument of influx that through that channel, without even turning to speech, it can pass from one soul to another. It is for this reason that Sufis use love for all kinds of teaching and guidance.

True friendship for the sake of Allah consists of two separate bodies living in one heart. In other words, friends become two hands that wash each other. Just like the muhajiruun and the ansar...

Mathnawi: "When the freshness of the rose has gone and the rose garden has entered the season of fall, the beautiful tunes and laments of the nightingale will not be heard." (v.1, 29)

A human's affection for another and the fruit of this affection, which is tender conversation, resembles the encounter of the rose and the nightingale. In general, words and thoughts that are uttered by humans are suitable to the listener's aptitude and spiritual needs. The one talking is the heart, while the tongue acts as translator. Expressions are almost like a heartsick tune from the ney. The listener is the person who is playing the ney. If the person playing the ney is an amateur, then that

assembly is similar to a rose garden that has reached the season of fall.

Mathnawi: "Those who distance themselves from their mortal being and are free of the selfish nafs, namely those who are familiar with and are attached to immortals, are the fortunate ones. Pity those who are living but sitting with the dead and are spiritually dead themselves ..." (v.1, 1513)

Lord Almighty says: "O ye who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true (in word and deed)" (Taubah, 9/119).

True happiness is possible through reinforcing high morality, which is attained through fayz and the spirituality that emanates from the souls of people who are close to Allah. Their graceful demeanor, through togetherness, which is a prerequisite of affection, emanates and matures people who pass from one soul to another. The Companions of the Prophet are the best examples of this. These people, whose past was full of savagery, burying their daughters alive, not caring for justice or law, reached the highest peaks of morality and virtue through their love and closeness to Prophet Muhammad. In degrees, people who are close to Allah are all in the same situation.

This situation is expressed in Rumi's language as such:

"O Friend!... Do not despair because you have not reached the beloved Prophet and are not able to reap similar benefits... Be with the faithful who are his followers, you will receive your sustenance according to your aptitude and inclination."

The greatest humanitarian disaster is going against Allah's order "...sit not thou in the company of those who do wrong!" (An'âm, 6/68) and being with

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those who live under the influence of their nafs. Feeling affection towards these people is the cause of a devastating loss that occurs through the reflection of all kinds of negativism from heart to heart.

Those who are always with the virtuous become one of them and those who are with the oppressors become oppressors and partners to their oppression and crime. Mawlana explains this truth in another place as follows:

"Keep company with people of spirituality, receive kindness and benevolence as well as spiritual strength; stay young, robust and healthy with divine love."

"This soul that is in the flesh, if it is unaware of love, is like a wooden sword in its sheath. As long as that wooden sword is in the sheath, it will be presumed worthy, useful; when it is drawn from its sheath it is only worth burning."

"If it is of wood, go and look for another sword. If it is of diamonds, then spring forward with joy. A diamond sword is the weapon of the saints. To see this is alchemy for you. It is a spiritual strength..."

"Whether you are a very hard stone or a piece of marble, if you find a man of soul, you will become a jewel, namely an emerald, a diamond. Place the love of those pure saints in your heart. Do not give your heart to anyone except to the love of the wise."

Mathnawi: "When the voice of love came to the dead, souls started fluttering; the dead raised their heads from the tombs of their bodies." (v.4, 840)

The Prophet and the saints are an elixir. With them hardened, lifeless souls are revived and invigorated.

Mathnawi: "O desirous human! Know this; the soul is the

greatest work of divine mercy. Other things are like shadows of this great work." (v.4, 1362)

"A river flows amongst the trees. In its clear waters you will see the reflection of the trees on both sides."

"The reflections in the water are imaginary gardens. The true gardens are within the soul, because the soul is the place of the divine gaze." (v.4, 1364-1365)

One should not forget that the heart is a place for the divine gaze, as according to a report Allah Almighty said: "The skies and the earths cannot contain me, save the heart of one of my believing servants." (Ajlûnî, Kashfu'l-Hafâ, II, 195)

Mathnawi: "Saints have such power bestowed upon them by the Lord Almighty that they turn the arrow, which has left the bow, from its route."

"When a saint is troubled regarding an incident that takes place, with the Lord's hand of power, he will close the door of reason that generated the incident." (v.1, 1669-1670)

The value and attainment possessed by the people who are close to Allah are described in a Hadith-i Qudsi as follows:

"Whoever is belligerent against my saintly servant, I will declare war against him. My servant cannot come closer to me with anything more delightful than the fard I have enjoined on him. My servant comes closer to me ceaselessly with the nawafil (that he adds to his fard) and at last I love him. When I love my servant I will become (as if I am) his tongue that talks, his heart that thinks, his ears that hear, his eyes that see, his hands that grasp and his feet that walk. I will give whatever he wants from me by all means,

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I will help him when he asks for help; I will protect him if he seeks protection in me..." (Bukhârî, Rikâk, 38) In another hadith the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said:

"There are some of Allah's servants who are neither messengers nor martyrs, but on the Day of Judgment the messengers and martyrs will look at them with a longing because of their status with their Lord."

The Companions of the Prophet asked: "Who are these and what kind of good deeds have they done? Let us know, O, Messenger of Allah, so we can show them affection and closeness."

The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) replied:

"These are such people that, in spite of not having any ties of family, trade or business, they love each other only for the sake of Allah. I swear by Allah that their faces are alight and they are upon radiant pulpits. They have no fear at a time when people are in fear, they are not sad at a time when people are sad." And he then read the following verses from the Qur'an:

"Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve; Those who believe and (constantly) guard against evil; For them are glad tidings, in the life of the present and in the Hereafter; no change can there be in the words of Allah. This is indeed the supreme felicity." (Yunus, 10/62-64) (Hakim, Mustadrak, IV, 170)

Mawlana comments on these verses:

"Allah sent messengers and saints to the world as a mercy. For this reason they will give good council to people without fail. For those who do not take heed they pray and say: 'O Allah! Have mercy on these; do not close the door of benevolence on them!' Come to your senses and listen to the advice of the saints. Listen and break free from fear and sadness, find spiritual comfort and reach security!"

"Before losing the opportunity and falling into doubt, hold onto the perfect human who has shunned the deceits of this passing world and completely surrendered himself to Allah so that you will be free of the seditions of these corrupt times that are close to the end!"

"The words of the saints resemble a river that is lucid, pure and full of an elixir. While there is still an opportunity, drink from it heartily so that spiritual flowers and roses will blossom in your soul."

Mathnawi: "Lord Almighty disclosed His names and attributes to Adam. But, it was through Adam that He proclaimed these names to others." (v.1, 1943)

"Harvest Allah's light whether through Allah or through a perfect human. Drink the wine of love whether from a jar or from a goblet." (v.1, 1944)

"The one who has seen the candle that takes its light from another has indeed seen the actual candle. Thus, if that candle's light is transferred to a hundred candles and hundreds of candles are lit by that candle, the person who sees the light of the last candle will have actually seen the first candle. Whether you take the light of hidaya, the light of love, from the last candle, or whether you take it from him, the candle of life, there is no difference between them." (v.1, 1947-1949)

On account of the reasons listed above, the title *warathatu'l anbiya* (the succession of the prophethood) is given to those special people who, by developing their comprehension and perception, have reached a delicate understanding and a joy of iman, have attained perfection within their soul along with their outer appearance through spiritual manifestations in the way of ascetism and taqwa.

For those who have not seen the Prophet and his followers, people close to Allah who are working to eliminate the impediments that arise from their nafs on the way of reaching Allah Almighty are actual and concrete examples that can be followed. The exemplary lifestyles of these sages and their guidance are the ultimate manifestations of prophetic morals that reach beyond time.

Because they are like magnets, a core of attraction for those who have iman and aptitude, they are hubs of love and kindness for all segments of society, for they have been endeared to all by Allah Almighty. As stated in the following verse:

"As for those who believe and do right actions, the All-Merciful will bestow His love on them." (Maryam, 10/96)

The words of the saints resemble a river that is lucid, pure and full of an elixir. While there is still an opportunity, drink from it heartily so that spiritual flowers and roses will blossom in your soul.



TASAWWUF: AN EDUCATION OF TAWHEED

*Live as if you see
Allah... Live within
the consciousness that
He sees us, although
we do not see Him...*



Let us start with the following statement: Tasawwuf is education in divine unity. Then, let us go to the beginning of the subject with the aim of returning later to this statement.

The main task of the human being is to know their Lord, to find their Lord. Allah created the human being for this purpose and He created them in a form which is capable of reaching this goal. The human being's life is an examination of this. Even though the human being objects to this task, there is an internal questioning in the depth of their nature. Indeed, the human being focuses on this internal process. In other words, the questions, "Where did I come from, where am I going?" are the main questions asked by the human being and what these questions are searching for is the secret of "existence". When one searches for the secret of Existence, the existence of the Creator must be the end point. The statement from the Holy Qur'an that: "Hearts find satisfaction only in the remembrance of Allah" is a divine description of the nature of the human being. (Ra'd,13/28) Either they will be able to attain satisfaction by finding Allah, by meeting with Him, or they will hopelessly struggle in this investigation.

In this matter the Creator has not left the human being without help; He has sent guides. The religion and the prophets who were sent with the religion are the guides and they guide human beings to the correct path.

The Creator does not want the human being to know just that He exists, but also desires that we are aware that He is the one and only Creator. It is obvious that the idea of the division of power against the eternal harmony of creation will not be able to satisfy the human mind. There cannot be numerous gods; such a situation would result in chaos. There can only be one God. The creator of the universe is one God and He sets the order. It is He who wants human beings to harmonize with this order. He also demands that His "Oneness" be recognized and that He be and respect (worship).

This is why the revealed religions are the religions of divine unity and why Islam is a religion of divine unity.

All revelation-based religions can be called by the name "Islam" and they all preach divine unity. All prophets speak of divine unity. In the Qur'an, when the stories of past prophets are being told, it is emphasized that the message of every prophet who came at different times is "to believe that there is no god but Allah – La ilahe illallah". The main tissue or the root cell of celestial religions is Divine unity. It is for this reason that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) educated the believers in Divine Unity during almost the entire Meccan period.

However, the formation of the consciousness of divine unity and the process of becoming an established faith requires education; the human mind will not abandon following an Almighty power, but they can become confused about

which power should be followed. In fact, the same message of Prophets who came at different times show that the human mind diffuses over time and deviates from its course.

The human mind is inclined to perceive many power centers, starting with their own soul, as a being that is to be respected. As the balance of respect is lost, these lesser objects can be worshipped or deified.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has clearly presented Islam to mankind as the final divine religion of unity, refreshing the the consciousness of mankind, saving it from confusion, and reuniting humanity.

At the times when Islam first represented Divine unity to mankind, people worshipped the idols which were made of wood, stone, or even sometimes dough. Even the divine unity religion of Prophet Jesus had become impure; Prophet Jesus had started to be seen as "the son of Allah". At the same time, Judaism had deviated from the path of Prophet Moses with Allah being reduced from being the Lord of the entire universe to a "national god".

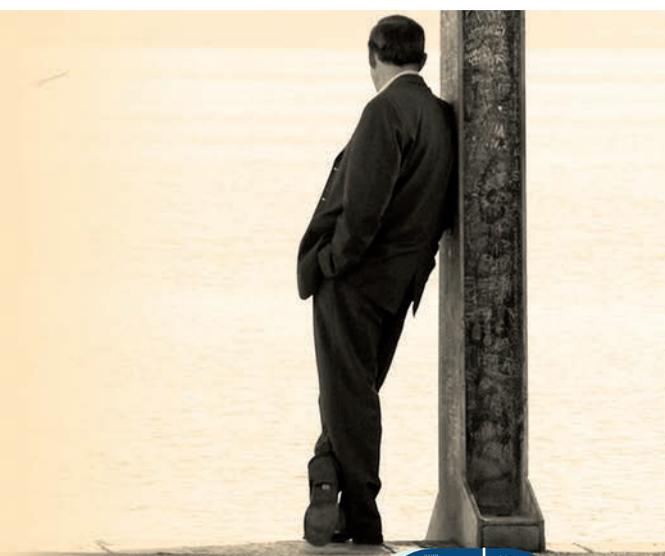
Minds were totally confused.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was charged to deliver a "consciousness of Divine unity" to all of humanity, starting from Mecca.

This meant a new education for humanity.

Islam forbids this inclination to deify things other than Allah, recognizing it as a weakness of humanity, and strongly recommends that we

The questions, "Where did I come from, where am I going?" are the main questions asked by the human being and what these questions are searching for is the secret of "existence".



There are some things which Islam calls "hidden polytheism". These are conscious or unconscious inclinations which, in essence, put the will of some people or things before that of Allah.



protect ourselves from such actions.

Polytheism, which means attributing a partner to the Creator, is probably the most ridiculous explanation of existence, one that trespasses the laws of the Creator. The human, stone, tree, sun, moon, wind... all are seen as having a power. This is polytheism, however in Islam it is forbidden to accept such things as partners to the Creator.

