



SUFI WISDOM

A Source of Inspirational and Traditional Islamic Knowledge


JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008 • MUHARRAM 1429 • NO:9 • £2 UK • US\$5 • AUS\$5

HAPPY FAMILY LIFE: A DIVINE MERCY

OSMAN NURI EFENDI:
HAPPY FAMILY LIFE

SULEYMAN DERIN:
**IMPORTANCE OF
MARRIAGE IN ISLAM**

MUSA BELFORT:
**EDUCATION OF
MUSLIM CHILDREN
IN THE WEST**



Dear Readers,

We have dedicated this issue to family life in Islam and the ways to reach happiness and peace in this special establishment.

Allah created all the human beings from Adam and Eve and they married each other in Paradise. Men and women have been created by Allah with a desire and need for each other.

Hence family union is a unique and the oldest establishment that existed throughout history. Family life also affords the opportunity of uniting spouses in an honorable manner thus giving the heart peace and the body comfort and pleasure.

For this reason, marriage is shown as a proof for the existence and wisdom of Allah, and it is encouraged in this verse of the Qur'an:

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect." (Qur'an:30/21)

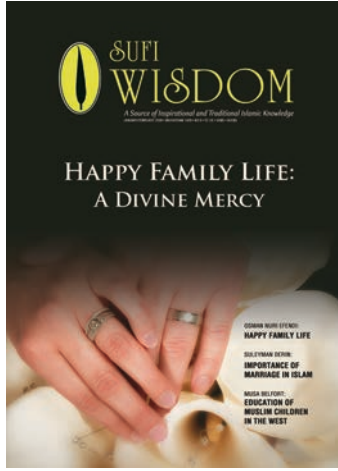
Our master Osman Nuri Efendi the rights and the duties of couples and the role of the mother in the family and anecdotes from the life of our beloved Prophet (pbuh), the best husband, the best father and the best role model for humanity.

This edition also contains an article of Dr. Suleyman Derin about the role of marriage in our spiritual development. Musa Belfort discusses in his article that how Muslim families living in the West should educate their children in the West.

You may also find in this issue supplication section about month of Muharram by Mahmud Sami Efendi.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition and may Allah grant you happiness and peace in your family life in this world and the Hereafter.

Amen!



- SUFI WISDOM Bimonthly Islamic Journal
- Copyright 2008
- No: 9 JAN/FEB 2008 - 1429
- Price: \$5 (USA), £2 (UK), AUS \$5 (AUS)
- SUFI WISDOM is published by ALTINOLUK Publishing Co.
- Chairman: **ABDULLAH SERT**
- Managing Editor: **M. LUTFI ARSLAN**
- Editor: **ELIF KAPICI**
- Editorial Board: **M. LUTFI ARSLAN**
SULEYMAN DERIN
JACQUILINE V. FRANK
- Design: **Altinolukgraphic / MUZAFFER CALISKAN**
- Subscription Rate For One Year: (Including Postage)
\$30 (USA) - AUS \$ 30 (AUS) - £12 (UK)
- www.sufiwisdom.net
- **Distribution and Subscription Representatives:**
- AUSTRALIA - FATIH CIFTCI 1/8 YARALLA CRT MEADOW
HEIGHTS 3048 VIC • e-mail: melbourne@sufiwisdom.net
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- Printed by ERKAM Printing • Phone: +90.212.671 07 07
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CONTENTS



OSMAN NURI EFENDI

4

HAPPY FAMILY
LIFE



JACQUILINE FRANK

10

THE WEAKNESSES
OF MAN



HAJAR WAFA

15

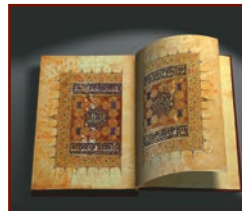
WESTERN
CHILDHOOD



ABDULQADIR ASAD

18

IMPORTANCE OF
MARRIAGE IN THE
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT
OF THE SUFI



MUSA EFENDI

22

THE CHARACTER AND
SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF
MAHMUD SAMI EFENDI



MAHMUD SAMI EFENDI 26

THE VIRTUES OF THE
DAY OF ASHURA



SULEYMAN DERIN 28

HOW TO ELIMINATE THE
CAUSES OF LAZINESS IN
RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

SUFI STORIES 31



MUSA HUB 33

THE COLOR OF OUR
FUTURE

PEARS OF WISDOM 38



MUSA BELFORT 40

EDUCATION OF MUSLIM
CHILDREN IN THE WEST



DIVINE PATH 43

WHY I AM MUSLIM



GOLDEN CHAIN 44

ALI RAMITENI

QUIZ 48



Happy Family Life

OSMAN NURI EFENDI

Through the proper fulfillment of the institution of marriage, the human soul can attain peace and contentment.

Allah Almighty made the attribute of oneness exclusively for Himself, and created the rest of creation in pairs. He placed the law of attraction between the opposite sexes in order to unite them in marriage, through which they attain both material and spiritual perfection. It is also interesting that Allah made profane love between man and woman a stepping-stone towards divine love. Therefore, Allah Almighty commanded marriage for humanity in order to preserve the perfection they were endowed with and to preserve human offspring from all sorts of corruption.

Through marriage, humanity is able to protect their most beautiful characteristics which make them truly human. Marriage is the social and spiritual sanctuary for the spiritual and development of humanity. The continuation of the verse: "Surely we created man of the best stature" (Qur'an:95/4) is related to healthy marriages.

Through the proper fulfillment of the institution of marriage, the human soul can attain peace and contentment, the human body finds its balance and order, human morality is perfected and developed and the welfare and safety of society can be realized. In the absence of marriage, this delicate order can be broken. Marriage also enables couples to develop their latent abilities.

A woman, through showing affection and concern for her children, perfects her love and mercy and over countless hours of work masters how to be a good mother, educator and arbitrator. A man learns how to be more responsible through family leadership and he acquires maturity. The family unit is the smallest social unit, but it is the most significant one for any nation. Therefore, all the prophets, except Prophet Jesus, who was raised to Heaven, were married.

After the gift of *taqwa* (piety) the most significant favor of Allah upon a servant is to possess a good spouse. A good spouse is the most essential part of human happiness. The strength of nations depends on the strength of family ties. The Holy Qur'an indicates that the institution of marriage is a sign of Allah: *"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect."* (Qur'an:30/21)

This verse directs us to reflect on the fact that the primary purpose in marriage is to achieve a state of love and mercy for the sake of Allah. Therefore, the Prophet (pbuh) always advised those who were thinking of marriage to choose good believers who have mercy and piety in their hearts.


In the following hadith the Prophet gives advice to a man who wanted to marry: "There

are four things for which one marries a woman, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty or her religion. So you should marry the religious woman (otherwise) you will be a loser" (Bukhari, Nikah)

The institution of marriage plays the greatest role in preserving high morality in society; without morality society could easily become corrupt and dissolve through indulgence and selfishness. Hence, the family and society should enable the young to marry when they reach the proper age and the basic necessities for marriage should be made as easy to acquire as possible.

Therefore, the Prophet (pbuh) describes the best marriage as the one that is carried out without excessive spending. If the material requirements of marriage increase drastically young people may put off marriage due to an inability to handle such a huge financial burden. Then, their natural desires can only be satisfied through immoral or illegal sexual relations, thus frustrating the goal of establishing a stable family life. This will be suicide for society. The only solution that can prevent such a negative development is to give full support for those who want to marry, both spiritually and financially.

Ibn Arabi advised rich Muslims to help couples to marry, stating that the best continuous charity (*sadaqa jariyah*) is to help a marriage happen. Those who help bring about a marriage will be rewarded, as they too will have a share in the



Profane love is a step toward this divine love, and this characteristic is engraved in the nature of all creation.



In the modern age an artificial competition of equality between men and women is leading them to points which are contrary to their natures.

good acts of the offspring of the married couple.

In order to make marriage easier, the first step is to cut the cost of getting married to the basic minimum by preventing all sorts of unnecessary waste. In particular, in some marriage ceremonies, alcoholic drinks are served to cater to the desires of the guests. If the first step in the marriage is made with *haram* (forbidden) acts, how can we expect future happiness for this family? Allah blesses wedding ceremonies that are performed within the boundaries of Islam through the acceptance of prayers and supplications that are made on these occasions.

If the couples do not appreciate the significance of the marriage and only consider it a formal act for being together, it will usually result in dissolution. In Islam, of all permitted things by Allah, divorce is the most displeasing act. In the following hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) states:

"Get marry and do not divorce! The Throne of Allah is shaken by divorce." (Muhtar al-Ahadith al-Nabawiyya, 228)

In particular, this is true when one of the spouses leaves or violates the sanctity of the marriage just for the sake of seeking pleasure when there is no real problem in the relationship. This is a sin that is not forgiven by Allah, since such this spouse has heedlessly destroyed the rights and trust of the other spouse.

THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF COUPLES

In Islam, the head of the family is the husband,

as can be understood from the following verse: *"Men are in charge of women, because Allah has given the one a merit (grace) over the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women)"* (Qur'an: 4/34)

According to Islam, the man is responsible for all the financial costs of married life; therefore, he has been given leadership in the family. However, this leadership does not mean that he has power over or the right to oppress women. This leadership is only to put an order to family affairs, since he represents the family in external affairs. On the other hand, women are in charge of the internal order and organization of the family.

The man has the responsibility of earning a living and providing for the costs of maintenance and financing the family home. He has the physical strength to protect his family. The man has also the duty to lead in prayer. He therefore has been given the responsibility of leadership.

This priority of the man is also manifested in the order of creation; first Adam was created, then Eve was created. Adam and Eve were created from the same soil, thus explaining the reality of the attraction between men and women. In a divinely inspired hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) informs us on behalf of Allah: *"I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known, hence I created the creation."*

As this hadith explains, the cause of creation is divine love. Profane love is a step toward this divine love, and this characteristic is engraved in

the nature of all creation. However, this love should be channeled by divine guidance, that is, through marriage. Therefore, Islam bases family life on the roots of love, high morality, virtue, piety, good interaction, mercy, loyalty and patience, as well as other similar characteristics.

Family life, which was started first in Paradise by Adam and Eve, was continued by their offspring in the world and eternalized by Islam. The laws that Islam introduced make married life a paradise, a continuous spring of mercy. In order to attain this happiness, we should manifest the beauties manifested by our ancestors, Adam and Eve; spouses should love each other spiritually and cooperate in piety. In short, they should be a single soul in two different bodies.

For a happy family life, the rights of the women should be protected and developed. Throughout history, when the rights of women have been respected, societies have lived a life of paradise on earth. However, on the other hand, when they have not been respected, societies have tasted a hellish life. The Prophet (pbuh) commanded his *ummah* (community) in the Farewell Speech concerning the rights of women:

"O men! Respect the rights of women. Treat them with mercy and love. Fear Allah concerning their rights. You have married them as Allah's trust; they became your legal wives since you have promised Allah to promise protect their honor and chastity."

Women should take part in family life in those areas to which they are most suited, such as raising children with lofty characters, organizing the home life and other relevant fields. If they are employed in occupations that go against their nature, the family structure of society will be harmed. A good family life can only be provided when the wife and husband respectively use their innate powers properly, as described by Islam. It should also be emphasized that in the modern age an artificial competition of equality between men and women is leading them to points which are contrary to their natures. In particular, this competition is destroying the feminine qualities of women and their pride in motherhood.

THE BEST EXAMPLE FOR US ALL...

The Prophet (pbuh) gave the best example of a happy family life. He not only practiced the

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A happy family
life as described
by the Qur'an depends
on love, mutual respect
and sacrifice.

rules of happiness in his life, but also trained his Companions and his own children. When his beloved daughter Fatimah married Imam Ali, the Prophet commanded his daughter to organize the internal matters of the family and charged Imam Ali to organize the external matters. In this way, he established the distribution of responsibilities on the basis of justice and the nature of the spouses.

His daughter, Fatimah, was very dear to him. Whenever she would come to him, he would stand up out of overflowing love and would seat her in his place. Such a beloved daughter came to her father and opened her heart to him. She talked of all the chores of the house: the grinding of the grain and the need to go herself and bring water to the house with great difficulty. Then she requested that she be provided with a servant to help her with the execution of these chores. The Prophet responded that no arrangements had yet been made for the Ashab Suffah (residents of the mosque). Until they were taken care of, he could not pay attention to any other matter. (Abu Dawud, Vol. II, p. 343).

In another collection of the Prophet's sayings it is also stated that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "The orphans of Badar have priority over you." (Abu Dawud, Vol. 11, p.343). At last, he gave this advice to his daughter. "Before going to sleep, you should recite 33 times SubhanAllah, 33 times Alhamdulillah and 34 times Allahu-Akbar. Having a servant or slave cannot compare to this remembrance of Allah." He said: "For you this remembrance of Allah shall be much better than a servant" (Abu Dawud, Vol. II, p. 340).

THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER

The mother should play the role of uniting the family members with her affection and leadership in the affairs of the home. She must train and educate the children; therefore, Allah Almighty endowed women with many noble qualities, such as great sensitivity, mercy, politeness and the instinct to look after children for the continuation of the family.

The mother is the second leader in family affairs. Through her compassion spiritual contentment is engendered in the family. Mothers have no equal in their mercy and compassion. They first carry us in their wombs, then on their laps, and finally keep carrying us in their hearts until death takes them away. Mothers who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of their families deserve the highest respect and a lifetime of gratitude. The soft and loving heart of the mother has the capacity to ease the weariness of the father and calm the naughtiness of the children. In order to highlight these facts Allah Almighty states in the Qur'an:

"And We have enjoined upon man concerning his parents- His mother beareth him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is two years - Give thanks unto Me and unto your parents. Unto me is the journeying." (Qur'an:31/14)

Highlighting the same fact, Rumi states: "Respect the rights of the mothers; carry them over your heads. If they did not suffer the pangs of the birth, children could not find a way to come to this world."

Mercy and compassion find their highest level in the hearts of the mothers. The mothering

of human beings is far superior to that of other creatures. The mother not only gives material food to her children but also gives the most necessary spiritual food. They give birth to humans that have the capacity to be close to the Creator of the universe. From the prophets to ordinary people, each person first takes their spiritual qualities from their mothers.

However, not all mothers are equal in giving the same amount of love and mercy to their children.

Some mothers abandon their babies in dustbins or on doorsteps. On the other hand, there are mothers who look after their sick or disabled children for an entire lifetime without complaint.

Therefore, the kingdom of mothers is in accordance with their virtues and mercy. We should not forget that mothers reflect divine mercy; they are the loci of the Divine Names *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Rahim* (the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). The following hadith of the Prophet (pbuh) explains the high status of mothers well:

"Paradise is found under the feet of mothers."

(Daylami, Musnad, 2611)

Parents occupy a special place in Islam. After our duty to obey Allah, they rank second in regard to obedience. Although respecting parents is another subject, here we will give some verses from the Qur'an concerning the rights of parents over their children after spending an entire lifetime for their well-being.

And your Lord has commanded that you shall not worship (any) but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them (so much as) Uff! Nor repel them, and speak to them a generous word. And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion, and say: O my Lord! Have mercy on them, as they did cherish and rear me (when I was) little. (Qur'an:17/23-24)

Thus, it is stated in the Qur'an that parents are rewarded not only in the next world but in this world as well. In short, a happy family life as described by the Qur'an depends on love, mutual respect and sacrifice.

May Allah make our families happy ones, and our homes gardens of paradise. May Allah enable us to guide our families to happiness both in this world and the Hereafter. Amen!

"Respect the rights of the mothers; carry them over your heads. If they did not suffer the pangs of the birth, children could not find a way to come to this world."

Rumi



THE WEAKNESSES OF MAN

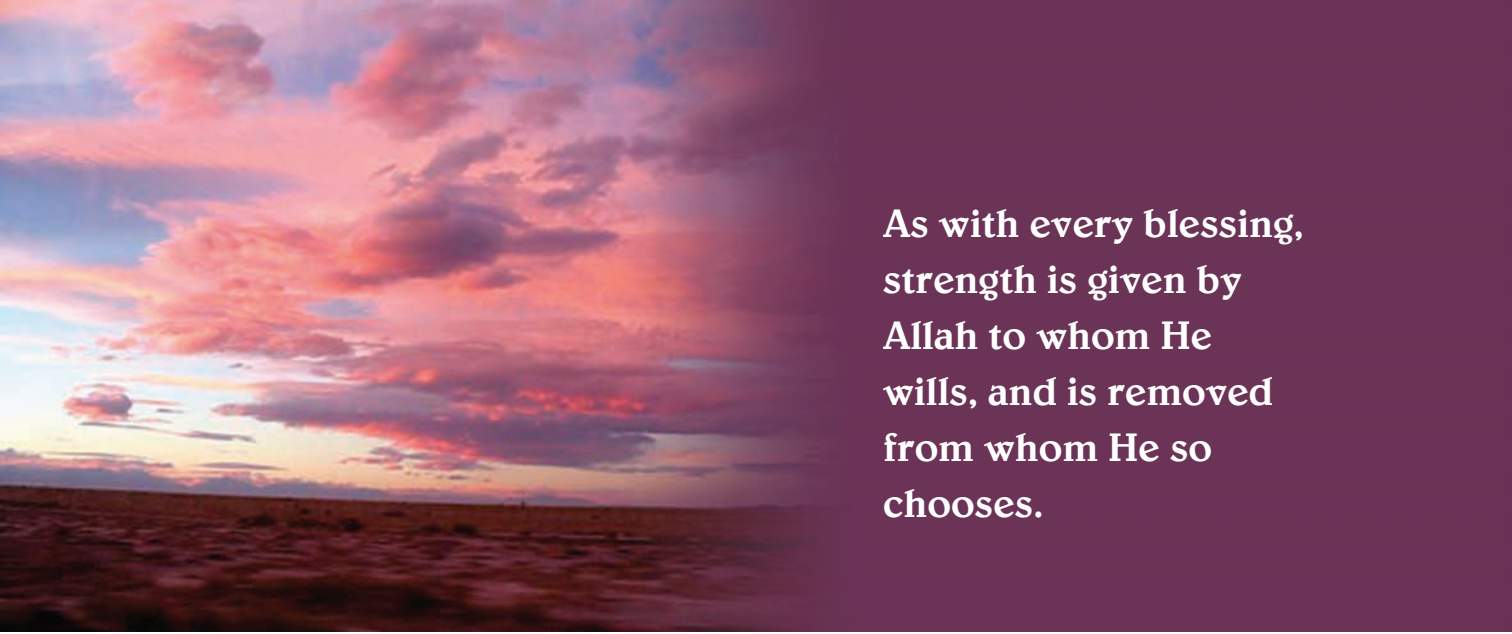
The human being enters this world totally dependant on Allah for care and protection, and Allah nurtures them first to a state of perceived self-sufficiency, then returns them to dependence again in old age.

JACQUILINE V. FRANK

"And Allah has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds so that you might have cause to be grateful."
(Qur'an:16/78)

Part one of this article opened the discussion of the weaknesses of man. More specifically, it focused on the weakness of the human mind and human knowledge and how this keeps one from fully being able to comprehend Allah's unique individuality. For this reason, Allah, in His ultimate Mercy and Beneficence, sent down the Qur'an as a book of enlightenment and guidance for His beloved creation; thus, any human who seeks knowledge of Him is able to learn and perchance to overcome this weakness. It is in the study of the Qur'an and the sciences which find their roots therein, and through contemplation, that people find worthy and valuable insights which strengthen their minds and bring them closer to their *Lord*. It is this very knowledge of and closeness to one's *Lord*, that brings about tangible wisdom and sincere worship of the One Truth, Allah.

It was also pointed out how Satan uses this weakness in one's mind and knowledge to influence and misguide people, drawing them into disputes, arguments, confusion and rebellion. It is with these tools that Satan leads people astray, exacerbating the mental defects of arrogance, ignorance and obstinacy in their minds and thus causing a great distance between human beings and their *Rabb*. Indeed, only righteous knowledge and wisdom can



**As with every blessing,
strength is given by
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save one from these vices and the wiles of Satan. But it is not only the weakness of the human mind that hinders people from complete submission to and worship of their Creator. Allah created human beings to be physically weak as well.

Physical Weakness and Ability

"It is Allah Who created you in a state of (helpless) weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave you weakness and a grey head: He creates as He wills and it is He Who has knowledge and power." (Qur'an:30:54)

Every human being is born into this world with the utmost physical weakness. During their infancy and early youth, people need total care and provision for their food, clothes, shelter and nurturing, as they have neither strength nor ability to provide any of these things for themselves. The human being enters this world totally dependant on Allah for care and protection, and Allah, out of His Mercy and Generosity, nurtures them first to a state of perceived self-sufficiency, then returns them to dependence again in old age. Allah does this so that mankind can understand Allah's power over all of His creation. He provides for one's needs as He deems appropriate and in accordance with what He has decreed for that individual's particular future state. Every human being is given the faculties that they will need, such as sight, hearing, physical ability and physical aptitude. Some will grow into strong bodies with great health while others will be sickly or meek. Some will pass away at a young age, while others will continue on to old age. About this Allah says:

"O mankind! If ye have a doubt about the Resurrection (consider) that We created you out

of dust then out of sperm then out of a leech-like clot then out of a morsel of flesh partly formed and partly unformed in order that We may manifest (Our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term then do We bring you out as babes then (foster you) that ye may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die and some are sent back to the feeblest old age so that they know nothing after having known (much)." (Qur'an:22/5)

Ironically, it is a flaw in mankind's perception of what is weak and what is strong that may be humanity's greatest hindrance in appreciating the Power and Authority of Allah. As with every blessing, strength is given by Allah to whom He wills, and is removed from whom He so chooses. However, as the human grows physically strong throughout youth and early adulthood, they often begin to think of themselves as autonomous. While the physical strength increases, so does the strength of the *nafs* (ego - lower self) and they forget that while they have gained their independence, they have also gained responsibility for their actions. The weakness of the human mind, as discussed in part one, makes them forget or simply be unaware of their *Lord* and His perfect knowledge of how to mete out strength to His creation. Indeed, the true reason for receiving this blessing is so that we may show gratitude to the Creator.

Inevitably, the person who has focused their youth on gaining righteous knowledge becomes aware of this situation, and comes to the realization that they, even at their greatest strength, are still not capable of doing anything for themselves. They come to the realization that their health, strength, energy and vitality are



Just as with all the blessings that Allah bestows on human beings, those with greater abilities will be asked how they used their greater gifts.

all blessings from their *Lord*, their Creator; a gift from the one who has taken care of them since their birth. At the same time, a person who remains uneducated about their *Lord* will also be ignorant of having any limitations. Although they have working eyes, they are unable to see Allah in His creation; in reality they are blind. Although they have working ears, they fail to heed the inner voice that leads to what is right; in reality they are deaf. Even though they have fingers and feet, they often fail to do the good deeds that Allah has offered to them, thus making them one of the infirm. Thus, it may be perceived that, when combined with a weak mind, being healthy may actually be a greater weakness than being ill for a human being.

The human being who has a sickly body will probably grow to know his/her physical limitations. If this person is educated in matters of religion, they may only feel hindered by their particular condition at times when they would like to worship or work in the service of Allah, or do a good deed that will benefit their life in the Hereafter. This same human may certainly, with Allah's help and succor, find other strengths which will help them overcome the weakness of their illness so that they will be able to worship and serve their *Lord*, like the blind man who becomes a hafiz (one who has memorized the Qur'an) by listening to the imam, or the woman who learns to read the Qur'an in Braille. It is because Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) understood that all strength comes from Allah that he said: "Oh Allah! To you I complain of my weakness."

However, the person who is blessed with strength and self-sufficiency can fall victim to the weakness of their own mind and their own physical limitations, becoming trapped in the snare of Shaytan. This was the case of the Pharaoh and Nimrod, both of whom stand out as warnings against such ignorance. Even when they were shown how utterly weak they were compared to Allah, they could not accept their weakness as a human, and fell into a rebellion that caused their destruction.

