

Spreading the Revival in the Hearts of the Living

Revival of Religious Knowledge

By

Imam Muhammad Abi Hamed El-Ghazaly

PART IV

Summarized and Edited

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To those who said, “Our Lord, make our hearts conscious of You and purify them, You are the best of those who purify the hearts. You are their Guardian and You are their Lord.”

To those who said, “By our Creator, we will not favor you over the evidence that we have received. You can do to us whatever you want; you can control our lives only in this world.”

To those who followed the straight path to connect with God.

In the Name of God Lord of Mercy Giver of Mercy

The Quarter of Ways of Salvation

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Biography of Imam Al-Ghazaly

Name, Family, and Early Childhood

1. Name and Lineage

He is the vastly knowledgeable Sheikh and Imam, the sign of Islam and the miracle of his time: Zain El-A'bedeen Abo Hamed bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ahmed El-Tousi Al-Shafi'e, Al-Ghazaly. He was a very bright man and has written many books.¹ Some made the connection between his name and the city in which he was born, Ghazalah with soft Zain. This connection is linguistically correct. But others connected his name to the word, "Al-Ghazzaly," with strong Zain, which refers to his father's profession. This is also linguistically correct.

2. Birth and Early Childhood

He was born the year 450 (H) in the town of Tous.² His father was a righteous, poor man. He earned his living by weaving wool and selling it in his store. In his leisure time, his father used to attend learning circles conducted by scholars of the town. He provided his services to the scholars; he was generous with them, and he used to learn from them. His father used to pray God to give him a son who would grow up to become a scholar. God gave him two sons, Abo Hamed and his brother Ahmed.³ However, he did not have the chance to live long enough to see that God has accepted his prayer. He died when Abo Hamed was yet a teenager. However, his mother lived to witness the rise of her son to the highest level of academic prominence at the time.⁴

His father, before his death, had entrusted his two boys to a righteous Sufi friend of his. He gave his friend whatever little money he had and said to him, "*I feel sorry that I missed getting an education. I wish that my boys would get the education I missed. Please take whatever little money I have and teach them as much as you can.*" When the money was exhausted and the Sufi was no longer able to support the two boys. He sat them down and said, "*You know that I spent all the money that your father left on your education and I have no means to support you. I advise you to join a school. You will be able to support yourselves using the scholarship you will get from the school.*" They did as the Sufi told them to do and that led them to success and happiness. Al-Ghazaly used to tell this story and say, "We sought learning for the sake of something other than seeking God's favor but our effort refused to be spent seeking anything except God's favor."⁵

¹ Biographies of Celebraties (18:322, 323)

² A town in Khorasan , north east Iran. Its modern name is Shahr

³ Biographies of Prominent People (1:207) and Sophism between Al-Ghazaly and Ibn Taymeiah (46).

⁴ The Ranks of the Shafieates (6: 193-194) edited

⁵ Imam Al-Ghazaly, by Saleh El-Shami (19)

3. His Struggle in Seeking Knowledge

His first teacher in Tous was Yousof A-Nassag. He also studied in his youth Fiqh under his teacher Ahmed bin Muhammad El-Razkani⁶ He then travelled to the city of Gargan where he studied under Abi Nasr Al-Isma'ili. The first stage in the learning process was to write down everything he learnt from his teacher. On his trip back to his town Tous, he was attacked by robbers who took the bag in which he carried his study notes. He pleaded with the robbers to give him his bag back, arguing that it was of no value to them. The robbers gave him his bag back. One of robbers commented laughingly at him, "*What kind of knowledge you claim you have that would be lost if you lose the written notes?*" This comment made him decide to commit all his study notes to memory, for fear of losing his written notes again. It took him three years to accomplish this feat.

4. Following the Imam of the Two Holy Mosques

Al-Ghazaly then went to Nissapoor, the capital of the Slujacks. Nissapoor was the second city of knowledge after Baghdad. He studied under the Imam of the two holy mosques. The Imam was a well-respected scholar. Al-Ghazaly worked hard at learning the Foundation of Fiqh (Usul Al-Fiqh), the fiqh of his school of thought (Mazhab) and how to refute the arguments of people who belonged to other schools of thought. These were the common Islamic sciences at that time. The Imam was impressed by his achievement, he called Al-Ghazaly, "*A flooding Sea.*"⁷

Al-Ghazaly excelled over all four hundred of his colleagues and was therefore, appointed an assistant to the teacher.⁸ It was said that he authored a book entitled, "*Al-Mankhool,*" (The Sieved). When Abo Al-Ma'aly read it, he said, "*You buried me alive. Could not you have waited for me to die before publishing your book? Your book made mine obsolete.*"⁹

5. His Appointment as a Teacher in the Regular School of Baghdad

The Imam of the two holy mosques died when Al-Ghazaly was twenty-eight years. By that time Al-Ghazaly was a well-known scholar in his own right. Al-Ghazaly went to have an audience with Minister Nizam Al-Mulk who sponsored an assembly for the scholars. Al-Ghazaly attended the assembly and engaged in debates with the other scholars in a way that impressed the Minister. The Minister then appointed Al-Ghazaly as a teacher in the Regular School of Baghdad. This was an appointment that many scholars dreamt of. Al-Ghazaly arrived in Baghdad in the year 484 (H) to start his career as a teacher at the age of thirty-four. It was a rare occurrence that someone becomes a teacher at this school at this young age. He was respected for his eloquence and loved for his decent manners.¹⁰

Abdel-Ghafer Al-Farsi, one of his contemporaries, said, "*He was very much respected and he outranked the dignitaries and the princes in the house of the Caliphate.*"¹¹ He had

⁶ El-Razkani comes from a small town near near Tous.