Additionally, there are some things which Islam calls "hidden polytheism". These are conscious or unconscious inclinations which, in essence, put the will of some people or things before that of Allah. For example, when worshipping Allah, people may perform some actions to appease other powers; this is seen as "hypocrisy-affectation" and it is forbidden, in the same way that desiring others to admire one's religiosity, fasting to impress others, giving charity to gain a good reputation or attending a holy war so that others will admire one's bravery have all been forbidden.

These are the feelings that descend on the emotional life of human beings. Human being can glorify their own soul; they can act in a way to please it. The Qur'an mentions human beings "who make their own desires a deity." (Furqan, 25/43)

This means that we can be inclined to being misled.

The construction of a personality that concentrates all their abilities on a point from which to worship the Almighty Creator, bypassing these inclinations... This is the result of education.

The concept of Divine unity must become part of the personality in the human being through education, and then it will be instinctively manifested by attitudes. This personality is manifested instinctively, namely, as a reflex, automatically, without any force, or without allowing intellectual deviations at times of weakness or sudden shocks.

Human beings should somehow be able to realize this. In other words, people should find the way to construct their own personality in this form. Indeed, this is necessary for every believer. This is what the Qur'an stipulates with the expression "entering faith into the hearts", in

which faith reaches its real meaning after entering the circle of Islam. (Hujurat, 49/14)

Tasawwuf ensures this. It realizes that this is the secret of being a Muslim; namely, knowing Allah and realizing that He is the one and only Creator...

Moreover, tasawwuf comprehends that the realization of being a real Muslim can be possible only if one does not forget Allah.

Normally, a Muslim would follow such a path with a search. Tasawwuf is a path that is created by this same search. Here what is important is caring about knowing Allah, about being close to Him, about not forgetting Him. Even if this was not called tasawwuf, Muslims would have created paths like this. In fact, this is the correct Islamic awareness:

-Allah exists

-Allah is the one and only Creator, without any partner and alike

- Allah is close to us. He is closer to us than our jugular vein. Allah is with us wherever we are. Allah sees us.

This is the awareness.

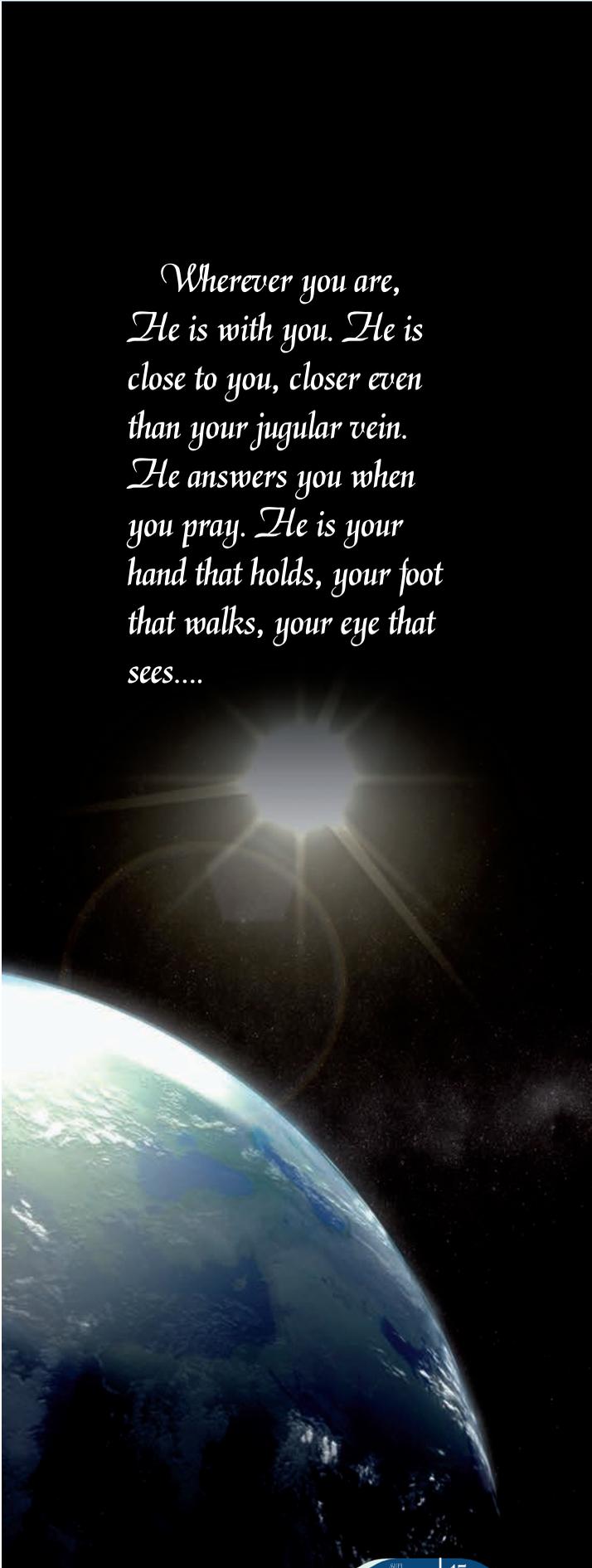
This must be an awareness and it cannot happen by itself. The education of Islamic society by Prophet Muhammad during the Meccan period shows that how important the consciousness of divine unity is, how important the consciousness of being with Allah is, how important His being close to us is, how important His seeing us is, and how important it is that none of our actions' are secret from Him are. It also shows how important an education of the personality is if this personality is to be made into a human being.

How does tasawwuf carry out this education??

It is believed that tasawwuf has established a method of education that is related to the construction of personality based on the path of the Prophet of Allah (pbuh).

Tasawwuf educates the mind, the heart, and our attitudes.

The human will become clear, definite, and concentrated... Now, one desire, desires it with great love. You have passed the examination of worldly life, and have decided to fulfill its requirements.



*Wherever you are,
He is with you. He is
close to you, closer even
than your jugular vein.
He answers you when
you pray. He is your
hand that holds, your foot
that walks, your eye that
sees....*

The message of "run to Allah" has sent a shock to your heart and you have replied "But where else can I go?" and have set off. You will expend efforts in your mind, heart and attitudes so that you can "stand constantly on the path of Allah".

This means the purification of cognition from *masiwa*, the influence of all things other than Allah, in terms of worshipping, and its reorganization with consciousness of divine unity. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee alone we ask for help.

This means the kneading of the heart with the consciousness of divine unity and togetherness. Wherever you are, He is with you. He is close to you, closer even than your jugular vein. He answers you when you pray. He is your hand that holds, your foot that walks, your eye that sees....

This means the forming of your attitudes within the consciousness that Allah sees you. Live as if you see Allah... Live within the consciousness that He sees us, although we do not see Him...

This means transforming the word of divine unity (*La ilahe ilallah*- There is no god but Allah) into the tissue of the heart and mind.

This means transforming sincerity into the tissue of personality.

This means understanding the closeness of Allah to the human being.

This means keeping in mind that Allah is always with us...

This is the awareness of the temporality of this world, the awareness that neither your

birth nor your life are under your control, that you can be called at anytime back to Allah and it is the discipline of transforming the awareness that the real life is the eternal life after death.

This is reinforced with Holy Prophet (pbuh), those who follow him, and the saints of Allah. This is the path of thousands of prophets, of Prophet Muhammad Mustafa, of the Holy Companions, and of the saints of Allah. This means taking heart from the consciousness that you are walking on such a holy path.

In this way you find companions who can be with you on this path and you will feed one another in terms of spiritual lives.

In this way you will know yourself on the path.

In this way you will promise to fulfill your education on the path. You promise the leaders and companions on the path. It should be mentioned that on such a path, leaders and followers differ from one another before the laws of Allah.

Everyone is in an examination until the last breath. In fact, this is transformed into a responsibility that is as complicated as knowing the laws of Allah. At the same time, love, the fear of Allah and anxiety increase. Maybe hope does as well.

Tasawwuf means seeing all of these as a life discipline instead of seeing them as daily tasks.

To sum up, tasawwuf means the effort, the endeavor, the longing and the enthusiasm of being a good Muslim.

Tasawwuf comprehends that the realization of being a real Muslim can be possible only if one does not forget Allah.



Ikhlas and the Assimilation of Tawhid

Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal was once dragged in front of the governor of Baghdad after Friday prayer for the crime of heresy: he had refused to sanction the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the created Qur'an that had been imposed by the humanist caliph al-Ma'mun, choosing to uphold the belief of orthodoxy, i.e., that the speech of Allah, the Exalted, is uncreated and eternal. His punishment, on this occasion, was a hundred lashes. The person charged with the order began to lash our Imam, may Allah shower him with His mercy. With every strike of the whip, the only sounds audible on the pure tongue of the Imam was the calm repetition *lâ ilâha illa-llâh, lâ ilâha illa-llâh*. Upon the sixtieth strike, the Imam's pure body, cut in several places and bleeding, could no longer sustain the cruel punishment and he fell unconscious.

He was carried back to his home by his students, who were horrified by the way their beloved teacher had been treated. But they were perhaps more shocked when, as soon as the Imam had regained consciousness, the first words to come from him were: 'Have you all prayed 'Asr?' The students wondered how the Imam could be altogether oblivious of the state in which his now heavily marked body was in. 'Help me to make ablution, then prop me up and face me towards Mecca so that I might pray to my Lord.'

When Imam Ahmad had completed his prayer, his students said to him: 'We are amazed. How is it that, while we were looking on in tears at you being lashed, you were all the while smiling?' The Imam responded: 'As for you all, you could only see the hand of the person charged with lashing me; I, however, could only see the hand of my Lord!'

Imam Ahmad had experienced a moment of Lordly unveiling (tajalliyya rabbiniyya), one of the fruits of spiritual realisation (haqîqa) – in this case, the realization that Allah singularly causes all that occurs and that He is the Determiner of all affairs.

One can read in Islamic hagiographical literature many such stories of those who have been graced with unveilings of this kind and who thus receive much inspiration. What is important for us, however, is to know how we might also be recipients of the manifestations of Divine Oneness, especially at a time when we are in greater need than ever of certainty (yaqîn), reliance (tawakkul) and contentment (ridâ).

To begin with, we should know something about the meaning of the word tawhîd as used in the Arabic tongue. Tawhîd, a derivate gerund of the root W-H-D, denotes the act of 'proclaiming the Oneness of the Divine'. Proclamation, in the

first instance, is the Believer's utterance of the testimony of faith 'There is no deity but Allah'.

Far from being a simple informative clause, the kalimat al-tawhîd has a profound affect upon the soul, preparing it for its ascendancy to the highest spiritual stations. Imam Ahmad Rumi Al-Akhisari, the 17th century Ottoman jurist and Halveti sheikh, explains in *The Assemblies of the Pious [Majâlis al-abrâr]*: 'The best form of remembrance (dhikr) according to prophetic tradition is [the saying], lâ ilâha illa-llâh.

It is necessary that the worshipper who is of sound mind occupies themselves with this formula in order that their heart can find contentment, and so that they can prepare themselves for [receiving] knowledge of God, the Exalted.' (Majlis 1, fol. 3)

The second form of proclamation is that of the limbs, when a believer acts in accordance with the Divine Imperative, undertaking what they are duty-bound to do and desisting from what has been prohibited. It is through this proclamation that the believer demonstrates to his fellows in faith that he is indeed a person of religion.

Now, if a Believer hopes to be graced with the sort of Divine manifestation that a friend

Far from being a simple informative clause, the kalimat al-tawhîd has a profound affect upon the soul, preparing it for its ascendancy to the highest spiritual stations.



of Allah is likely to enjoy, much more is required of them than just the two outward forms of proclamation already spoken of: they must also be someone who has assimilated tawhîd within themselves, and it is this which we might call the proclamation of the heart.

The process of assimilation can only occur through ikhlas, meaning sincerity, about which the Qur'an on several occasions mentions in reference to Allah's true worshippers: 'And call upon Him, making your devotion sincere' (A'raf, 7/29); 'And they have been commanded no more than this: To worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true [in faith]' (Bayyinah, 98/5).

Sincerity is, in part, a process of divestiture: one must become detached from the inclinations of the ego and remove all worthless cares; thereafter, one must focus all attention on pleasing Allah, the Exalted, and undertake all actions for Him alone. Sincerity might be seen as the nexus between the subjective proclamation of tawhid, which emanates from the Believer, and the objective manifestation of tawhid, which Allah discloses through visions and illumination to whomever He wills from among His worshippers. Doubtless it was Imam Ahmad's sincerity to his Lord – his suppression of his ego and his total commitment and focus on his Creator – which led to his experience of illumination described above.

The discipline of tasawwuf, or Sufism, has developed in order to teach the believer in a methodical way how they can attain various states of perfection, sincerity being amongst the most important. If one does not work to perfect within themselves these states, they can never reach true realization of the Oneness of Allah.