While illness is perceived as a weakness, in its own way, health can be a weakness to the body as well. This is because one's health and ability are closely tied together in Islam. A wise teacher once explained to his students that a human's ability is what they are responsible for doing in the eyes of Allah. A person who is only able to carry one kilogram of apples will only be answerable to Allah

for carrying that one kilo. However, a person who is capable of carrying ten kilos of apples will have to answer why he walked through life carrying only one kilo. In other words, just as with all the blessings that Allah bestows on human beings, those with greater abilities will be asked how they used their greater gifts.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) understood this and used this knowledge in the following manner:

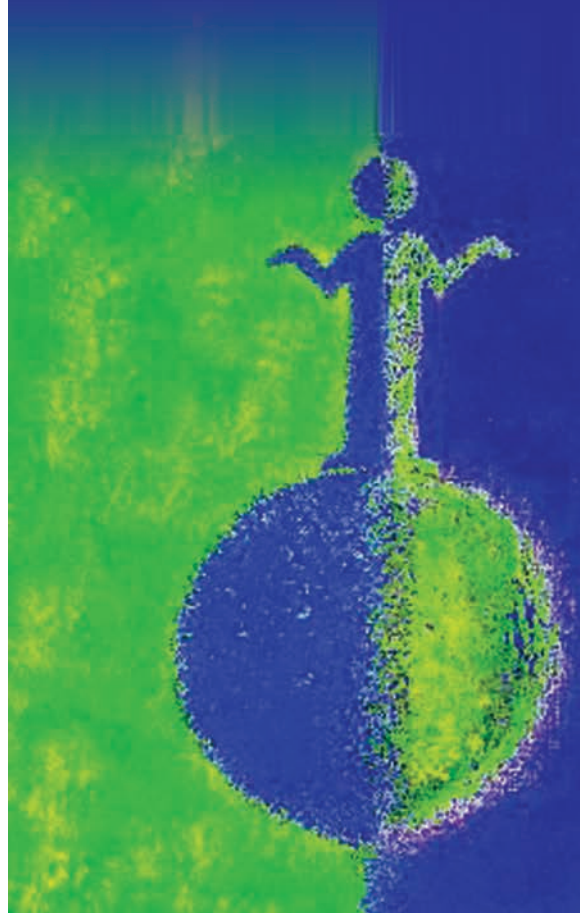
Narrated by Talha bin Ubaidullah:

A man from Najd with unkempt hair came to Allah's Apostle and we heard his loud voice, but could not understand what he was saying until he came near and then we came to know that he was asking about Islam. Allah's Apostle said, "You have to offer prayers perfectly five times a day and during the night (24 hours)." The man asked, "Is there any more (praying)?" Allah's Apostle replied, "No, but if you want to offer the supererogatory prayers (you can)." Allah's Apostle further said to him: "You have to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan." The man asked, "Is there any more fasting?" Allah's Apostle replied, "No, but if you want to observe the supererogatory fasts (you can)." Then Allah's Apostle further said to him, "You have to pay the Zakat (obligatory charity)." The man asked, "Is there any thing other than the Zakat for me to pay?" Allah's Apostle replied, "No, unless you want to give alms of your own." And then that man retreated saying, "By Allah! I will neither do less nor more than this." Allah's Apostle said, "If what he said is true, then he will be successful (i.e. he will be granted Paradise)." (Bukhari)

While the Prophet gave this advice to the man from Najd, it is important to mention that he accepted all of Abu Bakr's wealth and half of Umar's wealth as charity; he advised some to fast three days a month, others two days a week, and yet another he advised some to observe only the obligatory prayer, while others he advised to pray the *tahajjud* (night prayer) and others he added the *Duha* (mid-morning) prayer as well. On those who had a greater ability he placed a greater responsibility.

Thus, it can be understood that people should do what they are capable of doing and to the extent that they are capable of doing it. The advice to avoid bodily weaknesses, laziness and sloth is very important. When a person forgoes doing actions

It behooves mankind to never forget that all might and power belong to Allah, and that people are not in control of anything that befalls them except by way of their belief or disbelief.



that they are capable of doing out of a sense of pride, or from laziness, then they have truly fallen into error. They deem themselves to be in control of their lives, their destinies, and their afterlives. However, there is verse after verse in the Qur'an which warns us that this is certainly not the case.

The human being cannot control his/her own birth, or that of their offspring:

"Allah doth know what every female (womb) doth bear by how much the wombs fall short (of their time or number) or exceed. Everything is before his sight in (due) proportion." (Qur'an:13/:8)

"To Allah belong the dominions of the heavens and the earth. He creates what he wills (and plans). He bestows (children) male and female according to his will (and plan). Or He bestows both males and females and He leaves barren whom He will: for He is full of knowledge and power." (Qur'an:42/49-50)

Human beings do not control their own provisions during their lifetime:

"Say: 'Verily my Lord enlarges and restricts the provisions to whom He pleases but most men understand not'." (Qur'an:34/:36)

Human beings cannot protect themselves from distress or harm:

"Say: 'I have no power over any harm or profit to myself except as Allah willith. To every people is a term appointed: when their term is reached not an hour can they cause delay not (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation)'." (Qur'an:10/49)

Human beings cannot save themselves from death:

"And verily it is We Who gives life and who gives death: it is We Who remain Inheritors (after all else passes away)." (Qur'an:15/ 23)

Finally, humans come to the second period of weakness, the time of grey hair. For some, this is a time in which wisdom replaces arrogance and pride, and for others it is a time of complete loss. This is because, although Allah warns all of mankind time and time again to be careful that physical strength does not become a tool of the *nafs* to convince one that they are self-sufficient, often this warning goes unheeded by those who spend no time strengthening their minds with worthy knowledge about their Creator or about their destiny. Over and over again mankind is warned of the folly of allowing themselves to believe in autonomy at any point, as this allows arrogance and rebellion to overtake *iman* (faith). It behooves mankind to never forget that all might and power belong to Allah, and that people are not in control of anything that befalls them except by way of their belief or disbelief. A person's strength is found in their conviction and character, which are signs of their sincerity and *iman*.

May Allah strengthen our minds with true and pure knowledge and strengthen our bodies for sincere and worthy worship so that we may show righteous thanks for the blessings He has bestowed on us from the time before we were born to the time after we die.

A person's strength is found in their conviction and character, which are signs of their sincerity and iman.



WESTERN CHILDHOOD

HAJAR WAFI

Life in the West is about ease and comfort, and there is never any contemplation of what the life after is going to bring.

To my horror, the narrator of the commercial for the car company began by saying, "If you don't like your phone, get a new one. . . If you don't like your dog, get a new one. . . If you don't like your spouse, get a new one..." My children, having just finished watching their favorite cartoon on television, look up at me, the oldest speaking first: "It seems like everything here is replaceable, even if it's not broken, right Mom?"

The day I have tried to avoid for so long has finally arrived. The day that my children apparently become aware of the pressures of the society in which we live. The day that they become aware of the fact that there are influences trying to persuade them, ever so subtly, to give into a material lifestyle, making them think that having anything that is less than "everything" is somehow considered unfortunate.

Everything in America is fast. Instant gratification is the rule of thumb when seeking to have one's needs met. If you are hungry there are "fast food" franchises and microwave meals. If you are thirsty, you can "drive-through" Starbucks, or find just about any drink imaginable in a plastic bottle at the local convenience store. If you are cold, you turn up the heat, or if you are hot you turn up the air-conditioning.



Being Muslim parents, we try to instill certain values into our children, such as, charity for others comes before your own wants and desires, prayer and thanks to Allah is neither endless nor instant.



In Western society, there is no good reason for spending one day outside of complete comfort, unless your life-style demands something else from you.

Here, modesty is a silly thing for old-fashioned people, discomfort is for people who are living in the midst of a great catastrophe, and struggle is something that happens when you start following the "latest fad diet" in order to lose twenty pounds (although you should really lose 40). Yes, life in the West is about ease and comfort, and there is never any contemplation of what the life after is going to bring.

Being Muslim parents, we try to instill certain values into our children, such as, charity for others comes before your own wants and desires, prayer and thanks to Allah is neither endless nor instant, and the idea of "not wanting" something is a good enough reason to go out and find a new owner for that thing. We do not want our children to grow up thinking they have to "keep up with the Joneses"; rather we remind them to "keep up" with their fasting during Ramadan, their school work and course grades, and their reading of the Qur'an. A race for them is something in which you try to out-do the good deeds of your sibling, not something on which you gamble.

We try to be cautious about outside influences in order to keep them from seeping into our house and distorting the values we are trying to teach them. This is not an easy thing to do, most of all during the Christmas season, the very celebration of materialism.

Many people decorate their house with string after string of blinking lights. There are fake snowmen and lit-up Santa Clauses in 1/3 of all the front yards in our neighborhood. The television is channel after channel of big-eyed children staring blindly into the sky searching for a flying sleigh pulled by reindeer. Their sole fixation on this sleigh and reindeer is due to the fact that it is bringing them the latest video game, video player, cellular phone, or Ipod music player.

We try to explain to our children that the best gifts they can receive are the ones that Allah gives them; and we try to teach them the manners of how to show their gratitude for these gifts.

We try to expound upon the notion that they should find happiness in Allah's creation which stretches out before them, rather than to go and look for it in a box or bag. "Stores" we explain, "are where we find our necessities, prayer is where we seek our desires." A hard lesson indeed when the local shopping center has a wall of all the latest toys just inside the front entrance.

In our house Allah is talked about like an absent parent; what is pleasing to Him, and what is displeasing to Him. My children are, thankfully, convinced that Allah sees everything they do, and that He is in constant communication with me by means completely imaginable to children. For them Allah is real, tangible, somehow just beyond their sight, and He can and does take care of everything we need.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), we explain, is someone they haven't met yet, but they will one day...on the last day. We tell them how on that day they will see him coming to them smiling, as long as they remember him and live their lives with him as their constant role model and guide, just as we try to do. They look with the same big-eyed wonder as the "sleigh seekers" when they hear stories about the life of the Prophet, and they are even glad to know that he isn't going to bring them anything but a glass of water from the Qawthar Well if they live an upright life.

Yet, out of the blue, a commercial that makes it look glamorous to give into all the desires of the nafs always seems to pop up. Often we find ourselves guessing as to whether we are doing a good job as parents, and whether all that we say is being comprehended.

We wonder if our model of living a good a clean life is even being noticed. Sometimes we get an answer to our question in the subtlest of ways.

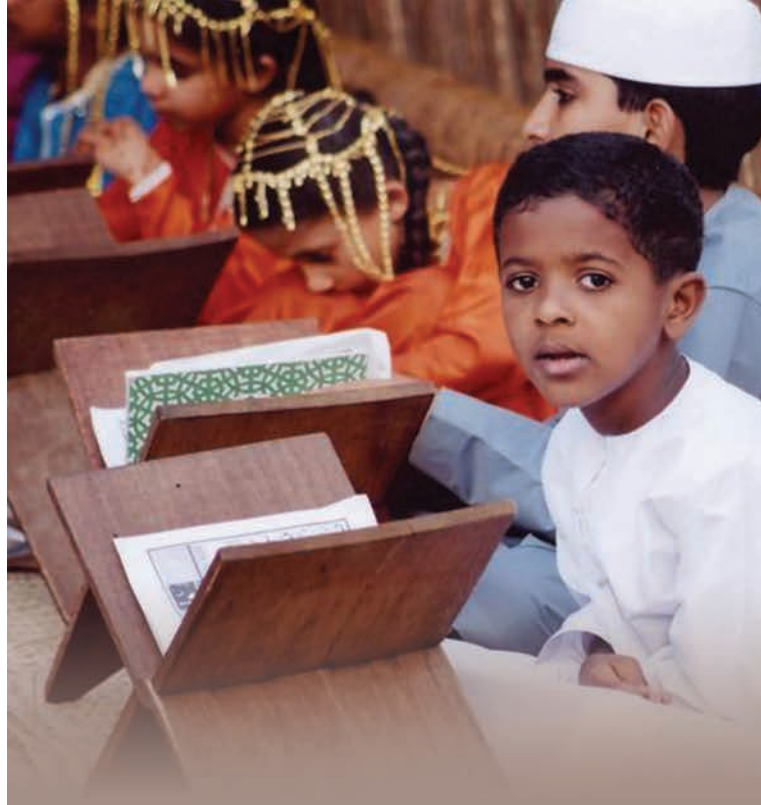
For instance, one day I was invited to join a group of Muslim representatives to view an art exhibition based on the religious stories of the Torah, Bible and Qur'an, depicted according to the viewpoint of the religion of the various artists. I was hesitant, but eventually decided to go, and took my daughter along.

One of the first items in the exhibition was by a Christian artist, a sculpture based on the creation story found in the Bible. My daughter looked at a placard which told about the sculpture and found a word. . .

"G-d". She quietly raised her hand and asked the guide who was showing us around why the artist wrote "G-d", instead of "God". The aging woman replied, "Well, dear, that is because some people think that writing the whole name of God is disrespectful to Him."

My daughter looked at her quizzically and asked, "Do you mean writing God's name is wrong, but carving a statue of Him when you don't even know what He looks like is not disrespectful?"

Lesson learned!



We do not want our children to grow up thinking they have to "keep up with the Joneses"; rather we remind them to "keep up" with their fasting during Ramadan, their school work and course grades, and their reading of the Qur'an.

IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE IN THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUFI

ABDULQADIR ASAD

The significance of marriage, not only as the biological basis of society, but also as an influential element in the formation of world ideologies and civilisation cannot be ignored.



Celibacy is one of the essential conditions in many of the spiritual practises of various religions. Christianity, in particular Catholicism, Buddhism and many other religions make celibacy a condition for a healthy spiritual development and consider marriage an obstacle on this path. However, the recent child abuse cases involving Catholic priests have put this practise into question and it is now being hotly debated by Christians as well as the followers of other religions.

Many religions consider marriage to be a sacred act and the union of souls or spirits with the sacred realm. Jewish beliefs focus on the origins of marriage to Adam and Eve and view their union as a part of the fabric of creation. In Christianity, furthermore the marriage ceremony joins the bride and groom into one spirit in union with Christ and God. For the Hindu, marriage is also a sacred institution whereby man and woman become one spirit. In the Vedic period it was a moral and religious obligation as well.

The first man created by Allah, Adam was also the first person to be married and to establish a family as the building block of society. The significance of marriage, not only as the biological basis of society, but also as an influential element in the formation of world ideologies and civilisation cannot be ignored. This can also be seen from the fact that there is no philosophic ideology or religion that has anything to say regarding the contract of marriage.