This draws our attention to the essential connection that exists between tasawwuf and tawhid and also goes some way to explain the words of Imam Malik, may Allah be pleased with him, who believed that tasawwuf is a necessary part of the curriculum of every student of knowledge: 'Whoever learns knowledge (fiqh) without learning tasawwuf will fall into heresy; whoever learns tasawwuf without knowledge will fall into sin; whoever combines between the two

The process of assimilation can only occur through ikhlas, meaning sincerity, about which the Qur'an on several occasions mentions in reference to Allah's true worshippers.



shall become realized.'

The Believer may gain experiential knowledge of Divine Oneness in various ways. Perhaps the best-known are Lordly visions and miracles (karâmât). But one should be on their guard, since visions and miracles are not necessarily Lordly, and may be experienced by anyone who has exerted themselves in spiritual activity, whether they be Muslim or not. Any such spiritual experience which has not been achieved because of an observance of the Sharî'a, or which does not point unambiguously to the Oneness of Allah is likely to be nothing more than self-deceit. Imam Ahmad al-Rumi explains:

'It may be that illumination and [the experiencing of] abnormal phenomena are achieved by monks and others who busy themselves with intense spiritual activity, despite acting [upon] falsehood and holding corrupt creeds. This is because [Allah], the Exalted, has made spiritual exercise the instrument for polishing the hearts which, in turn, facilitates illumination, the experiencing of abnormal phenomena, and other such things. None of this, however, is an indication of His pleasure, the Exalted, since the cause is evil.

'It is clearly understood that abnormal phenomena are not always miracles (mu'jiza) [of Prophets] or miracles (karama) [of the Righteous]; they may also occur as modes of self-deceit (istidrâj). Whenever [the abnormal phenomenon] occurs at the hands of a person who is misguided in action or creed, then it is judged to be istidraj and not a karama. This is since karamat are manifestations of abnormal phenomena at the hands of the Righteous who are well-known as such.

'This criterion is cautionary and aims at excluding istidraj which is [defined] as 'a manifestation or abnormal phenomenon appearing at the hands of one who is wretched', such as the anti-Christ (Dajjal), the Pharaoh (Fir'awn) or every ignorant person who is both misguided and misleading.

Unnatural phenomena manifest at the hands of the wretched just as they do at the hands of the Righteous. Whatever is manifested at the hands of the one who lives by the Sharî'a is a cause for them to increase in their struggle to [perform acts of] worship; whereas, whatever is manifest at the hands of one who does not live by the Sharî'a is a cause for them to increase in distance [from Allah] and self-deceit'. (Majlis 1, fol. 4)



*One must become detached
from the inclinations of the ego
and remove all worthless cares;
thereafter, one must focus all
attention on pleasing Allah, the
Exalted, and undertake all actions
for Him alone*

The believer who is constant in striving to perfect their actions and attain sincerity should not consider experiences of Divine Oneness to be anything but a good sign. There is a caveat: such experiences must not be a cause for complacency; rather, as Imam Ahmad al-Rumi states, they should be a motivation and a catalyst for the Believer to increase in their striving.

We end with the words of the Prophet, prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, who once gave advice to Haritha, may Allah be pleased with him, after being informed of the latter's experiences of Divine Oneness. Let us, then, take inspiration from his words:

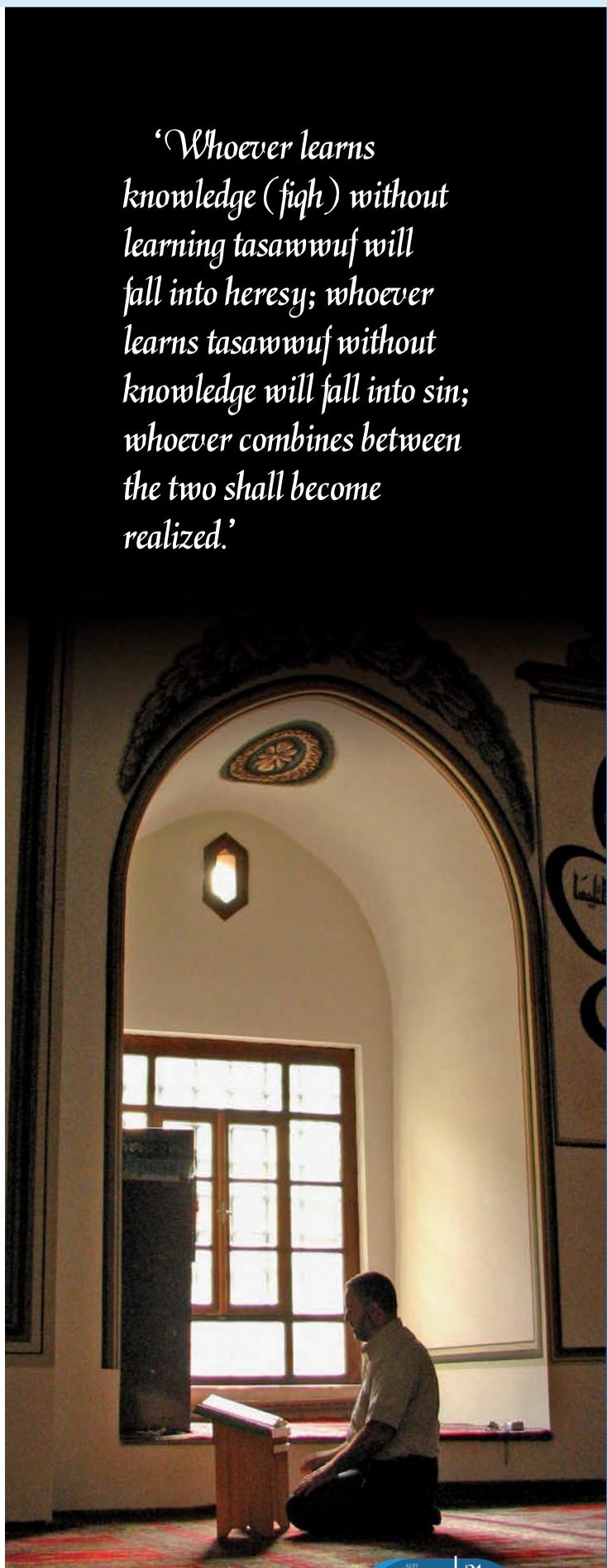
One morning, the Prophet asked Haritha about the state in which he had arisen. Haritha said: 'I have woken up a true Believer!' The Prophet asked: 'Examine what you say, for everything has an essence; what is the essence, then, of your belief?' Haritha replied: 'I have detached myself from the dunya such that its gold and its mud are equal in my sight. Now, it is as if I can see in front of my very eyes the people of Heaven enjoying the pleasures of Heaven; and it is as if I can see the people of the Fire being punished by its tortures; and it is as if I can see the Throne of my Lord with total clarity. And this is why I continue to stand up at night in prayer and why I continue to thirst during the day.' The Prophet patted Haritha on his back and said: 'You have attained realization so hold fast [to what you are doing].'

O Allah, we know that all people are doomed except for those with knowledge, and that the people of knowledge are doomed except for those who act upon their knowledge and that those who act upon their knowledge are doomed except for the sincere ones.

O Allah, help us to attain sincerity in all of our acts of worship, and strengthen our resolve by granting us experiences of tawhîd, even in this life before the Hereafter. Amen!



'Whoever learns knowledge (fiqh) without learning tasawwuf will fall into heresy; whoever learns tasawwuf without knowledge will fall into sin; whoever combines between the two shall become realized.'



MUSA EFENDI LONGED TO PROSTRATE BEFORE ALLAH DURING THE LAST DAYS OF HIS ILLNESS

“Do you know what I yearn for?” he asked, quickly adding: “I miss prostration very much... What a great blessing it is to be able to prostrate.”



The human being is born into this world as a manifestation of divine providence. They are given the blessing of life, the duration of which is predestined, as well as the human will which makes it possible to make the most of this blessing. And before them, in the words of the Holy Qur'an lie two paths, one of gratefulness and the other of ungratefulness.

Only those who set on the path of gratefulness through the purity of their good deeds and praiseworthy virtues can lead a life cognizant of the wisdom, meaning and secrets behind their creation and thus reach the culmination of servanthood. A person who lives each and every moment of their life in careful observation of divine rules comes to achieve the state of ikhlas (sincerity and purity) and earn the friendship of their Lord. That is, Allah the Creator becomes a friend to those whom He created. And His servant is blessed with the friendship of Allah. The people who, with the boundless beauty of servanthood, have made their mark in the hearts of society and left an esteemed legacy for generations to come, people who are guides, are the first and foremost prophets; after them come the friends of Allah who follow in the footsteps of the prophets.

The late, honorable Musa Topbas Efendi (1917-1999) who is one of the myriad of friends of Allah who have illuminated our world of knowledge, gnosis and the heart, lived his life as if it were a blessing entrusted to him, as so many of his relatives and friends testify; he lived his life in

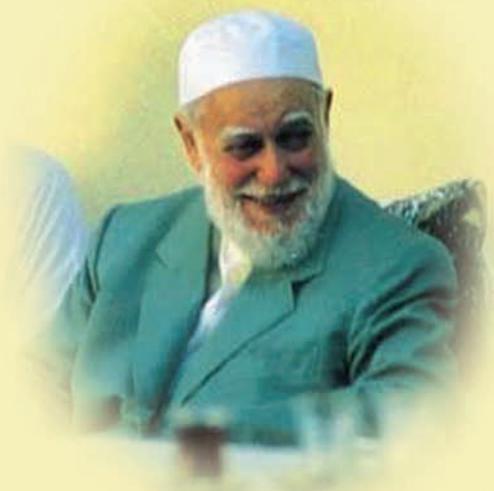
the most excellent manner and with an ardor and passion for being gathered unto Allah in the afterworld with absolute honor and loyalty. To relate a little bit about the late master's admirable Islamic sensitivity that was witnessed by his family members, who had the true happiness of living with him, they speak of traits like his reverence, propriety and self-humbling in his relationship with his Lord and his love, compassion, mercy, unconditional smiles and benevolence in his relationship with everybody else. Having been taught all these beautiful qualities, starting from an early age, the late Musa Efendi (k.s.) practiced them with utmost discipline throughout his entire life and served the people to guide them; all his efforts were aimed towards nurturing these excellent qualities in society.

Like a crystal chandelier hanging down from a magnificent dome and illuminating all the places it can reach, every aspect of our late master's life, including his family, his business, his lectures, his journeys and his worship of Allah reflected the exquisiteness of Islam. He would speak of how he had developed his habits of worship at a very early age: 'My late father Ahmet Hamdi Topbas Efendi, may Allah's compassion be upon him, used to always make sure that we woke up for the fajr prayer although we were very young at the time. He would

come to wake us up for the fajr prayer and call us softly saying 'Son, it's prayer time'. Then we would wake up, but every now and then, out of drowsiness, we would want to go back to sleep before getting up to pray; he would come again and wake us up gently once more. Sometimes this would be repeated for a second or third time. Although he was an imposing person who could be toughness when necessary, he would never be annoyed with us and always had this gentle attitude when waking us up for prayer. He would make sure that we made our ablutions first and then he would lead us in prayer. That is true compassion.¹

This discipline that Musa Efendi maintained in his acts of worship continued throughout his entire life along with his discipline of practicing other Islamic sensitivities. The relatives and friends who assisted him never saw any kind of carelessness or haste in his attitude, not once did he say, 'Let us finish this prayer at once'. Prayer is not some duty to be done in haste, but rather it is one of the main requisites of a Muslim's life. When our late master, may Allah's compassion be upon him, came to Istanbul, he used to have someone lead the prayer, even if it was only him and that person and he used to keep up his prayer in great peace and serenity and with utmost attention to propriety and to fulfilling ta'deel-e-arkaan ('the requisites

Like a crystal chandelier hanging down from a magnificent dome and illuminating all the places it can reach, every aspect of our late master's life, including his family, his business, his lectures, his journeys and his worship of Allah reflected the exquisiteness of Islam.



The way he held himself during prayer, the submission and reverence he displayed, his kneeling down and his prostration would fascinate people.



of praise') for each and every movement within the prayer. He used to utter 'alhamdulillah' as an expression of gratitude and thus imply that the strength with which one performs acts of worship is an exceptional divine blessing. The serene and grateful look that appeared on his face when saying 'alhamdulillah' was truly a precious sight that was worth watching.

During his travels he was careful to make his ablution when it was time and he would keep up the *naflah* (supererogatory) prayers without any hurry and in a state of serenity and propriety. His schedule of servanthood would never be delayed, but could be changed according to circumstances. When he was hospitalized after an operation, at night he would ask the time to whoever was staying with him and then he would say, 'so it is time for *tahajjud* (night prayer which was customary of Prophet Muhammad), you go and do your ablution and I'll make *tayammum* (wudu that is made when it is not possible to use water) and we'll pray and do our night *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah)'; if there was any time left, he would sometimes say, 'let us not go without our *sohbet* (spiritual companionship and conversation) even if we are at the hospital' and he would continue with the *sohbet* with one or two of his committed students who were there to accompany him. Hospital rooms where pain, loneliness and desperation are not uncommon would thus become places of spiritual healing.

Both the discipline that our late master practiced in his life of worship and the ever-apparent state of peace that he was in were always the envy of those who loved him and expressed these feelings. The late Osman Efendi, the clockman, may Allah's compassion be upon him, who lived in Medina as an expatriate, described the spiritual progress and the state of peace that he observed in the younger Musa Efendi in the following letter -the letter is dated 21st of Shawwal 1380 (according to the Islamic calendar)/1964 and Musa Efendi was around 45-46 years old at that time:

'To Our Honorable Brother, al-Hajj Musa Bey, Your mind is occupied not with people but with

their Creator. How fortunate you are, I must say...Whenever I remember that blessed face, that manner of sitting and that constant serenity of yours, I keep envying you in your absence. That state is something that was specially bestowed upon you. It is not granted to every servant. I ask you to please remember to mention us in your prayers. It is true that we are physically here (in Medina), but you are, spiritually, closer than us. Inshaallah, all your children and the whole Topbas family keep living in that state which is the desired remembrance of Allah, remembering Him much and constantly. It is such a state that even when one is doing one's tasks, they do not take a single breath in negligence of Allah. The blessed Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) cannot be surpassed by any saint...They too worked in a field or carried out business or served as soldiers with their swords. But their hearts would always remain perceptive and linked to their Lord. They were the guards of the Messenger of Allah, ready to sacrifice their lives for him; they were the lions of Allah. Each breath they took had a blessing and dignity about it. However, on the outside, nothing extraordinary could be seen, for they all lived simple lives. Neither their business nor their wealth got in the way of their remembrance of Allah.

May Allah bless you with boundless grace and may He give you eternal light. Only Allah knows how much you must have progressed spiritually since we last saw you. We wonder to what degree your manner of sitting, which we were very fond of, must have changed. That graceful body of yours, the way you sit on your knees must have turned into something even better, to a state that will make any onlooker

say it is befitting of an angel. Inshaallah, if we have enough left of our lifetime, we will be honored to see it one day. Five or six years ago, there was a man that came from India and I think he visited Istanbul too. He is a scholar, a soldier, a very good Sufi and the writer of many books. And at the moment he is in the process of writing another book. He is called Sayyid Hassan Nadawi.²

People who saw him pray in the Prophet's mosque used to watch him in awe as if he had came straight from the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and they used to take delight in just watching him from a distance until he completed his prayer. The way he held himself during prayer, the submission and reverence he displayed, his kneeling down and his prostration would fascinate people. He, too, must have progressed so much more throughout the years, just like we said of you. We do not know what he will look like if we are ever to see him again. Allah Almighty elevates those who show great endeavor in the path of His truth, from one spiritual state to another, and bestows upon them His boundless grace. If you were to pray together with Hassan Nadawi, you could only be distinguished by your face, for, you, Al-

Hajj Musa Topbas, are his equal in submission and propriety in carrying out your prayer. Talking of submission and reverence during prayer, I read the verse: 'The believers must (eventually) win through, those who humble themselves in their prayers' once more. If we interpret this verse to mean 'the believers win through and the believers are those who humble themselves in their prayers', then it can be concluded that humbling oneself and prayers are requisites of being a believer. Humbling oneself is the heart of prayer. Without it, one's prayer is like a dead

*Humbling oneself is
the heart of prayer.
Without it, one's
prayer is like a dead
body.*



body. If a believer can pray with their whole heart, then they can bring life to the rest of their time and their spiritual state during that time.'

Our late master hoped to cultivate these sensitivities which had been noticed in him and related to others by those who knew him, in his committed students whose spiritual training he led. His desire was for people to 'commit their hearts to Allah' and have a life of peace through remaining loyal to Allah with absolute ikhlas and serving people. He used to repeat that the friends of Allah stated that: 'acts of worship take one to heaven while propriety and reverence in acts of worship take one closer to Allah.'

He used to become extremely upset at the negligence and carelessness of parents with regard to their obligations towards developing habit of worship, serving people and leading an Islamic life in their children, and he used to always remind people of this fact.

'Today, many practicing Muslims show compassion of a worldly kind towards their children by not waking them up for prayer, worrying that they might lose some sleep. What a strange compassion this is...So much so that it renders a praying person unable to convey the same sense of spirit to their child. And as a result, both the parent's and the

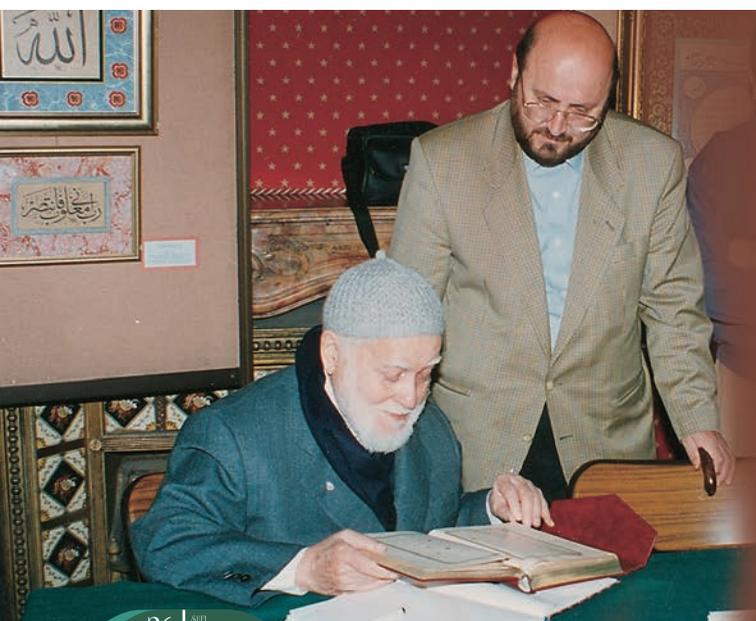
child's infinite life in the afterworld is tinged with disappointment. This sort of inappropriate compassion for our very transitory life in this world which makes one incapable of preparing one's child for the afterworld is colossal negligence, unforgivable ruthlessness.'

And in time, children who do not receive any spiritual training, Islamic knowledge or education grow up to be adults who cannot perform their duties of servanthood of Allah and who are negligent in the acts of worship. Some of them even have faulty faith.

Parents become upset when they realize this, but it is too late then. Only if they had not been negligent of their child earlier, the child would have been able to appreciate the divine importance of prayer and would not have spent their time without prostrating to Allah.

O people! You are the one that brings the child into this world; it is your duty to elevate them to the heavens too. Be as careful about your child's heart and spiritual life as you are about the health of their body, be compassionate and save the young one for Allah's sake. Do not let the child grow up to be debased.³

This friend of Allah, who lived his life of 83 years as a blessing trusted to him and in ikhlas, loyalty, service of others and peaceful servanthood, who enjoyed sharing every blessing bestowed upon him by His Lord with



To be able to live like him, is the utmost beauty that might be reflected on our hearts and lives from the profound spiritual world of Musa Efendi.

his fellow Muslim brothers and sisters in his final years was not able to stand up during prayer and therefore had to sit to pray; moreover, he was not able to be in the service of others as much as he had formerly been. Although he was grateful for this situation too, he once remarked about the beauty of being able to do all those things when he was sitting with his relatives and friends:

"Do you know what I yearn for?" he asked, quickly adding: "I miss prostration very much... What a great blessing it is to be able to prostrate."

On another day, he said: "I only wish my Lord had granted me a bit more health and more days so I could go to the remotest villages of our Anatolia and commit myself to the service of our brothers and sisters."

He was a servant who is never tired of serving others and who never thinks more highly of himself.

To be able to live like him, with a yearning for servanthood at the level of prostration, of self-humbling, of serving others in all sorts of ways, of spending benevolently for others, of smiling, that is, in short, of *ihsan* instead of delaying one's yearnings until the afterworld...Perhaps, this is the utmost beauty that might be reflected on our hearts and lives from the profound spiritual world of Musa Efendi.

On the ninth anniversary of his passing away, we commemorate him with all goodness and compassion. May his soul rest in peace.

Please recite surah al-fatihah once and surah al-ikhlas three times for his distinguished, dearest soul...

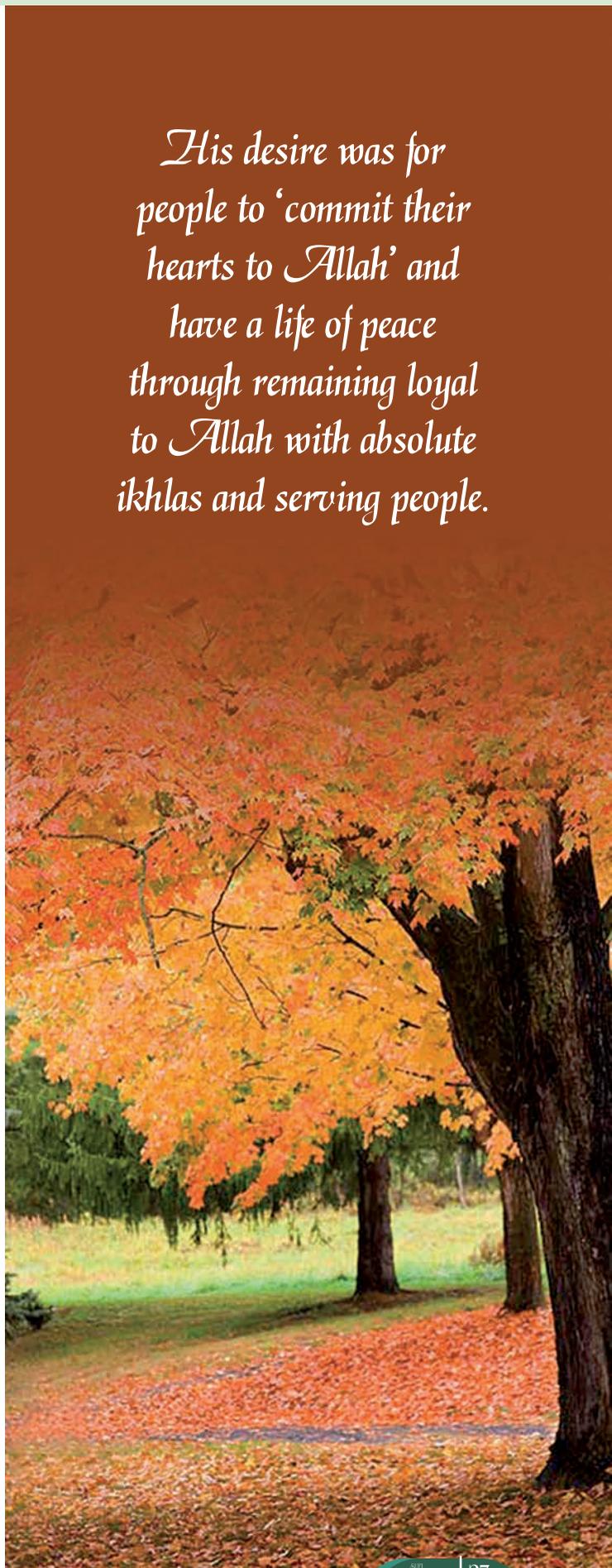
Footnotes:

1) Altinoluk Lectures 2, page 132

2) Abu'l Hassan Nadawi passed away a few years ago in India and an absentee funeral prayer was carried out for him on the Night of Qadr, before Tarawih prayer in the Holy Mosques of Mecca and Medina.

3) Altinoluk Lectures 2, page 133

His desire was for people to 'commit their hearts to Allah' and have a life of peace through remaining loyal to Allah with absolute ikhlas and serving people.



THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE - DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP (II)

By the power of the silsilah of the past spiritual ancestors, the disciple's heart is drowned and inundated with fayz that overflow through them like floodwaters coming from a very powerful dam.

Profound Attraction to the Illumined Heart of the Spiritual Guide (Nisbat)

When a disciple puts his hand in the hand of the spiritual guide and initiates a pledge of allegiance (bay-ah) to him, this is tantamount to giving one's pledge of allegiance to the Holy Prophet (pbuh) himself. A genuine spiritual guide is also a disciple of a previous spiritual master, to whom he likewise gave allegiance; in turn this master is connected to a past spiritual guide—thereby creating a strong chain of succession (silsilah) which can be finally traced to Prophet Muhammad, (pbuh) and which ultimately originates from Allahu Taala. By the power of the silsilah of the past spiritual ancestors, the disciple's heart is drowned and inundated with fayz (spiritual virtues) that overflow through them like floodwaters coming from a very powerful dam. This powerful flood of spiritual virtues originates from the Throne of Almighty Allah and descended to Medina by the agency of Hazrat Gabriel's message to our Blessed Prophet; auspiciously, it reaches us through the mercy of the spiritual master. This overwhelming flood of spiritual virtues that is generously supplied from the Throne (Arsh) of Almighty Allah is now powerfully watering our parched hearts, purifying them from all filth of worldliness and thereby preparing our spirit for transcendental cultivation and divine maturity.