**Islam depicts
men and women
as two complimentary
parts to one another's
spiritual life. Hence,
there is no tension
between a happy
married life and piety.**

From the Islamic point of view marriage is one of the essential necessities of life and ensures the continuity of human kind. Islam, when compared to most other religions, strongly advises its followers to get married. In addition to statements in the Qur'an, there are many sayings of the Prophet which emphasise that marriage is one of the most fundamental institutions in Islamic life. Islam depicts men and women as two complimentary parts to one another's spiritual life. Hence, there is no tension between a happy married life and piety. Although the Qur'an warns believers not to indulge excessively in the pleasures of lust, this warning does not specifically target marriage and is generally applicable to all other activities. Hence, it is clear that Islam, as such, is not against the existence of marriage, but opposes overindulgence in any worldly pleasures, such as the desire to possess wealth, children, or large families.

Islam does not see the relations between men and women and the attractions that exist between them as foreign to human nature. Rather these are viewed as a natural bond that exists between the opposite sexes and which is in accordance with the creative plan of Allah. The following verse best exemplifies this approach

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect."

From this verse the following can be established. It is perfectly natural to love the opposite sex and

to get married. Furthermore, that Allah created man and women as complementary to each other and permitted them to have conjugal relations is one of His blessings. Hence, the nature of man and women as created by Allah requires that they possess some form of inclination and attraction for one another.

As a result, the Qur'an does not see marriage as an obstacle to the love of Allah. Therefore, Muslims and particularly Sufis prefer marriage to celibate life. Although most Sufis warned their disciples against the pitfalls of marriage and wrote cautious warnings about it, they nevertheless followed the example of the Prophet and married. They normally used the following verse to indicate the dangers of marriage: *"Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your mates and your kinsfolk and property which you have acquired, and the slackness of trade which you fear and dwellings which you like, are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His command"*

According to Islam marriage is one of the fundamentals of bliss not only in this world but also in the Hereafter. After the needs of food and shelter the most important need of a human being is a spouse. Hence, in the Qur'an it is stated that in Paradise the believers will have wives and husbands as their rewards: *"And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that they shall have gardens in which rivers flow; whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: This is what was given to*



The Bible seems to discourage the love of women. The reason for this is that in the Bible love was the original sin committed in Paradise before the Fall.

us before; and it is given to them in resemblance. There for them are pure companions; there forever they abide." (Qur'an:2/25)

The verse explains that without marriage the bliss of a human being in the hereafter will not be complete. This is also true of this life. Men and women are in need of each other because of the way they were created.

The Bible seems to discourage the love of women. The reason for this is that in the Bible love was the original sin committed in Paradise before the Fall. The idea of original sin and Eve's seductiveness are emphasised. As a result, married life is only tolerated on a utilitarian basis for the procreation of life and to increase the followers of the Church. The celibate life of Jesus also played an important part in building feelings opposed to marriage among Christian scholars and Church fathers.

Thus, there was a world renouncing attitude and the Gnostic anti-sex feelings were shared by many, with the result that marriage was considered inferior to celibacy. Tertullian expressed the general orthodox position about marriage as follows:

'We do not reject marriage, but we simply refrain from it.'

However, the clergy soon came under pressure to remain celibate, especially in the Western church. In the Western church, from the fourth century on, attempts were made to impose celibacy on bishops and priests, and others who served at the altar.

Hence, over time avoiding sexual intercourse and celibacy became the ideal in Christian mysticism. This is related to the understanding of the supreme characteristic of humanity: reason. Reason is in the head and it is masculine. Clements writes that intercourse causes the blood to rush from the head to the sexual organs, thereby rendering us less human. Therefore, ascetics like Tertian rejected matrimony absolutely and even considered matrimony to be a form of adultery. This extreme anti-marriage attitude even led some Christian mystics to practice self-castration.

Gregory who is sometimes known as the "father of Christian Mysticism" considered marriage to be a "sad tragedy" and "a bodily union that works to produce a dead body".

Physical celibacy is the shell for an inner celibacy, which purifies the soul, making it like the spirit and thus allowing for a bond with God. Some of Gregory's biographers have even reported that he castrated himself. This practise was strongly condemned by Prophet Muhammad and those Companions who asked permission to castrate themselves were prohibited from doing so.

Among Sufi classics, the author of *Awarif al-Ma'arif*, al-Suhrawardi, (d. 1234) discusses the pros and cons of marriage at length and as an indication of his support for marriage, al-Suhrawardi mentions that in the Qur'an Allah never mentions the names of single prophets except Jesus. However, al-Suhrawardi claims that Jesus will marry when he returns to the world just before the Doomsday.

Al-Hujwiri, after quoting Qur'anic verses and hadiths concerning marriage, concludes that it is not marriage or celibacy that damages one's spiritual development, but it is rather following the base desires of the nafs or failing to follow proper Islamic conduct in the state of marriage or single life that causes great damage.

He also advises that the disciple should prefer marriage if they find that it is helpful to them in religious life. Hence, he gives the right to the disciple to choose whatever is best for them.

These Sufi manuals show that in fact the Sufis do not really support celibacy. The disciple should choose either marriage or celibacy, according to their needs. As Baldick confirms, the relative absence of celibacy in Sufism is its distinguishing feature from other religious spiritual philosophies.

Most ascetics and Sufis do not see marriage as being opposed to a pious life. Sahl b. Abdullah al-Tusteri says: "Celibacy cannot be deemed as a part of ascetic life, since the head of all the ascetics, the Prophet (pbuh) said three things are made lovable to me and one of these is women."

Hence most Sufis do not see that celibacy is an essential part of a pious Sufi life. However, they advise novices to postpone marriage in order to fully dedicate their time to spiritual perfection. Once they have completed their spiritual training they are urged to marry and establish a happy family life.

**As Baldick confirms,
the relative absence of
celibacy in Sufism is its
distinguishing feature
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THE CHARACTER AND SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF MAHMUD SAMI EFENDI

MUSA EFENDI



Among these subjects, one theme in particular occupied an important place in his talks; this was the subject of the heart and its training.

Mahmud Sami Efendi was of medium height, but the awe he inspired in the hearts of people made him seem much taller. His skin was of the color of wheat, his beard was not too thick, and his hair was curly. He was slim, but not skinny, and his eyes were hazel. His appearance would often change. Hence it is impossible to draw an accurate picture of him, and it is difficult to describe the beauty of his face in words.

He had a very kind personality, possessing the best qualities a human can have. He responded to different situations according to the needs of the time, and he would do so with moderation and wisdom. However, he would also act with extreme courage when the circumstances required. Although he always had a smiling face, he was serious at heart. His close friends and those who knew him well would refer to him as 'the angel Sami Efendi', due to his high standards of morality.

He wore simple and plain clothes. He did not let his beard grow longer than the palm of his hand, and sometimes he allowed his hair to grow down to his ears.

He would walk in a slow and dignified manner. Although he walked slowly, he still moved quite quickly, and his companions had to hurry to catch up with him. A poet described his walking thus:

In his slow walking there was a natural speed.

Those who walked as though running were left behind.



His close friends and those who knew him well would refer to him as ‘the angel Sami Efendi’, due to his high standards of morality.

He ate very little and slept very little. He talked very little, most of the time preferring to keep silent. He would only speak when necessary, and even then his words were few. When he talked to someone he did not ignore the background and status of that person. He said not a single word more or less than what was necessary. He would speak clearly and slowly, repeating three times when he wished to emphasize something.

The subjects of his talks were mostly concerned with explanations of the verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and stories of other Prophets. He would explain the lives and good character of the friends of Allah, and their patience and sacrifices for the sake of Allah. He gathered information about all of these things and would present it to his murīds (those whom he undertook to guide).

Among these subjects, one theme in particular occupied an important place in his talks; this was the subject of the heart and its training. He would always narrate the famous hadith of the Prophet (pbuh) that states: "Beware! There is such a piece of flesh in the body that if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt, and that is the heart." He would also add that the heart is the only place where Allah manifests Himself. Hence, the heart is more important than the Kaaba, because the latter was built by Prophet Abraham (pbuh), that is, it is something constructed by a human; whereas the heart is constructed by Allah, and is hence a direct creation of the divine.

Whenever he witnessed the shortcomings of a murīd Mahmud Sami Efendi would feel very sad,

but he would never speak behind their backs, even by implication. All his dealings with others were within the bounds of kindness and mercy. He strongly desired that his followers be trained in the best manner and that they possess the best moral qualities, such as sincerity, intelligence, modesty, selflessness, generosity, mercy, and many other good and noble characteristics. People would benefit from his talks and conversations according to their level of sincerity and ability. Those who followed his advice and performed the wird (a daily prayer usually given to those entering a Sufi order) he had instructed them in traversed the spiritual path quickly; this was a fact that was easily observable by others.

*Their vices were replaced by virtues.
Their pride was replaced with modesty,
Unbelief with belief,
Jealousy with respect,
Greed with selflessness,
Laziness with diligence,
Cowardice with courage,
Rudeness with kindness,
Cruelty with mercy.*

Ustadh Mahmud Sami never argued with others, never indulged in backbiting or entered into heated debates. He did not hold bad opinions of others; rather, he forgave the mistakes of others. Like other friends of Allah, his personality was characterized by forgiveness and mercy.

He always gave hope to his followers, and those who visited him always left his presence with a feeling of relief and happiness, even though they may have not come into his presence with the appropriate manner.

Mahmud Sami Efendi was very fond of murîds who possessed good manners, and he would pay special attention to them. He never behaved carelessly. He was one of those distinguished persons we rarely witness over the centuries; Allah had bestowed upon him the best characteristics, those which He bestows only upon His elected servants. Mahmud Sami Efendi demonstrated the true meaning of the Arabic phrase *Addaba-nî Rabb-î* (My Lord has refined me).

He was a person filled with a great many noble qualities; he lead an ascetic life, and was always careful about how he dealt with others. As a spiritual guide he also had great powers. If the murîd was a sincere person, Mahmud Sami could take him through different stages of *tasawwuf* in a single moment. As a result, the murîd was able to purify their heart from worldly loves and was filled with the love of Allah. The heart of the physical eye would be replaced by the eye of the heart. As a result, the murîd gained insight that enabled them to discriminate what is true from what is false. In short, the faith of the murîd, which had been based on imitation, became internalized with spiritual enlightenment, and this was the result of the *baraqah* (spiritual grace) of our Ustadh Mahmud Sami. The positive transformation in the spiritual life of some murîds was often extraordinary.

Conversely, many people fail on the spiritual path. They either do not follow a spiritual guide, or they follow the wrong guide. Such people, even if they perform many good deeds, fast and perform all other manner of good actions,

nevertheless fail to reach their destination because they are not able to purify their hearts from the love of worldly things, such as wealth, family and children. Even worse, sometimes the amount of their worship makes them think that they are better Muslims than others, and this boasting causes them more trouble, since they are not able to see their mistakes and can see only the mistakes of others.

Our Ustadh never became angry with his friends. He did not discriminate between those who praised him and those who criticized him. He also forgave those who railed against him if this person later understood their mistake and sought his forgiveness.

When performing his ritual prayers Mahmud Sami Efendi would always look straight ahead. Before starting his *sohbets* (Sufi discourse) he would always ask a *hâfidh* (a person who has memorized the whole of the Qur'an) to recite a portion of the Qur'an. He would also ask us to recite *surah Al-Fâtiha* (The opening chapter of the Qur'an) once and *surah Al-Ikhlâs* three times, presenting them as a gift to the souls of our previous masters. Although he spoke with a low voice, everybody would be able to hear him, even those who sat in the far corners of the room. In most *sohbets* he would either ask someone to read a religious book or he would read one himself. However, when the subject was concerned with matters of the heart, he would speak from his own mind without following a book. He would very often read the following verses:

Those who followed his advice and performed the wîrd he had instructed them in traversed the spiritual path quickly; this was a fact that was easily observable by others.



Allah Almighty wills His servants to recognize their Lord and to bow in front of His majesty in modesty. In this way the servants are able to fulfill their duty of servanthood towards their Lord.



Surely We created man of the best stature
(Qur'an:95/4)

We have honored the sons of Adam
(Qur'an:17/70)

Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Qur'an:49/13)

According to our Ustadh, taqwâ means that the servant knows Allah as He deserves to be known, then they follow His commandments untiringly, performing them in the best manner, refraining from what is haram (the acts which are forbidden by Allah) and following the Sunnah (the example) of the Prophet in all their actions. He would also repeat the following verses:

What did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us? (Qur'an:23/115)

Does man think that he will be left uncontrolled (without purpose)? (Qur'an:75/36)

Allah Almighty wills His servants to recognize their Lord and to bow in front of His majesty in modesty. In this way the servants are able to fulfill their duty of servanthood towards their Lord. After knowing Allah, a believer is asked to obey the commandments of Allah which are prescribed in the Qur'an. However, it is necessary to know that the physical obedience of the body to the commandments of Allah is not enough. Similarly, the heart should willingly accept the worship of Allah, and should sever external bonds with worldly things. Without the consent of the heart, the mere obedience of the external limbs is not sufficient to reach the knowledge of the divine (Al-Ma'rifah al-Ilâhiyyah).