It is a spiritual obligation (fardh) of every Muslim to have faith (iman) in Almighty Allah and in the Holy Prophet; and after iman there is a need for every Muslim to be predisposed to all righteous actions (aamal-e-salihaat). Hazrat Shahan Shah Bahauddin Naqshband said:

Oh my son, love of Allah is death for our nafs (ego) but life for our spirit. Our ego is very stubborn and therefore love for Allah is not easily obtainable without the discipline and perfecting training that comes from an authentic spiritual guide. The path of soul reformation (islah-un-nafs) is paved with temptations from our self and from Satan; therefore, my son, you need to hold fast to the cloak of the spiritual master who is paving your way in order for you to reach Allahu Taala (Kalam-e-Shahan Shah Naqshband, p.36).

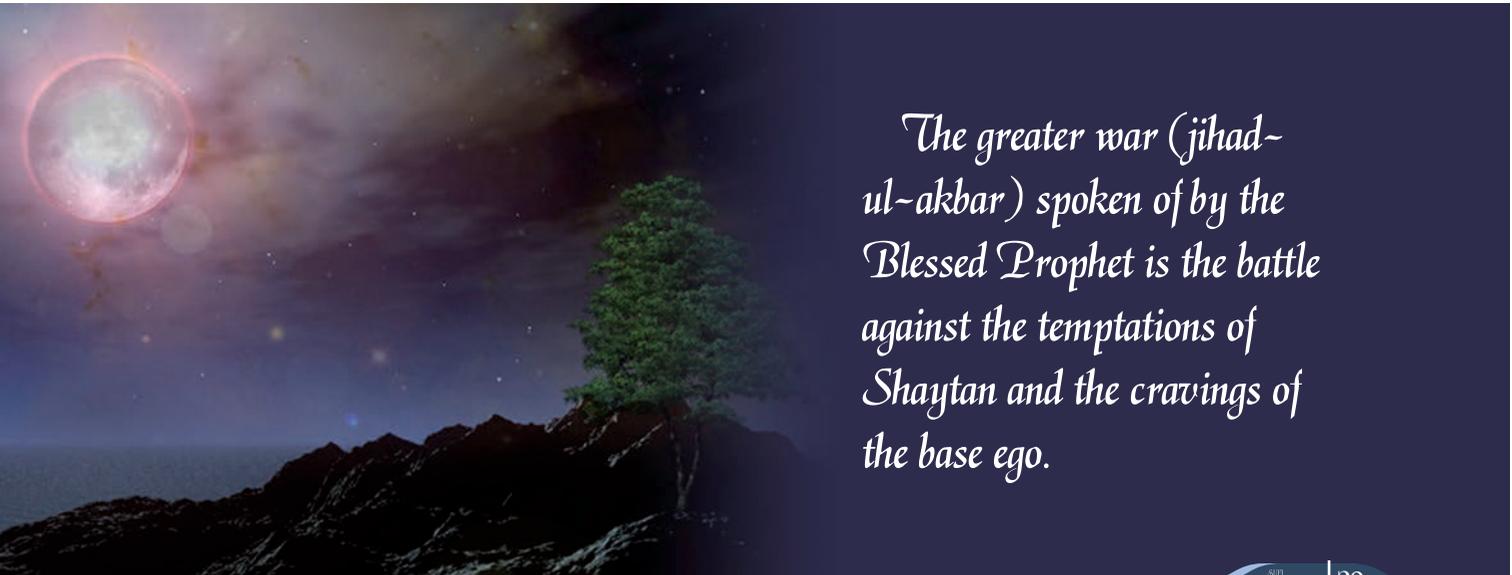
Likewise, for those of us who are seeking the good pleasure of Almighty Allah, it is indeed beneficial to listen to the helpful advice of the Sufi saint, Hazrat Ashraf Ali Thanwi Chishti:

If we are to remain steadfast in our faith and if we are to remain established in good deeds, seeking and following a spiritual master is indeed very important. Hold to the cloak of your Shaykh like a drowning man holds firmly to a strong rope (Malfuthat; Kitab-e-Thani, p. 32).

Obedience to the Instructions of the Spiritual Master as the Means to Spiritual Elevation

Unconditional surrender is the key towards success in the spiritual path. Nobody can set a time limit for spiritual maturity—its effects can be immediate or can be discerned after many years, depending on the readiness of the heart and the willingness of the disciple's resolve.

Spiritual elevation will assuredly be attained according to the intensity of the disciple's longing (talab) and dependent upon the good-pleasure (ridha) of Allahu Taala who graces the disciple with spiritual ripeness commensurate to the student's intense desire (hawwa). Through loving service (khidmat) to the spiritual guide, fertile soil is being tilled and cultivated in the heart of the disciple—such a heart is ready to receive the rain of mercy from Allahu Taala. The disciple's heart is now ready to be planted with the seeds of Divine Reality (haqiqat). By observing the ripeness of the disciple's heart, the spiritual guide will invite the mureed (novice) to his inner chambers and will allow him to taste the sweetness of Almighty Allah's Name. Even though the disciple has continuously heard and invoked the Most Holy Name of Allah, this priceless and splendid taste (dhauq-e-khas) of Allah's name will be fully experienced by the disciple only during the imparting of the Holy Name of Allah (Ism-e-Azam) by the spiritual guide at the auspicious moment of bayah. Thereafter, the mureed becomes tranquil and peaceful. The overwhelming obstacles which lay before them in subjugating wrath, hatred, conceit, lust, and self-centeredness have now absolutely been transformed into divine love (muhabbah) and unbounded mercy (rahmah). For this gift of the taste of the Most Divine Name of Allah, the mureed will eternally be



The greater war (jihad-ul-akbar) spoken of by the Blessed Prophet is the battle against the temptations of Shaytan and the cravings of the base ego.

Suhbat with a true saint of Allahu Taala is the best channel to attain spiritual reformation and thereby gain nearness to Almighty Allah.

indebted to the spiritual guide—such is the grace that Allahu Taala gave to the seeker through the wasila (mediation) of the spiritual master.

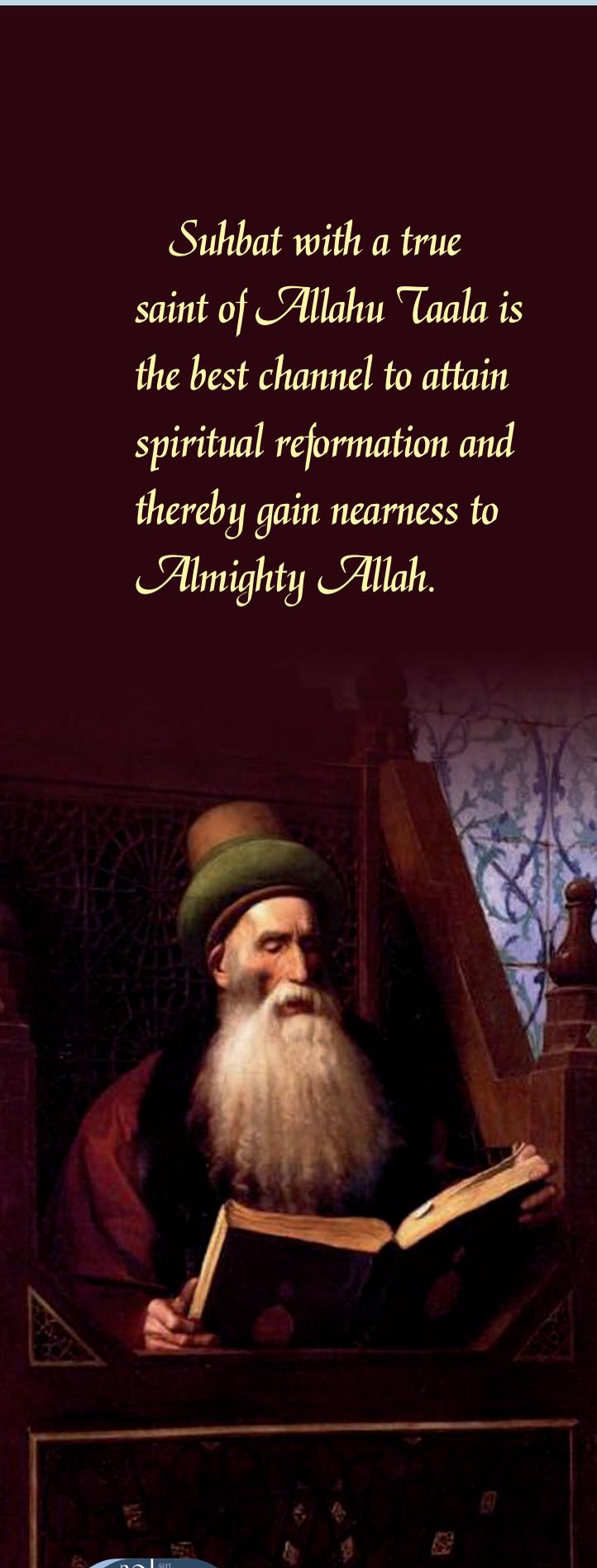
Allah's Prophet (pbuh) said; "We are moving towards the greater struggle (jihad-ul-akbar) from the lesser struggle (jihad-ul-asgar)" (Imam Bukhari; Kitabul Jihad; Hadith 5). Even in our mundane world, wherever and whenever there are wars, the army needs a commandant so that the various tactics in defeating the enemy can be properly coordinated. Similarly, in the perpetual struggles against the damnable Shaytan and against the sinful nafs a seeker needs a spiritual director to advice them as to the proper usage of the various spiritual weapons from the potent arsenal of the Holy Prophet which are available to defeat the shameless devil. The greater war (jihad-ul-akbar) spoken of by the Blessed Prophet is the battle against the temptations of Shaytan and the cravings of the base ego.

The commandant required to win such a formidable war should be a God-fearing, pious, and genuine slave of Allah—such a person is the true murshid. Basing on the hadith sharif on jihad-ul-akbar, Hazrat Ashraf Ali Thanwi declared that it is Sunnah for every Muslim to make a pledge to the Prophet in the hands of a perfect spiritual teacher so that the seeker may be guided throughout his life in his struggle to elevate his spiritual station, fight his nafs, and become a true servant of Almighty Allah.

Hazrat Mawlana Jami strongly opined that the devil is the murshid (guide) of a person who does not have a spiritual teacher to guard and protect them from the deceiving satanic manipulations and from their lower nafs.

Divine Assistance and Spiritual Transmission (al-Himmat wal Imdad) in the Pledge of Allegiance (Bayah) to the Spiritual Teacher

In the Holy Qur'an, Almighty Allah commands the Muslims: "Oh ye who believe! Fear Allah and join the company of the truthful" (Surah Taubah:119). In this verse, it is manifestly clear that Allahu Taala orders us to be in companionship (suhbat) with the truthful. We need to be under



the guidance of a truthful wali (saint) of Allah Almighty for our moral and spiritual reformation. Therefore, the means for our spiritual progress is through suhbat or spiritual association with the murshid. Suhbat with a true saint of Allahu Taala is the best channel to attain spiritual reformation and thereby gain nearness to Almighty Allah. Likewise, in another verse, Allahu Taala says;

Verily, those who plight their fealty to thee, do plight their fealty to none other but Allah: the Hand of Allah is over their hands... and anyone who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah, Allah will soon grant him a great reward. (Fath, 48/10).

The pledge of allegiance mentioned in this verse refers to the prophetic bayah. In the history of Islam, we read that giving one's vow of loyalty to the Holy Prophet was the custom of the Prophet's Blessed Companions. The Blessed Companions pledged themselves to the Holy Prophet (pbuh) by taking the Prophet's blessed hand. Surah Fath, verse 10 clearly asserts that pledging oneself to the Prophet is equivalent to covenanting oneself with Allahu Taala.

In our day and age, however, we are unable to pledge directly with the blessed hand of Allah's Messenger, (pbuh), but we can take the hand of a perfected spiritual master whose conduct and manner of life best resemble the exalted character of the Blessed Prophet (pbuh) and whose authentic spiritual existence is a living testimony to the beauty of the Sunnah of Rasulullah.

Therefore, to be attached to a genuine murshid is, in reality, an attachment to the Holy Prophet and through the Holy Prophet we will be connected to Almighty Allah. Spiritually speaking, when the disciple gives bayah to a true murshid, the former is pledging an act of allegiance to Rasulullah through his khalifah (spiritual representative), the murshid. The spiritual help (imdad), assistance, and spiritual firmness (himmat) we receive from the real spiritual guide are actually from Allah Himself Who transmitted these spiritual blessings (barakah) through the Prophet. In turn, the spiritual guide conveys the Prophet's barakah

To be attached to a genuine murshid is, in reality, an attachment to the Holy Prophet and through the Holy Prophet we will be connected to Almighty Allah.



to his disciples by the divine connectivity made possible through the holy chain (silsilah) of past spiritual adepts in the Sufi way.

During bayah, the disciple asks forgiveness of all past misdeeds and makes a firm resolve to surrender to Allah and submit to the orders of the Holy Prophet. During bayah the spiritual guide is the disciple's witness in their firm intention to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet. After bayah, the disciple must lovingly serve their spiritual guide, faithfully obeying the directives, hearkening to their spiritual advice (naseehat), deferring themselves to the wishes of the spiritual teacher, and being assiduous in reflecting on the Divine Name of Allah (Ism-e-Azam). Subsequently, the spiritual mentor will bestow assistance (imdad) and firmness of resolve on the heart of the disciple (himmat) by placing the love of the Prophet's way of life (Sunnah) in the disciple's heart. By absorbing the beautiful Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, the disciple will be able to annihilate their crooked morality and replace it with the excellence of the Prophet's holy character. When love for the Prophet is cultivated in the inner being of the disciple, then Almighty Allah will love them as the disciple's heart is now like a mirror reflecting the exquisite loveliness of the Prophet, himself the beloved of Almighty Allah (Habibullah). Once Allah's favor has been

won, by faithfully practising the Sunnah of the Prophet as taught by the spiritual guide, the disciple will be granted the experience to feel the presence of Almighty Allah (wasl) and it is at this time when they will be aware of nothing but the presence of Allah embracing and enveloping them; this transcendental experience allows the disciple to behold the beauty and majesty of the Divine Presence (wahdat-ul-shuhud) [See, Hazrat Zulfiqar Ahmed Naqshbandi, Love of Allah; pp.101-109].

"Oh, Allah, I love your beloved saints although I am not one of them.

Bestow upon me the grace of being like them on account of my love for them." Rumi

May Allah, the Compassionate, grant us the grace to encounter a genuine spiritual mentor who is an authentic devotee of Allah and a bona fide adherent to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). We need to be linked to a spiritual instructor whose sole purpose of existence is to faithfully worship, love, and serve Allah Almighty. Success lies at the feet of such a spiritual guide. By loving service (khidmat) to the spiritual master, the boon of spiritual and moral reformation (islah) is achieved, Rasulullah's intercession (shafaah) is guaranteed, and Allah's pleasure (ridha) is attained. Insha'Allah.

By absorbing the beautiful Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, the disciple will be able to annihilate their crooked morality and replace it with the excellence of the Prophet's holy character.

TAWHHEED

Allah,
THE SOLE,
THE UNIQUE

It is to know and accept that Allah is the sole God, and that He exclusively has the ability to be a God.

Say: He is Allah the One and Only;
Allah the Eternal Absolute;
He begetteth not nor is He begotten;
And there is none like unto Him. (Ikhlas, 112/1-4)

The above verses of the Qur'an are well known amongst Muslims, and generally it is understood that these are verses that deal with the concept of tawheed, the Oneness of God/Allah, in Islam. It is in these verses that one will find the word Ahad mentioned twice, first as a declaration of Allah, "I am Ahad", and the second time for emphasis.

It is this word, Ahad, which caused the greatest religious revolution in the history of mankind, and to this very day, causes the schism between two of the brothers of the Abrahamic faiths, Islam and Christianity. So, how is it that one small word can be so powerful? It's all in the meaning.

The word Ahad is generally translated as "one" or "only", and indeed that is the translation that is used above. However, this is something of a misnomer in that it over simplifies into single words the translation of something that is actually complex. In its simplicity it loses much of the fullness of the meaning of the word, which is necessary to

Islam teaches that Allah has no need to be human, and that furthermore if He were to become like His creation this would remove Him from His Individuality.



understand its religious value. It is simplistic by design, and thus the flaw is in the usage.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the word "one" in Arabic actually comes from a derivative of Ahad, being wahad, meaning a single item or identity, as used in the following verse:

Allah has said: "Take not (for worship) two gods: for He is just One (wahad) Allah: then fear Me (and Me alone)." (An-Nahl, 16/51)

The word Ahad, on the other hand, is complex enough to have had volumes of exegesis written about it by some of the most knowledgeable Muslim scholars. It is more suitable for Ahad to be understood as meaning "sole", "solitary", "individual", or "exclusive".

By understanding the nuance between these words one can more easily understand the Islamic concept of Tawheed.

Essentially, it is to know and accept that Allah is the sole God, and that He exclusively has the ability to be a God. This meaning is further expounded in the last verse used above when it says that there is nothing like Him, thus he is Unique.

By adding this final meaning of Ahad, that of being "Unique", a more complete understanding manifests itself, and this completed word picture allows one to see the Islamic perception of how Allah relates to His creation.

First of all, one must understand the Islamic premise that nothing which is created is "unique". Everything you see has a partner, a mate, and an opposite. Take humans for instance. There is more than one male in existence, and for every male there is a mate. His opposite is anything which can render him helpless or cause him to cease to physically exist.

The same application can be made to anything and everything in creation, down to the very building blocks of atoms and DNA; everything in creation has a partner, a mate and an opposite. Allah however has none of these, as confirmed in the verse:

Say: "I am but a man like yourselves (but) the

inspiration has come to me that your Allah is one (wahad) Allah: whoever expects to meet his Lord let him work righteousness and in the worship of his Lord admit no one as partner." (Al-Kaf, 50/110)

It is this fundamental belief which set the stage for the religious revolution that took place during the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in which people were called to give up the worship of their family idols; idols which had been created by hand and made from other parts of creation such as clay, dung, or even dates.

Indeed, it is true that due to this revolutionary concept within one generation, only 23 years, idol worship was nearly abolished in the entire Saudi Peninsula and replaced with the true and "solitary" God; Allah.

It is also true to state that the Islamic concept of tawheed is also the source of the "Great Schism" between the followers of Prophet Jesus (pbuh) and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). By saying that God is Unique and not comparable to anything means that, by the mere fact that Jesus (pbuh) looked and acted the same as every other human being, he could not be God.

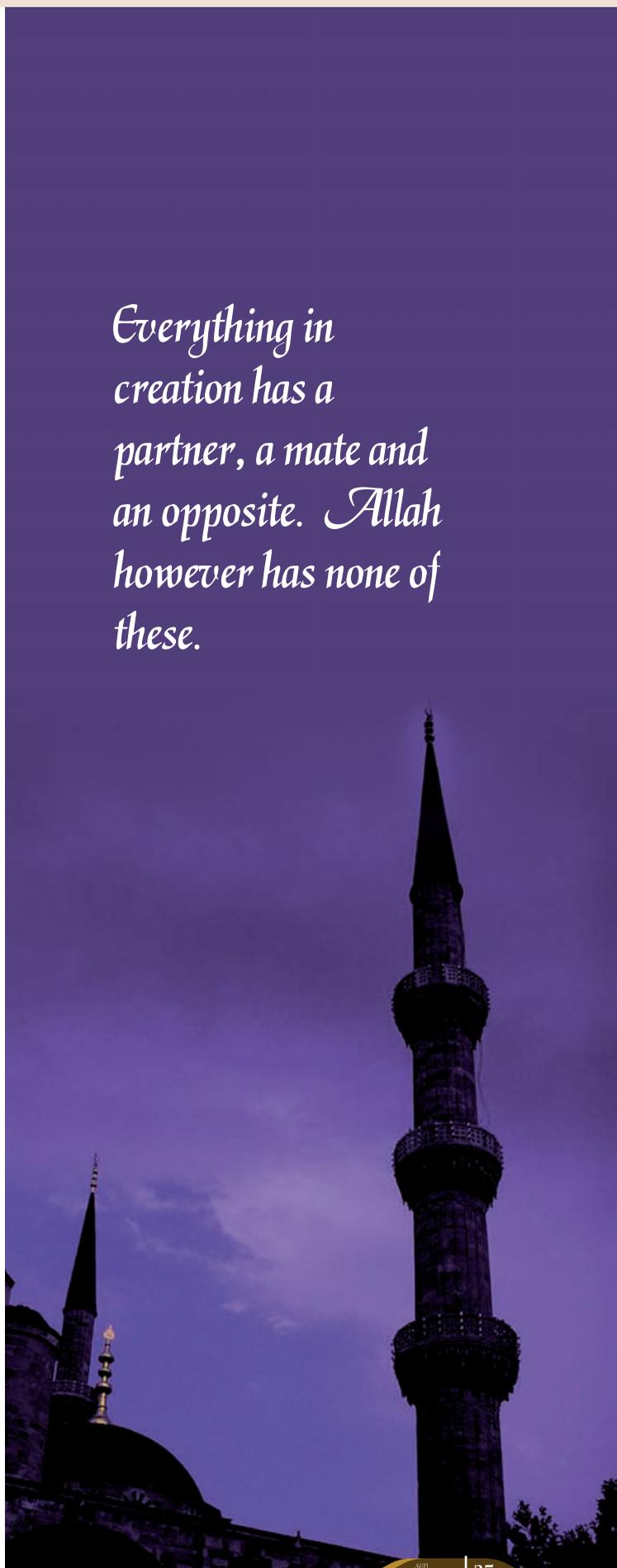
Jesus (pbuh) was neither sole, solitary, exclusive, nor unique, thus he did not meet the criteria of being God nor did he have the ability to become God.

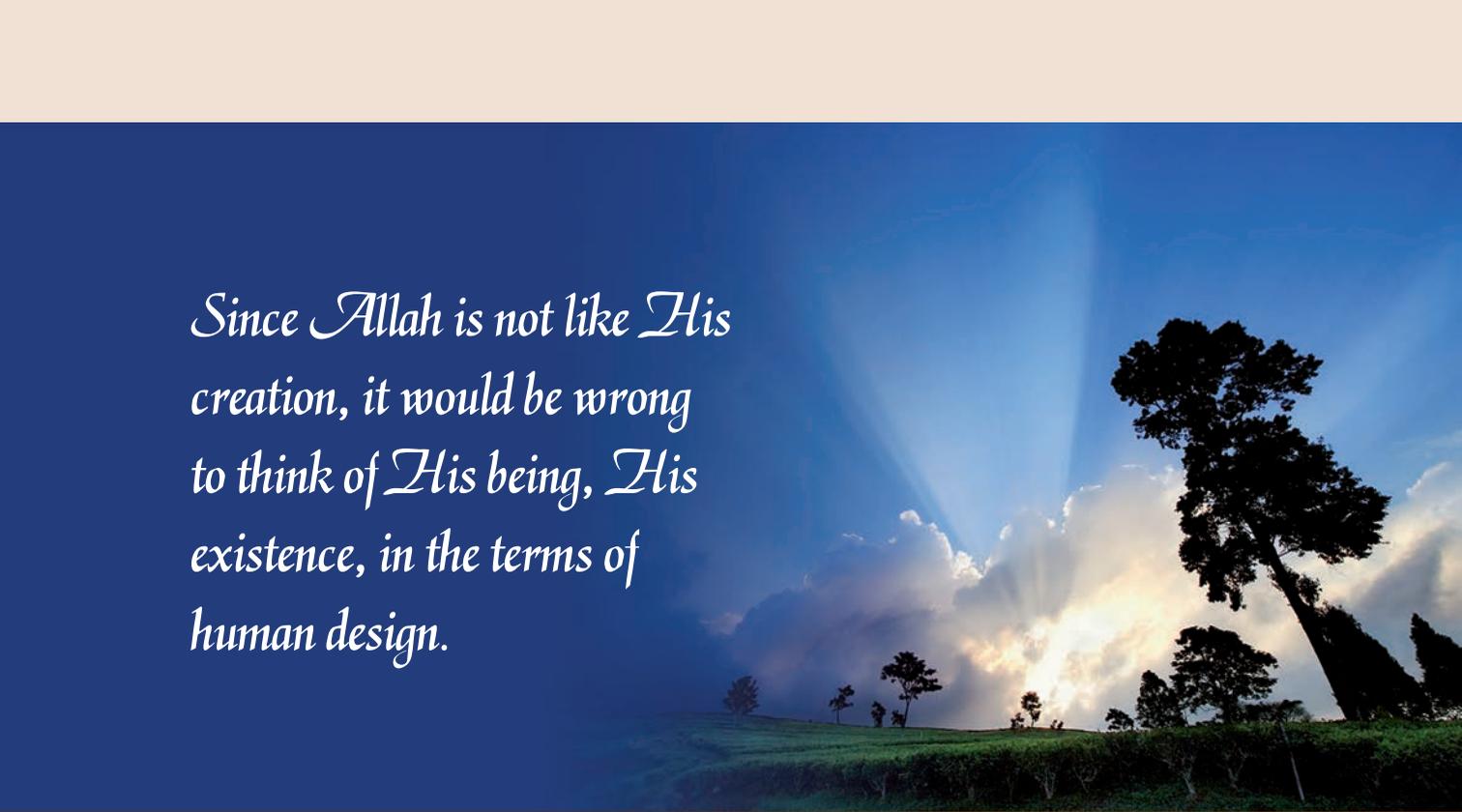
In order to explain this aspect of tawheed, the scholar Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali wrote:

He is not a body with form, nor is He a confined or quantifiable substance. He does not resemble bodies in quantifiably or divisibility. Rather He resembles nothing existent, nor does anything existent resemble Him. There is absolutely nothing like Him, nor is He like anything. No measure confines Him, no space contains Him, no direction encompasses Him, nor do the heavens surround Him. (Revival of Religious Sciences)

It is also understood in Islam that if one says that Jesus (pbuh) was the son of God then they also essentially rob Allah of His Holiness and Uniqueness. Such an approach brings Allah down to the level of reproducing like His creation.