In order to emphasize the significance of this spiritual training, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said the following to his Companions when they were returning from the battle of Tâbûk.

"We have returned from the lesser Jihad to the greater Jihad."

The battle with the nafs (the lower self) is more significant than the battle with the enemy. Abdul-Qâdir Jailânî, the great pillar of the Sufi path, said:

"The battle with the nafs is harder than the battle with the enemy, because the enmity of the nafs is continuous at all times as the nafs is part of the human personality. Why is it so difficult to battle the nafs? To fight with the nafs is to fight with one's own self. It means giving up the bad habits and the desires of the self to follow the commandments of the Divine Law. Whoever leads those who fight such battles with the external and the internal enemy, Allah will reward such a person both in this and in the next life." (Al-Fath al-Rabbânî, Suhbat, 8)

Abu Bakr al-Saydalâni said:

"There is life in the death of the nafs; the life of the heart is dependent upon the death of nafs."

"The greatest victory is to escape your nafs, as it is the greatest veil between you and your Lord."

"It is impossible to defeat the nafs with the nafs. Only with the help of Allah can you be victorious against your nafs. This means that your will submits to the will of Allah." (Tadhkirat al-Awliyâh, 752)

The Virtues Of The Day Of Ashura

MAHMUD SAMI EFENDI



Narrated Ar-Rubai binti Mu'awwidh that Rasullah (pbuh) sent a messenger to the village of the Ansar in the morning of the day of Ashura to announce, "Whoever has eaten something should not eat but complete the fast, and whoever is observing the fast should complete it."

She further said, "Since then we used to observe fast on that day regularly and also make our children observe fast. We used to make toys of wool for the boys and if anyone of them cried for food, he was given those toys till it was the time of the iftar."

Look how the great companions of Rasulullah (pbuh) took every act of worship seriously and taught their children even when they were very young!

According to the scholars of Islam, the fast of children is not obligatory but recommended. According to Imam Shafii, children should be ordered to fast after seven or ten years old if they are physically strong enough; according to Ishak, children should be ordered to fast from twelve years old; according to Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, children should be ordered to fast from ten years old. Evzai said: "If you make your children fast, three consecutive days is recommended."

However, we should not cause children to become weak, and also we should remember that even the travelers are permitted not to fast. We should not forget that Allah says in the Qur'an: "Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you."

According to the narration of Ibn Abbas: "The Prophet (pbuh) came to Al-Madina and s.a.w. the Jews fasting on the day of Ashura. He asked them about

that. They replied, 'This is a good day, the day on which Allah rescued Bani Israel from their enemy. So Moses (pbuh) observed fast on this day.' The Prophet (pbuh) said: 'We have more claim over Moses (pbuh) than you., So the Prophet (pbuh) observed fast on that day and ordered the Muslims to fast on that day."

It is narrated that on this day (Muharram 10th) the repentance of Adam (pbuh) was accepted, Adam (pbuh) reached the level of prophets, Idris (pbuh) was raised to a high place, the ark of Noah (pbuh) was saved, Abraham (pbuh) was rescued from the fire, Moses (pbuh) was given the Torah, Joseph (pbuh) was saved from the prison, the sight of Jacob (pbuh) was restored, Job (pbuh) was cured, Jonah (pbuh) was saved from the belly of the fish, the Red Sea was divided in front of the Children of Israel and they were saved from the armies of Pharaoh, David (pbuh) was forgiven, Solomon (pbuh) was given his throne and wealth, the past and future sins of Muhammad (pbuh) were forgiven, the earth was created, the first rain fell on the earth.

Ar Rawzu'l Faik tells this story in his book: "There was a wealthy man in Basra. Every year on the day of Ashura he used to invite his Muslim brothers to his house, and read the Qur'an all night, help the needy, the poor and the widows. In his neighborhood, there was a man and his daughter, both of whom were paralyzed and could not walk. That night the girl asked her father, 'O father, why did our neighbor gather so many people in his house and read the Qur'an all night?' The father answered, 'Today is the day of Ashura, which has many blessings, and this day is very important before Allah.'

Later, her father went to sleep but the daughter could not. She was listening to the Qur'an and the dhikr. When she heard the supplication of Hatim, when the recitation of the whole Qur'an was finished, she raised her hands and said, "O Allah, for the sake of this night, and for the sake of Your servants who don't sleep tonight to read the Qur'an, make me healthy again!"

When her father saw her the next morning, he was surprised and asked how she had been restored to health. She said, 'I begged Allah through the blessings of this night, and He gave my health back.'"

Look how the great companions of Rasulullah (pbuh) took every act of worship seriously and taught their children even when they were very young!



HOW TO ELIMINATE THE CAUSES OF LAZINESS IN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

SULEYMAN DERIN, PhD

*T*he first cause of laziness is our ego and Satan, the cursed. They perform all kinds of tricks to prevent Muslims from fulfilling their duties, including giving them false hope to trust in Allah's forgiveness.



In most of his letters Imam Rabbani strives to eliminate the reluctance of the ego to fulfill religious obligations. He gives many examples of such laziness and shows us methods to solve this problem, something which directly concerns all Muslims. The causes of reluctance in religious duties, according to Rabbani, come from various sources. The first cause of laziness is our ego and Satan, the cursed. They perform all kinds of tricks to prevent Muslims from fulfilling their duties, including giving them false hope to trust in Allah's forgiveness. They make believers think that whatever they do Allah has to forgive. Another important cause is ignorance and a lack of knowledge about religion. In his 73rd letter he writes:

O son! There are two causes behind the negligence of religious duties, the first is to regard the injunctions of Shariah as invalid and the other is to consider Allah's power and magnanimity less than that of the people of the world. You must understand that in both cases you have committed a grave and ugly sin.

To solve this problem, Imam Rabbani emphasizes that, as a matter of fact, the fulfillment of religious duties is of benefit to us both in this world and in the next world. Unfortunately, most people think that by fulfilling religious commandments or refraining from haram acts (prohibited acts) they are benefiting themselves. We should abandon the idea that such acts for the benefit of Allah:



What a useless faith we have if it does not urge its owner to follow the truth to the same extent that we follow information gathered from doubtful sources.

The purpose of fulfilling the law of Islam is to protect the rights of Allah's servants. Our worship or obedience to Allah has no benefit for Him in any way. Hence the servant should fulfill their duties in a manner of thanksgiving. By sending His commandments and explaining the forbidden acts, Allah Almighty has actually given us a great bounty. Therefore, when we fulfill the injunctions of the law we should feel gratitude to Allah.

(Letter 73)

To further explain the above point Rabbani gives the following example:

If a man of high position obliges us to do something in which all the good returns to us, we would be very happy and we would obey his orders willingly and with gratitude. However, it is interesting that although we know that the commandments of Allah are beneficial to us thousands of times more than any mortal can benefit us, we still behave lazily in following the advice given to us by the Prophet. Or if we do a little favor to someone for the sake of religion than we feel proud and at times makes other feel at unease. This is nothing but minimizing the greatness of Allah.

If we do not give the same amount of value to the information brought by the Prophet, the most trustworthy human being, the "Muhbir-i sâdik", as we value the information given to us by a liar, then what a bad faith we have. When someone who is known to be a liar informs us of some form of danger, such as an enemy invasion, intelligent people would at least check out the truthfulness of these words, assuming that there may be some modicum of truth in them.

In other words, when our worldly interests are at stake we take the words of a liar seriously, while most of us take the warnings of the Prophet lightly, even though they are concerned with eternal loss. If Muslims were to take the advice of the Prophet seriously, they would amend their ways and look for solutions to their idleness. What a useless faith we have if it does not urge its owner to follow the truth to the same extent that we follow information gathered from doubtful sources. Hence, according to Rabbani, claiming to be a believer only on the surface has no significance in the Divine Court. Therefore, one needs to attain ilm-i yakînî (certainty in knowledge), which urges us to do pious works.

Among the pious works that need to be fulfilled, Imam Rabbani gives a special warning regarding the financial obligations of Islam:

O my son! Our nafs is in its essence very miserly. It particularly dislikes helping others financially. My gentle words should not deceive you in this matter. You must know that all wealth and possessions in reality belong to Allah. It is for this reason that a servant of Allah cannot stop giving financial aid to others or postpone the rights of others. Therefore, a believer should not be idle about repaying their debts or giving rights to the poor.

(According to Islam poor people have a right to 2.5 % of the net savings of the more wealthy people each year; this is called zakat. This is not a gift from the rich, but it is a right given to the underprivileged, such as the poor, students, those who have been left without money while traveling, and so on.)

Imam Rabbani also teaches us a practical way of paying one's zakat –which is a great burden on one's ego – in an easy way. He advises that we allocate a certain amount of our savings at the beginning of the year with the intention of fulfilling the obligation of zakat and distribute it throughout the year. If a Muslim gives to charity with no intention of paying the yearly zakat due, then this is not considered to be zakat, only charity. The wealth which is distributed with the intention of zakat is the only way to fulfill the obligation of zakat. (Letter 73)

Paying one's debts in this world is quite easy, but it is not so easy to pay them in the Divine Court. One can fully pay the rights of others, but in the Hereafter this becomes a more difficult problem. (Letter 73)

The best time of doing good works is the time of youth. A wise believer does not waste this period of life since one cannot be sure of living until old age. Even if we assume that one will live until old age how can they be sure that they will have the energy of the youth to fulfill their obligations. The weakness of old age can prevent one from completely fulfilling one's obligations. For a young person it is not difficult to fulfill all one's obligations as they have the power and energy to do so. If one constantly postpones their obligations to tomorrow (when young) there is nothing that can justify this. (Letter 73)

Imam Rabbani gives some interesting advice in connection with procrastination. He says that we should postpone our worldly works for the sake of the religious ones, rather than the other way around.

If your occupation with the works of the Hereafter is preventing you from the works of this life, how fortunate this is! On the other hand, if your engagement with this world is preventing you from religious obligations, how bad this is! A little work done when the nafs and Satan have great power over one's worldly desires is much better than numerous pious works at other times (probably in old age when the nafs is weaker). The similitude of this is that when a country is under attack by a powerful army the courage of soldiers is greatly appreciated. A small amount of bravery and their fortitude are highly appreciated. However, when the county is at peace and there is no threat from the enemy, the courage of the soldiers is not valued as before. (Letter 73)

In order to give importance to the rights of other and to prefer the works of the Hereafter over the works of this life one should be satisfied with the minimum requirements in this life:

The important thing here is that one should abandon an excess of worldly gains, even if they are permissible, and only take what is most necessary. Even when taking a little, the disciple should intend to attain enough energy to fulfill their religious obligations. For example, when buying a cloth one should buy enough to cover the body, the private parts, and to protect the body from the cold and heat. This measure can be taken in all permissible actions. (Letter 73)

If one applies the above principles of Imam Rabbani they will be able to serve Allah as required. May Allah give us the energy to serve Him and to eliminate all kinds of negative feelings.



When our worldly interests are at stake we take the words of a liar seriously, while most of us take the warnings of the Prophet lightly, even though they are concerned with eternal loss.



RABIA'S GIFTS TO HASAN AL-BASRI

Once Rabia al-Adawiyya sent Hasan al-Basri three things - a piece of wax, a needle, and a hair.

"Be like wax," she said. "Illumine the world, and yourself burn. Be like a needle, always be working naked. When you have done these two things, a thousand years will be for you as a hair."

"Do you desire for us to get married?" Hasan asked Rabia.

"The tie of marriage applies to those who have being," Rabia replied. "Here being has disappeared, for I have become naughted to self and exist only through Him. I belong wholly to Him. I live in the shadow of His control. You must ask my hand of Him, not of me."

"How did you find this secret, Rabia?" Hasan asked.

"I lost all 'found' things in Him," Rabia answered.

"How do you know Him?" Hasan inquired.

"You know the 'how'; I know the 'howless'," Rabia said.



LEARNING HUMILITY FROM BAYAZID AL-BISTAMI

There was a certain ascetic who was one of the great saints of Bestam. He had his own followers and admirers, and at the same time he was never absent from the circle of Bayazid al-Bistami. He listened to all his discourses, and sat with his companions.

One day he remarked to Bistami, "Master, for thirty years I have been keeping a constant fast. By night too I pray, so that I never sleep at all. Yet I discover no trace of this knowledge of which you speak. For all that I believe in this knowledge, and I love this preaching."

"If for three hundred years," said Abu Yazid, "you fast by day and pray by night, you will never realize one atom of this discourse."

"Why?" asked the disciple.

"Because you are veiled by your own self," Abu Yazid replied.

"What is the remedy for this?" the man asked.