Everything in creation has a partner, a mate and an opposite. Allah however has none of these.





Since Allah is not like His creation, it would be wrong to think of His being, His existence, in the terms of human design.

Since Allah is not like His creation, it would be wrong to think of His being, His existence, in the terms of human design.

The verse: "I do not beget, nor am I begotten" confirms this truth that Allah is not like a human in any way. In other words, making Allah a "father" makes Him human-like; a concept that is akin to anthropomorphism.

The Encarta Dictionary defines the word anthropomorphism as "the attribution of a human form, human characteristics, or human behavior to non-human things, e.g. deities in mythology and animals in children's stories". In Islam, the attributes of Allah are one of the most carefully taught topics.

Nothing in Islamic teachings allow for the anthropomorphism of Allah into a human form, nor does the concept of tawheed allow for human traits to be applied to Him.

Rather, in Islam it is more appropriate to look for the attributes of Allah in human beings. Islam teaches that these attributes are under the sole ownership of Allah, and that creation, including the human being, is only able to manifest some of these attributes. For example, some things in creation are compassionate, while others are not.

However, the creature is not the source of this compassion, it is merely a reflector of the

compassion that Allah has for His creation. Allah is the source, never the recipient.

God/Allah in the form of a man, or the idea of God having a son, is clearly anthropomorphism according to the above definition. It is the attribute of Zeus, the mythological Greek god and is an opposing concept to the tawheed of Islam, as it essentially denies Allah's Uniqueness and Exclusiveness.

Islam teaches that Allah has no need to be human, and that furthermore if He were to become like His creation this would remove Him from His Individuality. If God were to become like His creation then He would have eliminated His own solitude as Sovereign over His creation. This is an instance which is far from the concept of Ahad.

It is also important to note that because nothing knows His creation better than He, Allah has no need to be anthropomorphic. Allah Almighty knows all, sees all, and hears all. Still another point that opposes the anthropomorphic view is that all of creation is fani (comes to an end).

Allah is neither fani, nor is He finite. He has no boundaries. When anthropomorphism is applied, Allah becomes both fani and finite. Again these things are opposite to the concept of tawheed in

that Allah is not anything like His creation. Imam Ghazali explains it as follows:

Allah is Living, Irresistible, Overpowering; deficiency does not affect Him nor does incapacity. "No slumber can seize Him nor sleep." (Ayat Al-Kursi)

Extinction and death do not eliminate Him. He is possessed of absolute dominion, sovereignty, and grandeur; to Him is creation and command. He is matchless in creating and beginning, solitary in causing existence and originating.

He creates all beings and their acts, decrees their sustenance and spans. Nothing possible is outside His grasp, and He is never detached from the absolute governing of all affairs. His abilities cannot be enumerated, and His knowledge is boundless. (Revival of Religious Sciences)

Thus, one can understand that tawheed is an essential basis for Islam. If it is applied to one's life and actions, this philosophy eliminates the possibility of a servant of Allah ever worshipping a false God or idol.

It also eliminates the possibility of Muslims ever placing Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a position of being an object of worship.

Moreover, and probably most importantly, the concept of tawheed as explained in the Qur'an, gives the servant a small peek behind the veils which surround Allah and keep Him out of view.

In His Supremacy He is the creator, and in His Individuality He is Sublime. Belief in these things becomes the stepping stone to:

La ilaha illa'llah. (There is no god but Allah).

May Allah protect his servants from the pitfalls of worshipping another other than Him.

May Allah keep all of His servants on the straight path. Ameen.



*The creature is not
the source of this
compassion, it is
merely a reflector of the
compassion that Allah
has for His creation.
Allah is the source,
never the recipient.*

MY GUIDANCE

"Sometimes children can guide their parents to the Truth!"

Linda Van Morter

My daughter talked so lovingly about Jesus, how he was born, and how he lived. After hearing this, I froze in my footsteps This time smotehing stirred inside me.

My name is Linda and this is my 57th year in this world. My story actually began in 1994, when I learned that my daughter had become Muslim after what seemed like a very long period of soul searching, and sometimes naughtiness. My family had always been Methodist, and even though I did not go to church very often, I could not understand how my daughter could have betrayed the family in such a way as to give up her religion for another. Also, since my only knowledge about Islam came from the movie "Not Without My Daughter", I have to admit I was somewhat scared for her well being and sanity.

When my daughter refused to give up this "new" religion, I thought maybe it was a form of rebellion, which made me angry with her and caused a great deal of stress on our relationship to the point that the entire family basically isolated her; cut her out. I later found out that allowing this to happen was my worst mistake.

By 1999, my daughter had gone through many changes. She started wearing the hijab (head scarf), long skirts, and long sleeves. She started reading a book in a foreign language called the Qur'an. When she tried to talk to me about her life's evolution, I did not want to discuss it with her. I didn't want to join her "brain-washing". But at the same time I could see that she was growing more loving and patient. I kept telling myself it

was just because I was such a good mother that her manners and morals were so sound.

That year, I became very ill. I needed to see a series of specialists who were very expensive, and I couldn't afford my medical fees and still be able to keep my house. My daughter, without hesitation, drove 2,200 miles to pick me up and move me to her own home so that she could take care of me while I was ill and I could afford all of my medication. However, I told her when she came to get me that I would only move with her if she promised not to preach to me, or talk to me about her religion. I was a Christian, and I was going to stay that way. "That's fine", she said; nothing more. And from that point on she didn't talk to me about her religion even once.

However, she did talk to others. It seemed like nearly everyday one or more of her friends were coming to our house to seek her advice or ask a question. Always she would get out her books and research the answer, and then give a small talk on the topic of the question. She politely would take her friends into the other room so that I would not be bothered by their talking; as if the house was mine and she was the guest. One day I became curious and came close to the room that they were using for their conversation, so that she didn't know I was there, and I listened to the conversation.

I was amazed at the answers that she was giving; they made sense and answered the question that was asked...they seemed like very logical and real answers. The answers were very close to the answers that I would have given being a Christian. Her religion was making some sense: but I thought "How can that be?"

I left the place that I was sitting and went to the opposite end of the room so that I could not hear her anymore. I didn't want to believe or admit that her religion could possibly be right. For a few days I avoided listening to any of her conversations with her friends. I wasn't going to allow myself to be brain-washed like she was...no way! Then one day, a few weeks later, she had a very important class. I could tell this was going to be an important meeting because many of

The answers were very close to the answers that I would have given being a Christian. Her religion was making some sense: but I thought "How can that be?"



the ladies that she counseled came for the gathering. Again curiosity got the better of me and I sat near to the other room so I could hear her.

She told the ladies that she had found a very nice book and wanted to share some of the passages from it. At first I thought that she said the book was about a person named Allah, after a short while I realized that was the name of her God. She started to talk to the ladies about God, how He was the Creator of everything in the Universe, how He was so compassionate and Merciful to all of His creation, and most importantly how He was One and Single in nature, and Unique, different from everything in design. "Nothing is like Him", she said, "not even Jesus could compare."

Well, I thought that was an attack on my religion and was almost going to barge into the room and say something about her "Allah" when she started to explain what Islam teaches about Jesus. I froze in my footsteps. She talked so lovingly and beautifully about him, how he was born, and how he lived. I sat back down. This time something stirred inside me. How could it be that she still believed these wonderful things about Jesus? After that I openly sat next to the door, and even sometimes in the same room. I always pretended that I wasn't listening, and

I was always working on some kind of sewing work so that I would seem very busy.

Over the course of six months I heard much, and it was changing the way I felt about my illness, my life, and my daughter. One day I decided that it was time for me to change my religion to match what my heart knew was the truth. So I went to my daughter and asked her to help me become a Muslim. I knew there was something special that I needed to say for it to be "official"; my shahadah. But she thought I wanted to say it to please her, or because I feared losing her or my place in her home, not for the sake of Allah.

After a few attempts to convince my daughter that I wanted to become a Muslim for genuine reasons, I finally called a friend of the family; they came and helped me take my shahadah. This was a day that I knew would never be a mistake.

Now I live back in my small town where I am the only Muslim; but I never cease calling people to read the Qur'an, and I always recommend people call my daughter if they have a question about Islam...starting with my son. Inshallah, he will have such a happy day. I, and my daughter, pray for this everyday. May Allah be merciful to all of the mothers who pray to Him for their children



The day I took my shahadah was the day that I knew would never be a mistake.

Dance On, Oh Beautiful Dervish

*W*e were standing at the doorway of the Turkish Culture Center looking at a serene picture of a Whirling Dervish on a poster that announced a visit to my city when my friend turned to me and said, "You know the brothers at the mosque say this is a huge bi'dah (innovation) and we shouldn't go and see the program at all. They say that every bi'dah leads to the haram (forbidden things) according to a hadith."

"Oh really?" I replied, smiling. I already knew what was said about this event. The statements are often repeated, especially when the Whirling Dervish are due to arrive in town. The khutbah (sermon) starts off with the saying that "all Muslims are brothers." Then a while later the statement will be made; "but we must be careful of bi'dah, for every bi'dah leads to Haram." Then the sermon will continue and at some point the statement will be made; "those who practice bi'dah are not really Muslim anymore." The final statement which connects the dots in the khutbah is this; "All Sufis practice bi'dah."

I remember hearing once that an Imam was asked by a man after such a khutbah: "Are you saying that the Sufis are not Muslim?" The reply came. "Estaghfirallah (Allah forgive)! Estaghfirallah! Don't put words into my mouth! I never said that! I would never say that a person is not a Muslim!" Actually... he just did...and that is just the point.

Indeed, one of the most notable Sufi events that conjures up such criticism, and in some cases outright bias, is the Sema of the Whirling Dervish. However, the truth to the matter is that most Sufis do not practice the Sema, which today has become



something more associated with Turkish culture than with Islam. It is ironic that most Sufis have no real knowledge about the Sema, but they are "cast-away" Muslims because of it; and yet, if they obtain even a small amount of understanding about the Sema, it would add a new dimension and depth to their Sufi quest for reaching the level of *ihsan* (perfection).

It was for this reason that I decided that the time had come to explain to my friend what I understood about the Sema, and its beautiful, simplistic way of explaining complex things, which were, and in some cases still are, nearly impossible to explain in words. I began...

The Sema and the Nature of All Things Created a secret turning in us makes the universe turn. Head unaware of feet, and feet head. Neither cares. They keep turning. (Rumi)

There are many Muslims today who do not understand the foundation or reasoning behind the Sema of Rumi, thus they try desperately to disconnect the practice of the Sema from Islam. Thus, the first fact that must be completely understood about the Sema is that Rumi never implied that one must whirl in order to be a Muslim, nor did he ever imply that Muslims must whirl as part of their prayers. Rather, it should be understood that the Sema is an explanation of universal events according to Qur'anic descriptions and at the same time it is a

simple *tesbihat* (glorification) of Allah Almighty, inspired by the universal *tesbihat* that happens around us all the time and in which we actively (albeit unwarily) participate.

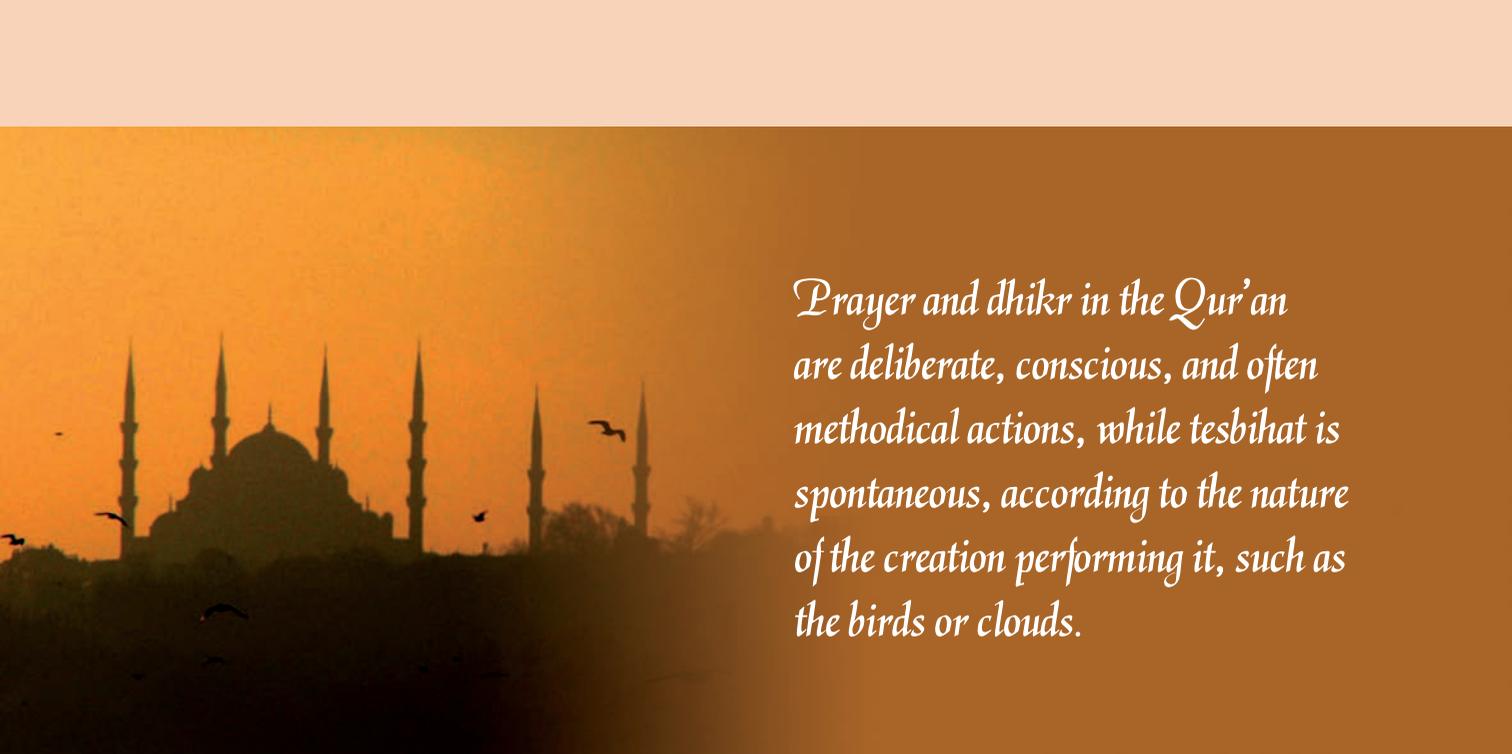
Rumi developed this beautiful symbolic motion to explain the concept of a universal relationship with the Creator so that his students could learn a lesson and find inspiration. Thus, the original intention of the Sema was to teach the deeper meaning of some spiritual truths to his own students, whose depth of intellect had reached a plateau; yet, they still yearned for more. Their educated minds had taken them to the material limits of practicing Islam outwardly. All of their prayers were instinctual and they lived their daily lives completely according to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Their love for Allah and all of His creation had peaked at the highest levels; Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was their essential guide in all matters, yet they still yearned for higher levels of understanding. Their glass was full, but they were still thirsty.

The inspiration started with the verse:

Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praises (yusabihu) all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer (salat) and praise (tesbihat). And Allah knows well all that they do. Yea to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and

Sema is an explanation of universal events according to Qur'anic descriptions and at the same time it is a simple tesbihat (glorification) of Allah Almighty.





Prayer and dhikr in the Qur'an are deliberate, conscious, and often methodical actions, while tesbihat is spontaneous, according to the nature of the creation performing it, such as the birds or clouds.

the earth; and to Allah is the final goal (of all).
(Nur, 24/41-42)

Yusuf Ali wrote the following explanation of these verses, which one can see to be related to the Sema: "All of the denizens of the heavens, such as angels, and all of the denizens of the earth, including the waters (such as man, animals, insects, fishes, etc.), and all the denizens of the air, such as birds, celebrate the praises of Allah. Each has its own mode of praise and prayer. It is not necessarily with words, for language (as we know it) is peculiar to man. But actions and other modes of self-expression recognize and declare the glory of God... Those who have spiritual vision can read this Book of Allah with delight and instruction."

The verses mentioned above require that one understands that there are essential differences in prayer, dhikr (remembrance), and tesbihat (glorification). Of these, tesbihat is the only act which is referred to as instinctual or natural; it is an action of spontaneity and is often mentioned in combination with the word hamd (praise). Many Muslim scholars today use dhikr and tesbihat as interchangeable terms, but the reality is that Allah never interchanges them in the Qur'an.

Prayer and dhikr in the Qur'an are deliberate, conscious, and often methodical actions, while tesbihat is spontaneous, according to the nature of the creation performing it, such as the birds or clouds. In essence, the Sema makes spontaneity

a deliberate action for the semazan.

One only needs to look carefully at the examples which Allah used in the above verses to understand that tesbihat is the nature of the cyclical creation of the universe.

Creation turns either through alternation (day and night, high and low tides), rotation (earth, etc), revolution (planets around the sun or moon around the earth), or cycles (seasons and water cycle). No matter where you look there is a spinning, a whirling, a turning or a twisting occurring in nature. The shared similarity amongst all of creation is the revolution of the electrons, protons and neutrons in the atoms. Everything turns and everything glorifies Allah! In order to understand this better, consider the following verse:

The seven heavens and the earth and all beings therein declare His glory (tesbiha lahu): there not a thing but celebrates His praise (yesbiha bi hamdihi); and yet ye understand not how they declare His glory (tesbihahum)! Verily He is Oft- Forbearing Most Forgiving!
(Isra, 17/44)

Whatever is in the heavens and on earth doth declare the Praises (walahul hamd) and Glory of Allah (yusabihullah): to Him belongs Dominion and to Him belongs Praise: and He has power over all things. (Tagabun, 64/1)

The fundamental basis of the Sema is to join in this universal tesbihat by spinning. It is to join in the dance of creation willingly and

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Rumi



consciously. It is to be an active, not passive, part of the natural and collective awe for Allah. It is a dance of pure joy, for it is the celebration of Allah's wonders. It is the abandonment of the material world and all of its idols, traps and delusions, to impulsively become part of the creation at its core reality.

The form of the Sema demonstrates the nature of the universe and how humanity is similar to, as well as an integral part of, the rest of creation according to the grand design of Allah.

At the same time, the Sema also manifests many understandings about Allah's creation; these were unknown in the time of Rumi, and even contradicted the general consensus of great thinkers at the time. For instance, the Sema itself resembles a small universe with its planets (the student) traveling around the sun (the Master). Consider the verses:

It is He Who created the Night and the Day and the sun and the moon: all (the celestial bodies) swim along each in its rounded course. (Anbiyya, 21/33)

And He hath made subject to you the sun and the moon both diligently pursuing their courses: and the Night and the Day hath He (also) made subject to you. (Ibrahim, 14/33)

It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon nor can the Night outstrip the Day: each (just) swims along in (its own) orbit (according to Law). (Yasin, 36/40)

On a scientific note, the understanding of heliocentricity that Rumi obtained from these verses of the Qur'an were difficult to comprehend, as language has limitations in explaining and due to the fact that at the time the general consensus of scientists believed that the sun revolved around the earth. However, in the Sema, the semazan travels along in their circular course in the same direction as the planets go around the sun, never catching up to one another, nor bumping into one another.

It was in the 13th-14th centuries that the Muslim astronomers Mo'ayyeddin Urdi, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, and Ibn al-Shatir developed the mathematical techniques that confirmed

heliocentrism similar to those used later by Copernicus.

It has been suggested that Copernicus may have been influenced by them, and indeed, Copernicus discusses the theories of Al-Battani and Averroes in his major work. Several other Muslim astronomers also had discussions on the possibility of heliocentrism, such as Ibn al-Haytham, Abu-Rayhan Biruni, Abu Said Sinjari, 'Umar al-Katibi al-Qazwini, and Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi.

In the year 1515, Copernicus wrote his theory of heliocentricity in *Commentariolus*, opposing the long held general consensus that everything rotated around the earth; a "theory" for which he was excommunicated and nearly put to death.

Certainly today, one can not look at a Dervish spinning in tranquility without noticing his hands; one raised and one lowered; it is as if they are emulating the earth and its off-centered axis, thus creating the seasons, another cycle found in nature.

Yet still another might consider this to be a manifestation of the recently discovered magnetic forces which flow through and around the earth. It is important to note here that parts of the meanings of the Sema are so deep that science is still catching up with them and that even today some of its secrets are still being unlocked. It will be interesting to see what scholars studying quantum sciences will discover related to the Sema.

The Sema and the First Journey ~ The Death of the Ego ~

It is Allah Who alternates the Night and the Day: verily in these things is an instructive example for those who have vision! (Nur, 24/44)

And Allah sends down rain from the skies and gives therewith life to the earth after its death: verily in this is a Sign for those who listen. (Nahl, 16/65)

The Qur'an is a book of science, but it does not contain only scientific facts. In light of this, it should be understood that the Qur'an does not only refer to the rotation of nature, but it also refers to the natural cycles of events in nature, such as the cycle of life and death. It is for this reason that Rumi uses the Sema to explain two different journeys through life, both ultimately ending with one's death. The first is a journey through spiritual life and the levels of spiritual knowledge and wisdom which raise a human from *asfala safileen* (lowest of the low) to *ahsani taqweem* (the best of nature); these lead one to the death of the ego. The other journey is passing through this material life into the *ahirah* (after life). For the Sufi, the success of the first journey is necessary for bliss in the second, and the end of both journeys is summed up in the words of Rumi himself:

I am no more a candle spreading light I
gather no more crowds and like smoke I am all
scattered now... I am no more...not a teacher
not a leader just a servant to your wishes. (Rumi)

*No matter where you
look there is a spinning,
a whirling, a turning or a
twisting occurring in nature.*



SUFI STORIES

EXPECTATIONS OF THE MERCY OF ALLAH

There once lived a pious man who was enslaved to a wicked master. The righteous slave wanted to teach his master a lesson that he would not forget, a lesson that would make him change his ways.

The Master told him one day to plant wheat. The slave took the opportunity. He went and collected seeds of barley and planted them.

As the season drew near, the master was enraged to see that after all this work and time the slave had planted the wrong seed. In a rage, he scolded the slave, saying, "Why did you do this?"

The righteous slave said, "I had hope that the barley seeds would turn out to be wheat."

The Master said, "How can you plant barley seeds and expect it to come out as wheat?"

The slave stopped and said quietly, "How can you disobey Allah and expect for His bounteous mercy? How can you openly challenge his religion and hope for Paradise?"

The Master was stunned and silent. He understood. "You have taught me something today that I had never realized. I free you for the sake of Allah."



HOW TO CONTROL YOUR DESIRES

A man came to Ibrahim ibn Adham and said, “Abu Ishaq, I am unable to control my nafs. Please give me something to help me.”

“If you accept five conditions,” said Ibrahim, “and are able to put them into practice, your disobedience will not cause you any problems.”

“Just tell me what they are, Abu Ishaq!” the man said.

“The first is that when you want to disobey Allah you do not eat anything He provides.”

“Then how will I get anything to eat? Everything on the earth is from Him!”

“So is it right to eat His provision and disobey Him at the same time?” replied Ibrahim.

“No, it is not. What is the second condition?”

“When you want to disobey him, move off His land.”

“That is even more difficult!” exclaimed the man. “In that case where will I live?”

“Is it right to eat his provision and live on His land and then to disobey Him?” asked Ibrahim.

“No, it is not. What is the third condition?”

“When you want to disobey Him and eat of His provision and live on His land, find a place where He will not see you and disobey Him there.”

“What do you mean, Ibrahim? He knows everything that happens even in the most hidden places!”

“So is it right to disobey Him when you eat His provision and live on His land and when you know that He can see everything you do?”

“It certainly is not!” the man replied. “Tell me the fourth condition.”

“That when the Angel of Death arrives to take your soul, you say to him, ‘Give me a reprieve so that I can repent and act righteously for Allah.’”

“But he won’t listen to me!”

“Then if you cannot ward off death long enough to give yourself time to repent, and you know that when it comes there will be no reprieve, how can you hope to be saved?”

“What is the fifth?”

“That when the angels of the Fire come to you to take you to the Fire, you do not go with them.”

“They will take me whether I like it or not!” exclaimed the man.

“So how can you hope to be saved?”

“Enough, enough, Ibrahim! I ask Allah’s forgiveness and I turn to Him!”

The man’s repentance was sincere and from that time on he was assiduous in his worship and avoided acts of disobedience until the day he died.



Quiz For Children



- Which part of the body do you NOT wash as part of Wudu?
a) mouth b) nose
c) hands d) shoulders
- Which part do you only wash ONCE as part of Wudu?
a) head b) hands
c) feet d) face
- How many times should you rinse your mouth and nose for Wudu?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4
- What can you use in place of water to make Tayammum?
a) leaves b) dirt
c) cotton d) salt
- What is the name of the full bath made for ablution?
a) Saf b) Wudu
c) Ghusl d) Tayammum
- Which foot should you use to enter the bathroom?
a) left b) right
c) both d) neither
- For which actions must you have Wudu?
a) Reading the Qur'an
b) Praying
c) Going around Kaaba
d) all of the above
- Which part should you be careful to wash when washing the feet?
a) the heels b) the calves
c) the knee d) the thigh
- Which part should you make sure you include when washing the arms?
a) the shoulder b) the biceps
c) the elbow d) the funny bone
- Which side should you always wash first?
a) top b) bottom
c) left d) right

.....
Hey Kids! Maybe you can win a prize!

The first 25 entries that have all of the questions correct will win. Circle your answers, fill out the form, and mail to: Sufi Wisdom - Quiz, 8508 So. 71st East Ave. Tulsa, OK 74133 USA

Name: Age:

Address:

Parent's Name (for consent purposes only):

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