"You will never accept it," answered Abu Yazid.

"I will so," said the man. "Tell me, so that I may do as you prescribe."

"Very well," said Abu Yazid. "This very hour go and shave your beard and hair. Take off these clothes you are wearing, and tie a loincloth of goat's wool about your waist. Hang a bag of nuts around your neck, then go to the marketplace.

Collect all the children you can, and tell them, 'I will give a nut to everyone who slaps me.' Go round all the city in the same way; especially go everywhere people know you. That is your cure."

"Glory be to God! There is no god but God," cried the disciple on hearing these words.

"If a nonbeliever uttered that formula, he would become a believer," remarked Abu Yazid. "By uttering the same formula you have become a polytheist."

"How so?" demanded the disciple.

"Because you count yourself too grand to be able to do as I have said," replied Bistami. "So you have become a polytheist. You used this formula to express your own importance, not to glorify God."

"This I cannot do," the man protested. "Give me other directions."

"The remedy is what I have said," Abu Yazid declared.

"I cannot do it," the man repeated.

"Did I not say you would not do it, that you would never obey me?" said Bayazid Bistami.

The Color OF OUR Future

The period of childhood is the most precious and valuable in terms of learning for every human being. As our older generations would rightly say “a tree can be bent only when it is young.”

MUSA HUB

When one talks about humanity, one aspect that is of primary importance to the overall development of the human being is education. Where there are human beings present, in large or small groups, or even as individuals, there you will find education and learning. Learning lies at the core of the creation of the human being and we are in constant need of it. One could even argue that the very essence and meaning of our existence is to learn and to be educated. A human being and education are like inseparable twins. The periods of childhood followed by youth are the periods of life that are the most precious and valuable in terms of learning for every human being. As our older generations would rightly say “a tree can be bent only when it is young.”

When one looks back into history it is quite clear that it is those societies which paid serious attention to education and learning that were the happiest, the most productive, and therefore the most prosperous. Children's upbringing and their education are at the forefront of learning, the teaching process and the creation of a program to ensure this was rigorously followed. The enormous value of a child's education is of as great importance to the child themselves as it is to the future of the society within which he or she is growing up. As the





The more society ensures the upbringing of self conscious and accountable generations the more that society will rid itself of egoistical figures and build a solid structure of bricks made of strong moral values that encompass characteristically and physically healthy personalities.

environment in which the child is growing up is at the same time the starting point of the child's own life it will, therefore, essentially shape and mold the core of their future life and equip him or her with the fundamentals required to live a successful life there or indeed anywhere else he or she chooses to live. Thus, depending on how the child is educated, his or her future will be directed and secured both on a personal as well as on a public level.

The early period of education, therefore, is clearly the most important in all successful societies and world religions, as well as being the most important investment a state can prioritize. Those who did not pay enough attention and give importance, or indeed prioritize the education of the younger generations, particularly where moral education is concerned, could be argued to have written off and destroyed their own destiny with their own hands.

As the proverb says: "States do not fall because of a lack of finance, but rather because of a lack of moral values". During the last and most painful stages of the Ottoman Empire, a state that influenced the world for over 600 years, a Turkish poet - Mehmet Akif Ersoy - who grew up in that period wrote: "Show us, O Allah, a miracle that will save this nation. Send upon us a drop of the essence of shame from your eternal treasury."

Each child is educated through a variety of

means and according to various methods. Within these variables one of the most important, indeed the key, roles is given to developing the values of a consciousness of ethics: moral awareness, honesty, righteousness, humility, virtue, chastity, modesty and the concept of haya or 'shame' – though an old word that might be considered taboo in modern times; As Muslims, we draw our understanding of the meaning of the word haya from the Hadith, "If you are not ashamed, do whatever deed you wish, (any bad deed can be expected from you)." When we speak of such concerns regarding the upbringing of children and the instillation of these values into their daily lives and thoughts, it is with the primary concern of their accountability to God, as well as being true to themselves and to the society in which they live. To be righteous, humble, self-conscious, accountable, well-behaved, honoring others as well as to being honored, respecting others and, in doing so, gaining the respect of our fellow man allows us to become wholesome and positive members of society.

A role model that can live and exhibit, without abusing the rights and freedoms of others, all these precious human characteristics is one that can be admired by all who themselves know they have the capacity to live up to these noble standards and to be envied by those who feel that such a thing is impossible to achieve.

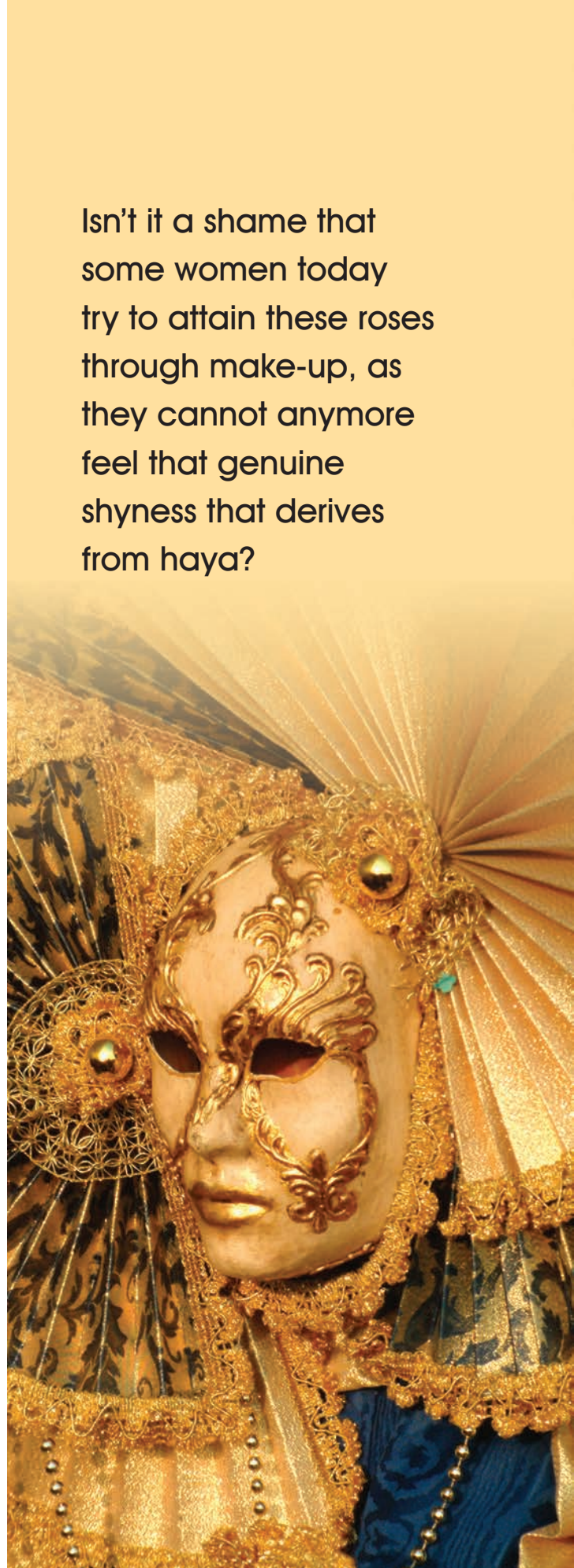
It has to be made clear at this point that the child who is brought-up with an awareness of such

noble characteristics will be a more successful, more helpful and useful person in his or her life and, with the family that he or she establishes in the future, this child will lay another layer of solid foundations towards a more stable and healthier society and/or nation. The more society ensures the upbringing of self-conscious and accountable generations the more that society will rid itself of unwanted, unreliable, self-centered, egoistical figures and build a solid structure of bricks made of strong moral values that encompass characteristically and physically healthy personalities.

To stress the importance of our discussion, let's look at the following example that took place at the faculty of media studies at Gazi University in Turkey in 1982. The 2nd year students were waiting for their lecturer. The classroom was clamoring with the noisy chattering of students when an angry lecturer entered, throwing a disappointed and angry look around the class, before proceeding to the board. He took up a piece of chalk and wrote the number one (1) on the board. "Look" – he addressed the classroom. "This is personality. The dearest and most valuable thing you can achieve in your life." Then he adds zero next to the number one. "This is success. A successful personality makes one person equal to 10 people." He adds another zero: "This is experience. When you are ten it will make you a hundred (100)". Then he keeps adding zeros, describing each of the virtues which enhance character: skills, discipline, love, etc. Each added zero multiplies the personality in tens... Then he takes the cloth and wipes away the digit 1 at the beginning, leaving a line of zeros on the board. "If you haven't got personality, the rest is nothing. It consists of nothing".

Indeed, if there is no personality, all achievements, praise, wealth, etiquette and titles are like an empty balloon. There is oxygen at the core of the "personality". If that oxygen does not exist, then the personality is also absent. It renders the person hardworking but indecent, skilled but shameless, successful but dishonored, brave but wicked. We will all be tested in our desires and each will undoubtedly fail due to a lack of dignity. There are many examples in history that have shown that even though there were men and women of dignity, bravery and honor who were unparalleled in

Isn't it a shame that some women today try to attain these roses through make-up, as they cannot anymore feel that genuine shyness that derives from haya?



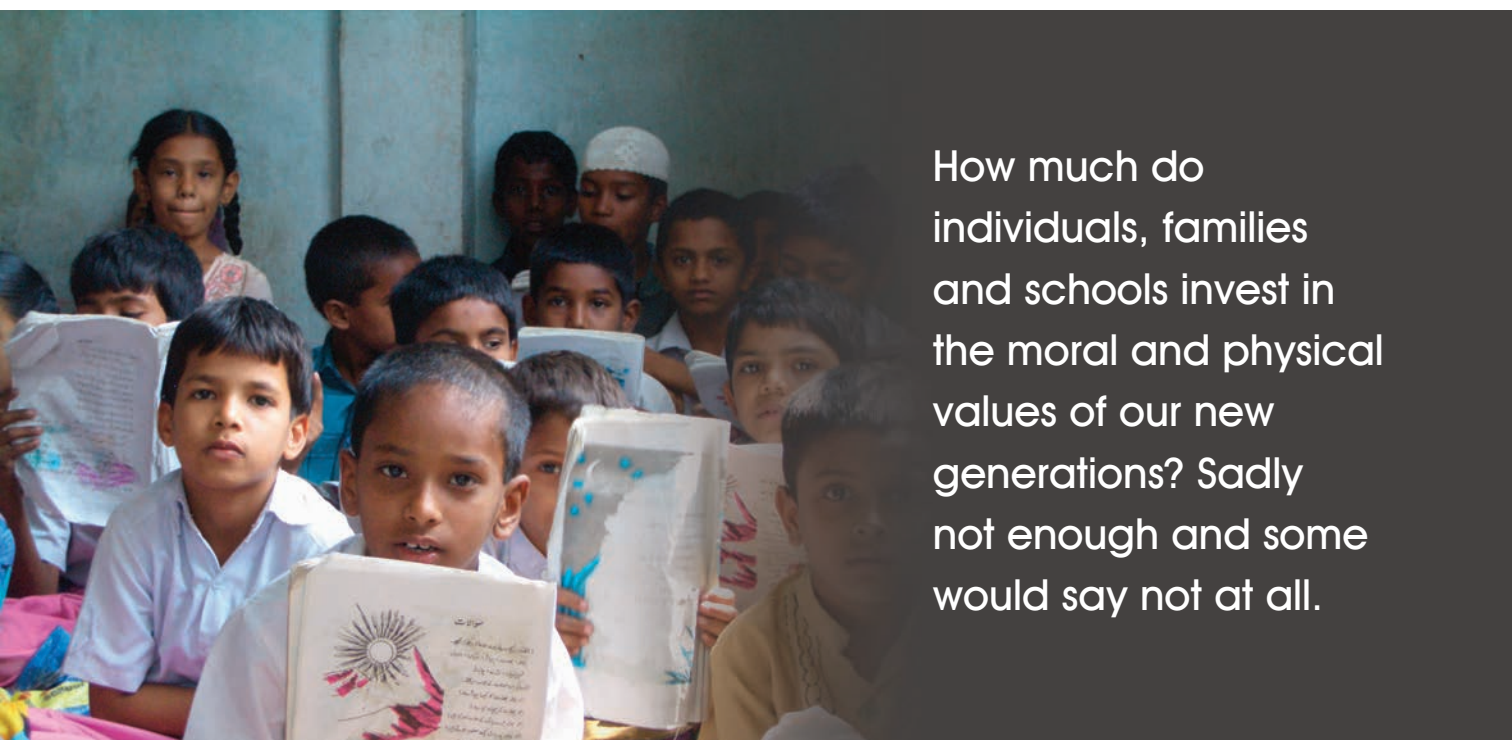
the challenges that confronted them, they were still destroyed by a lack of moral fiber. Their life-time achievements disappeared or at least paled into insignificance due to their shame and their charisma being eliminated.

Our beloved Prophet (pbuh) said: "Haya is beautiful, but if a woman has it, it is even more beautiful." When Aristotle was asked what men liked the most in women, he replied: "The rose (rosiness) that blooms on her face when she feels shyness." I think it is not an exaggeration if I say that there is nothing that looks more beautiful, smells more pleasant or looks more aesthetic than the blush on the faces of children, women, and men. Isn't it a shame that some women today try to attain these roses through make-up, as they cannot anymore feel that genuine shyness that derives from haya? How artificial. The words are shameless, the speech is brazen, and the artificial blemishes on the face... No make-up can replace the natural rose that appears on the modest faces and on the rosy-cheeked from haya, because haya is not only a pink rose blossoming on a chaste cheek. It is an entire spring blossoming all over the body; on the face, in the eyes, in the speech, on arms and hands, in the posture, in gestures. It blossoms as flowers, as roses, in fact it blossoms as Heaven.

Haya is a feeling of embarrassment about a word, action or behavior that is regarded as unacceptable by the moral values of humanity, or where Muslims are concerned, of Islam and which goes against the very nature (fitra) of a human being. The clearest expression of this is an inner feeling of disappointment, of self-recrimination that is reflected by a feeling of guilt manifesting itself in gestures and attitude. This feeling of guilt is a state of the soul and resides within the human being as part of its own creation. Islam, being a religion of fitra, or the natural inclination or state of the human being, blends this aspect of haya, which ultimately originates from the fitra, to bring about a sense of happiness based on good moral judgment and manners to every human being.

Although a sense of haya without faith could bring joy and happiness in this world, it would be of no use in the Hereafter. However one should not forget that just as there can be haya without faith, there can be faith without haya.

According to the beloved Prophet (pbuh) the true haya comes from Iman (faith). It is one of the particles that make up the entire faith and at the same time it is one of the most important signs of the existence of iman in a person. The faith of



How much do individuals, families and schools invest in the moral and physical values of our new generations? Sadly not enough and some would say not at all.

a person without haya is weak and unfulfilled.

When we, as parents and teachers, are entrusted to implant the seeds of belief into the hearts and minds of our children so that we nurture the natural fitra we feed, water and nourish it so that it becomes the measuring stick for our children's actions which are rooted in the foundations of Islam and within its parameters; these were referred to as 'thamarat-ul fuad' – the 'fruit of the heart', by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). If we educate children to worship with meaning and with wisdom, not only will they be a source of pride for their parents but, in the words of the Qur'an, they will be "kurrat ayn" (Qur'an:25/74; 28/9), the 'one which gives pleasure to the eyes' in both this world and the next.

The natural feeling of haya that children have from birth will reach its perfection when it blends at a later stage with iffat (the haya combined with will), which develops during the years of early adulthood.

Finally, the haya will be an exalted (sublime) throne in the ninth heaven of human virtues and the owner/possessor of it will be a sultan (king) of the virtues of paradise.

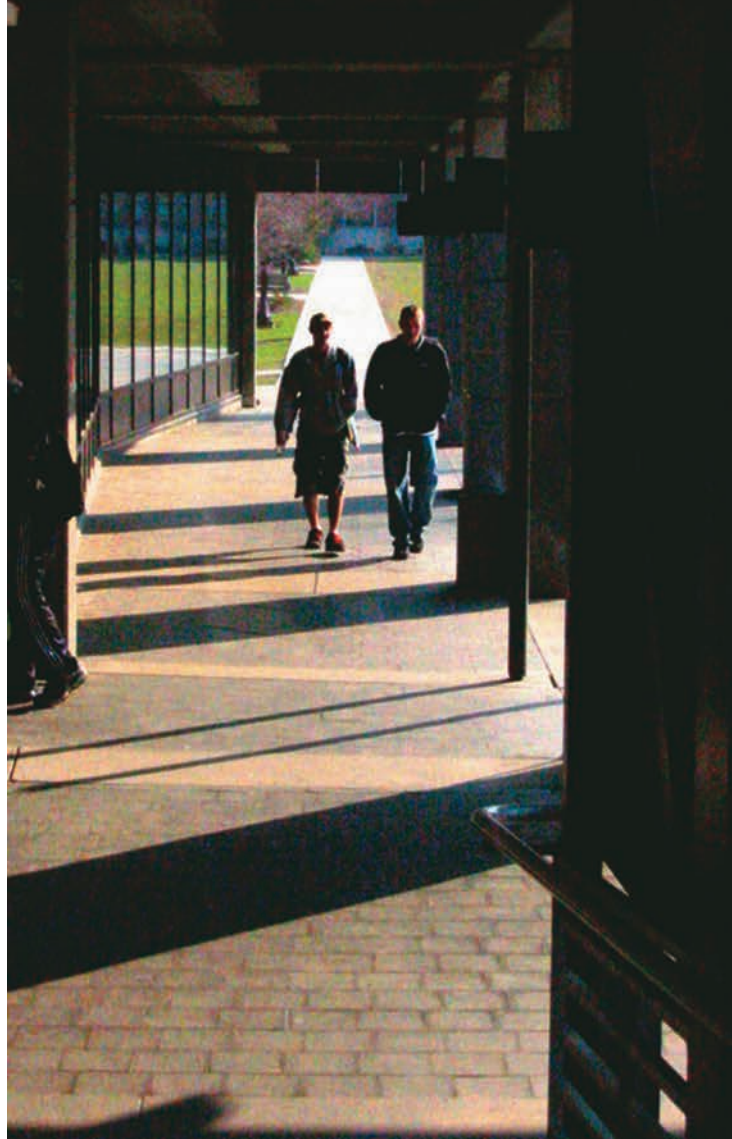
"Good manners are a crown from the divine light of Allah.

Wear that crown, and be secure from every evil."

The flush of haya (shame, bashfulness) and blushes of iffat (chastity, virtue) that blossom as pink roses on virtuous cheeks and the modest are probably like the pictures of Paradise which can be seen and perfumes of Heaven that can be smelled in this world! And these in turn can only be felt or observed in children, who are like little human angels, who are the result, or fruits, of a education based on faith. "A person who loves roses must put up with their thorns."

The question is: How much do individuals, families, social groups, charities, schools and states invest in the moral and physical values of our new generations? Sadly not enough and some would say not at all. The answer to this penultimate question will determine the color of our future...

How much do
individuals,
families, social
groups, charities,
schools and states
invest in the moral
and physical
values of our new
generations?



PEARLS OF

Allah will not give mercy to anyone, except those who give mercy to other creatures.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

The life of this world and the Hereafter, in the heart of a person, are like the two scales of a balance, when the one becomes heavier the other becomes lighter.

Amr bin Abdullah

If someone's state does not lift you up, and his words do not lead you to Allah - then do not keep his company!

Ibn Ata'illah

Be with Allah as if there were no creation, and be with the creation as if you had no ego.

Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani

In this world, in which you are a traveler, you should not act like a dweller.

Osman Nuri Efendi

WISDOM

The best of alms is that, which the right hand gives and the left hand knows not of.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

The heart is comforted by true words, just as a thirsty man is comforted by water.

Rumi

I don't serve God like a laborer expecting wages.

Rabia Adaviyya

Prayers are performed in certain times; however, faith and servanthood are through all the life.

Osman Nuri Efendi



EDUCATION OF MUSLIM CHILDREN IN THE WEST

MUSA BELFORT

How can parents give their children an Islamic education if they do not put it into practice in their lives?

"Remember Abraham said: "O my Lord! Make this city one of peace and security: and preserve me and my sons from worshipping idols."
(Qur'an: 14/35)

One of the names of Allah is "*ar-Rabb*", that is to say the Master, He who educates. Therefore, the education of the child in Islam has always been one of the major values taught in this religion. This education must take into account not only the scriptural bases (Qur'an and Prophetic Tradition), but also the different contexts to which it must necessarily comply. We will talk here of the Western context in which many Muslims live and in which they raise their children.

From their earliest age, children confront the world around them. The child remains sensitive and curious, waiting for answers and guidance for everything that concerns them. They will become good Muslims and act in this world and become men and women who are aware and responsible. To educate children to become good Muslims in the West, three things are essential:

- 1) A strong link between parents and children
- 2) A strong Muslim identity of the parents
- 3) A strong and uncomplicated Muslim community.

The first aspect: A strong link between parents and children

Love, affection and attention are essential components of any relationship between parents





The West suffers from a lack of dialogue due to the secularization of society; the spiritual dimension of the human being has been abandoned to the advantage of the material.

and children. Without these components, children will never know the true nature of this relationship. Several hadiths confirm this reality: Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

"Make sure that the first level of your children is 'Lâ ilâha illa Allah'" (that is to utter the profession of faith).

"A parent can do nothing better than to bequeath to their child a good education."

"Be fair to your children" (This he repeated three times).

Muslim parents must educate their children so that they can become good Muslims, worship Allah, implement justice and live in peace with other members of society. That is the goal set for any parent and the values above should in no way be disregarded. These recommendations remain valid, irrespective of time or country, and are universally recognized as such. In a more general framework and in the western world in particular, where Muslims are a minority, democracy and freedom of expression allow everyone to educate their children according to their religion. While there are some difficulties, the various injunctions that are part of the prophetic law, which transcend time and era, allow Islamic education to be the same in the West.

The second aspect: A strong Muslim identity of the parents

The parents must themselves be deeply aware of their belonging to Islam and live in keeping with their faith. How can parents give their

children an Islamic education if they do not put it into practice in their lives? This would be nonsense. Muslims parents are obliged to live what they teach, whatever their education or level. For example, the wise Luqman practiced what he taught his son when he said:

"O my son! Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in (the conduct of) affairs. And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for Allah loveth not arrogant boaster. And be moderate in thy pace, and lower thy voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass." (Qur'an: 31/17-19)

Muslim parents must teach their children respect for others, the crowned characteristic in any life, respect for the institutions which are in force, and many other virtues. Parents who profess Islam must possess intelligence and spiritual education of the heart so that their children can grow in harmony with their faith and their environment. In addition, knowing the psychology of the child is necessary to understand the realities that they are living. Therefore, it is essential to repeat that the family is the core in which children thrive and are prepared their adult life. Parents, the strength of their Muslim identity and the examples they provide all greatly influence children and are involved in the construction of their personality.

The third aspect: A strong and uncomplicated Muslim community

The importance of the Muslim community (*ummah*) is paramount. The child who lives in the West must also meet with other members of their community of faith; learning about the society also means learning through relationships with other Muslims. As such, Islamic schools (*madrassa*) offer the possibility for children to learn and be educated according to the precepts of Islam: learning from the Qur'an, the life of the Prophet (pbuh), moral rules, and participation in the life of the mosque... All this forms a significant aspect that provides Muslim children with a normative framework that is conducive to their development. The Sufis, in particular, have a very important role. Imam ibn Hanbal urged his son to attend the Sufis:

"O my son, you must sit down with the Sufis, because they are like a fountain of science and they keep the memory (dhikr) of Allah in their heart. They are the ascetics and they have a very strong spiritual power."

This "science of the heart" brings the child serenity and joy in all circumstances; they think of Allah, of the Hereafter and their spirit is awakened to religious realities. For them, attending a collective spiritual atmosphere is complementary to the core of the family, bringing balance and happiness to the child.

Certainly a strong, uncomplicated and organized Muslim community provides children and young people with an ideal framework for their own fulfillment.

In summary, the West suffers from a lack of dialogue due to the secularization of society; the spiritual dimension of the human being has been abandoned to the advantage of the material. Although technologically moving forward, there are great deficiencies in the West in terms of the education of the soul. Nevertheless, there are also great advantages for promoting the values of respect and tolerance, which are the civic foundations of Western society. Muslims are called by vocation to be servants of Allah Almighty. As parents, they undertake to raise their children, providing them with love and support, and to lead them toward the path of eternity. They learn to worship Allah, to serve Him and to honor Him throughout their life. Education is first in the home, within the family cocoon; the love of a father and a mother is crucial for the rest of children's lives. Here is the "royal way", a path of education, but one that is particularly concerned with love. The great Persian Sufi Farid ud-Din Attar said:

"Any heart that is not animated by a noble ambition cannot achieve the infinite kingdom."

The education of children is a noble ambition; the one who succeeds will reap eternal rewards. Let us finish with this quotation from Imam Al-Ghazali:

"The child is a trust given over to the parents' care; their soul's pure substance is a jewel, innocent and stripped of any recordings or images. Everything there it receives is serious, and it is inclined to where it is inclined."



As parents, they undertake to raise their children, providing them with love and support, and to lead them toward the path of eternity.

WHY I AM MUSLIM?

ANGELA SMITH



I have read the
Qur'an. It is
not a book of
terrorism. It is a
book of peace.

God was instilled in me as a child. I came from a French-Canadian Catholic family. I sought God in the New England woods where I grew up. I watched the cycle of the seasons, the course of the sun and the moon. I observed the pristine, perfect beauty of nature. Everything had its own rhythm and purpose. It had its own design in symmetry and in proportion. All living things had its own adaptation. From atoms having their own circular orbits, to galaxies and stars revolving around each other, everything had its own system and submitted to the will of God. God's divine law is in the rules of physics. Only to the human being did God gave free will allowing us to choose between good and evil. Man's love for God was greatly cherished by God, because humans have the ability to choose to love or not. God gave me strength to overcome many things.

I became a poet and an artist to celebrate what I saw in the beauty of nature. I was dismayed by the falsehood and the disintegration of family, the disregard for women in my society.

I converted to Islam upon my marriage. I married a Bengali man 23 years ago. I raised my children in the Bengali and Muslim culture. The

Bengali culture is a very family oriented and I also traveled to Bangladesh many times.

All my life I have been very softhearted to those less fortunate than me. I believed that I followed the compassionate way of the Prophet. I have worked with abused and abandoned, mentally challenged children as an art teacher and tutor.

I have read the Qur'an. It is not a book of terrorism. It is a book of peace. There are people who distort sections of the Qur'an for their own benefit, just the same as the Bible and other books have been distorted, for people's selfish political goals. It is amazing the descriptions of science and nature which there is no way an illiterate man that many years could have known about or written about. One should learn the Qur'an in Arabic, but also learn the translation and the meaning of it. This way no one can sway anyone to any misconceptions or wrong thinking.

I follow the Qur'an, which gives vivid descriptions of nature as signs of God. I believe fully in the simplicity of the Qur'an and its way of life. Everyday I thank God that He guided me to Islam.

ALI RAMITENI

Ali Ramiteni saw faith as a matter of enthusiasm and emotion. When he was asked “What is faith?” he would answer: “Faith is to make effort and then to attain.”

He was of moderate height, with a pleasant face. He was well built. He was a weaver who preferred a humble life. He enjoyed being with the common people. In the Hajagan way of the Naqshi tariqah, he was called “Azizan”. He was a complete Saint who performed wonders and had a spiritual status.

The thirteenth ring of the golden chain, Ali Ramiteni, known as “Azizan”, was the second caliph of Mahmud Faghnawi. He is the head of the Hajagan way that leads to Shah Naqshband. He was born in Ramiten. Ramiten was a large town about eleven kilometers from Bukhara. This is where Ali Ramiteni was trained. He attended lectures from the scholars of his time. He was also a weaver. He was a contemporary of Sheikh Rukneddin Aluddevle Simnani and Seyyid Ata, who were descendents of Ahmed Yesevi. After becoming acquainted with Mahmud Faghnawi he followed him. The Nefehat and Reshehat narrate the events that occurred between them as epic stories.

Faghnawi, at his time of death, by giving the trust to Ali Ramiteni directed his brothers in the tariqah. It is narrated that Ramiteni lived a long life and had many murids (novices). He died in 721/1321. His grave is in Ramiten, which is 40 km. away from the Incirbag village in Bukhara. Although Cami, in his Nefehat, says that Mevlana Celaledin Rumi referred to Ali Ramiteni as a nessac, i.e. a weaver, in one of his gazals, it seems chronologically impossible, as Mevlana died about forty years ((673/1273) before Ramiteni (721/1321). Although in the translation of the Reshehat, Cami, who wrote the Nefehat, is presented as Ali Ramiteni's son, this is wrong.

It is narrated that Ramiteni had good relations with the Shah of Harezm. The story is as follows: Upon receiving a spiritual sign Ramiteni decided to immigrate to Harezm. When he arrived at the entrance to the city he sent two murids to the Shah to attain permission to stay in the city and he said to them "Go to the Shah. Tell him that a poor weaver has arrived in the city and asks for permission to stay. If he allows, the weaver will enter; if not, he will go back. If he permits, the weaver requests a document stating this."

The dervishes carried out his order to the letter. The Shah, who was not accustomed to receiving such requests, at first was surprised. Then, he granted the requested document. After the dervishes brought the document to the sheikh, he entered Harezm and settled in a house in a poor neighborhood. After moving to the city, he went to the bazaar and employed daily workers, saying to them: "Your task is to immediately perform wudu (ablution) and attend our lectures here until sunset and you will be paid at the time of departure." The workers gladly accepted this offer and enjoyed joining the lectures. Nobody wanted to abandon the lectures after they had started to attend. With every passing day, the sheikh's house was getting more and more crowded with the ever-increasing amount of dervishes. As the sheikh's fame spread around Harezm and people gathered around him, some people who were envious complained about him to the Shah. They said: "If this situation continues, soon he will be shah and you will lose your throne." The Shah of Harezm immediately ordered that Ramiteni leave Harezm. But Ramiteni replied: "We have a document which permits us to stay in the city

and is signed by the Shah. If the Shah denies his signature, then, we will leave the city." The Shah visited the sheikh to prevent becoming so petty as to deny his own signature. When faced by the sheikh's grandeur, the Shah was drawn to him and joined the rank of his followers.

A Meeting with Simnani

The writer of the Reshehat informs us that Ramiteni corresponded with Alauddevle Simnani; he tells us that Simnani sent an envoy to Ramiteni and asked three questions. These are the questions and answers that were sent:

Question 1) Both of us are serving all people. As far as the treatment of people, you are, without exerting yourself, content with what you have to hand. However, although we exert ourselves, people love you more than us. What is the reason for this?

Answer 1) There are many who serve expecting gratitude in return for their service. There are few who are thankful to be serving people. If you see serving people as a gift and are thankful to those whom you are serving, then everyone likes you and the number of complaints decreases.

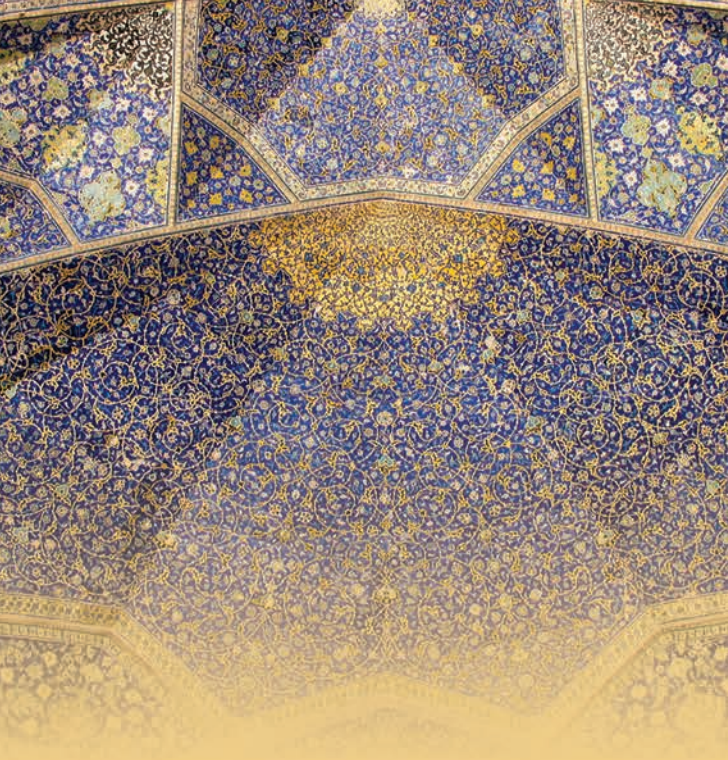
Question 2) We heard that you were trained by Khidr. How did this happen?

Answer 2) There are some servants of Allah who so love Him that Khidr loves them.

Question 3) We heard that you had given up hafi (silent and secret) dhikr (remembrance of Allah by reciting His Holy Names) and were performing the jahri (vocal and open) dhikr? What is the reason for this?



If you see serving people as a gift and are thankful to those whom you are serving, then everyone likes you and the number of complaints decreases.



He would say that there is both an indication and glad tidings in the verse “Turn unto Allah in sincere repentance”

(Qur'an:66/8).

Answer 3) We heard that you were performing the hafi dhikr. Yet, if we have been able to hear this, then yours is not hafi, because the peculiarity of hafi dhikr is that no one can hear it. Since both these dhikr are being heard and known, they are the same. Indeed, at this stage, the hafi dhikr is closer to hypocrisy than the jahri dhikr.

Another time, he explained the reason why he preferred the jahri dhikr as follows: "The Prophet of Allah (pbuh) has ordered us to announce the words of unity (La ilahe illallah) with our last breath which is called halet- i nez'. Tasawwuf (Sufism) means seeing every breath as the last breath. For this reason there is no problem in performing the jahri dhikr, indeed, this way is better."

One day, Bedreddin Meydani asked:

"Is the verse 'Remember God with unceasing remembrance' (Qur'an:33/41) concerned with jahri dhikr? Or is it about hafi dhikr?" Ali Ramiteni replied as follows: "It is jahri for learners and hafi for experts. It is with the tongue at the beginning, and with heart at the end."

Ali Ramiteni saw faith as a matter of enthusiasm and emotion. When he was asked "What is faith?" he would answer: "Faith is to make effort and then to attain. It is to make effort about the masiva (everything other than Allah) and to reach the Truth (Allah)."

Ali Ramiteni was careful about "vera", which is described by Sufis as checking the conformity of things that enter the mouth and those that come out of the mouth with Allah and His Prophet. He would say: "Take care about two things; those that enter your mouth while eating, and those that come out of your mouth while speaking."

He would say that there is both an indication and glad tidings in the verse "Turn unto Allah in sincere repentance" (Qur'an:66/8). The indication is of repentance, the glad tidings are for the acceptance of this repentance, because if repentance were not to be accepted it would not have been commanded.

Ali Ramiteni considered that being confident about good works was unacceptable and he would say that one must be attached to good works and perform them properly, while still seeing oneself and one's good works as incomplete but continuing to commit good works.

He also said that those who deal with training the community should recognize the skills and the weaknesses of the learners, like a lion tamer. The murshid (the spiritual guide and trainer) must act in the same way as the lion tamer; that is, according to the properties of the animal/person that is being trained. If the murshid does not do this they cannot be successful.

In another case, by comparing the murshid to a bird trainer, Ali Ramiteni said: "A trainer must know how much food the bird needs and how much they can hold. Excessive or deficient feeding is detrimental. The murshid must direct the murid to dhikr and mortification with respect to the abilities of the murid. Instruction must neither be deficient nor excessive because then it will either be not enough or too much for the murid."

Ali Ramiteni knew that on the way of arriving at the Truth (Allah) one must enter a heart. For wuslat (uniting with the beloved one) the murid must undergo many mortifications and difficulties.

However, there is another way for wuslat which allows the soul to arrive quickly and precisely at the destination. This is to enter a heart that devotes itself to Allah. Such hearts are nazargah- al'ilahi. Such people are lovers of Allah who take people to the Truth. It is necessary to enter these hearts by loving and being humble in front of them.

One day, Sheikh Rukneddin asked Ramiteni: "On bezm-i elest, when the divine discourse 'Am I not your Sustainer?' (Qur'an:7/172) was delivered, the souls affirmed by replying 'Yes' However, on the Day of Judgment, no one will be able to answer the question, 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day?' (Qur'an:40/16) Why?"

Ramiteni gave the following answer: "Bezm-i elest is the day when the Shariat was offered to the souls. In the Shariat it is necessary to speak. But on the Day of Judgment, the offer will no longer be valid. For this reason there will be no speaking on that day. And Allah Almighty will answer that question."

Ramiteni also presents some poems in the Reshehat in addition to the narration of his many works of wonder.



The murshid must direct the murid to dhikr and mortification with respect to the abilities of the murid. Instruction must neither be deficient nor excessive because then it will either be not enough or too much for the murid.

QUIZ FOR CHILDREN

1. From which Prophet's life do we learn many actions for Hajj ?
a. Yusuf (pbuh) b. Adem (pbuh) c. Musa (pbuh) d. Ibrahim (pbuh)
2. Who is stoned at the Jamarat during Hajj?
a. angels b. jinns c. Satan d. prophets
3. Who ran between the Marwa and Safa mountains looking for water?
a. Hz. Sarah b. Hz. Hajar c. Hz. Aisha d. Hz. Asia
4. What did Prophet Ibrahim (as) sacrifice in place of Ishmael (as)?
a. bird b. elephant c. camel d. ram
5. What is the name of the building built by Ibrahim (pbuh) and Ishmael (pbuh)?
a. the Ka'ba b. the box c. the house d. the mosque
6. How many times does a person on Hajj run between Marwa and Safa?
a. once b. seven c. twenty d. one hundred
7. What is the name of the place where the hajjis pick up their stones?
a. Mecca b. Medina c. Muzdallifa d. Taif
8. What is the name of the mountain where all of the Hajjis gather on the ninth day of hajj?
a. Sinai b. Arafat c. Judi d. Olympus
9. What is the name of the place often called the "tent city"?
a. Mina b. Ankara c. Istanbul d. Muzdallifah
10. How many people went to hajj this year?
a. 3 b. 30 c. 3,000 d. 3,000,000

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.

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