⁷ The Ranks of the Shafieates (6:195); Sophism between Al-Ghazaly and Ibn Taymeiah (47).

⁸ Men of Thought and Call (1:172)

⁹ **Biographies of the Celebrities (19:335).**

¹⁰ The Ranks of the Shafieates (4:106)

¹¹ Men of Thought and Call (1:173)

many students. It was said that he had three hundred students.¹² He also started writing books on the Foundation of Fiqh, Fiqh, Theology and wisdom.¹³

6. Reasons for Al-Ghazaly's Excellence and Fame

Al-Ghazaly's excellence and fame could be traced back to several factors. These are

- His interest in learning from early age motivated by his inquisitive nature.
- He had an excellent memory.
- He was extremely bright.
- Being a teacher at the Regular School of Baghdad.
- These were some of the factors that contributed to his excellence and fame.¹⁴

7. The Drastic Change in Al-Ghazaly's Life

Al-Ghazaly became a successful renowned scholar. With success came power, influence, fame and money. However, he continued in pursuit of knowledge and in disseminating this knowledge. He authored books in various aspects of specialized sciences. Then came the drastic change which completely changed his attitude towards life.¹⁵ Let us listen to him describing how this happened, "I started reading other scholars' works e.g. Food for the Hearts by Abi Taleb Al-Maccki (may Allah bless his soul), the work of Al-Hareth Al-Mohasiby, and different works authored by Al-Junaid. I became certain that these people were more interested in behaviour than in words. I realized that I have already gained what could be gained through reading and that what I need to gain could not be gained by reading. I needed something that would refine my taste and change my behavior. I also realized that happiness in the Hereafter can only be achieved by being conscious of God and controlling one's desires. This can only be realized by severing the ties which bind the heart to the worldly life, abandoning the transient pleasures of this life, yearning to the eternal bliss in the Hereafter, and working hard in seeking God. This requires abandoning the quest for wealth and power and freeing oneself from the requirements of relationships and occupations. I then considered my situation. I found myself deeply involved in relationships and highly busy with pursuing unimportant knowledge that does not improve my chances in the Hereafter. I considered my interest in teaching, and I found that it was not motivated by seeking God's favor, but it was motivated by my interest in gaining power and fame. I realized that if I do not start thinking of changing my life, I would end up falling in the abyss of Fire. I gave this a great deal of thought, trying to make up my mind to leave Baghdad. I was torn between the pursuit of the Hereafter and the love of the worldly life. One day, my faith urges me to leave, reminding me that time is passing very quickly and that all the knowledge I gained and the deeds I did will not be of any benefit in the Hereafter because they were gained and done in hypocrisy. I listen and make up my mind to flee my present life. Another day, Satan tempts me to continue enjoying my present life telling me that I am only suffering a temporary stage of uncertainty which will soon dissipate; warning me that I will be miserable if I give up the wealth and power that guarantee a comfortable life. For six months, beginning with the month of Rajab, 488 (H), I was in a hesitant state

¹² Salvation from Misguidance (85)

¹³ Biographies of Celebrities (19:173)

¹⁴ Sophism between Al-Ghazaly and Ibn Taymeiah (50).

¹⁵ Imam Al-Ghazaly by Saleh El-Shamy (23)

of mind being pulled apart between the pleasures of the worldly life and the pursuit of the Hereafter. In that month, I reached a state of desperation. God held my tongue and I was unable to teach. I tried very hard to please the hearts that came to me seeking learning, but I could not say even one word to teach them. So, I had no one to turn to except God. I prayed God who responds to the desperate who calls upon Him. God accepted my prayers; He made it easy for me to abandon power, money, family, and friends.¹⁶ Al-Ghazaly left Baghdad in the month of Zul Qui'dah, 488 (H). He performed Pilgrimage and went to Syria (Al-Sham), where he lived for ten years. He spent some of this time in Jerusalem. He lived most of these years in seclusion trying to purify his heart for the remembrance of God. He used to spend the whole day performing I'tikaf in Damascus Mosque.¹⁷ His contemporary Abdel Ghafer described the change that Al-Ghazaly went through saying, *"He pursued an ascetic discipline drawing nearer to God and did not care about his prestige and status in the eyes of others. He focused on the use of the tools that increases his consciousness of God and enhances his provision in the Hereafter. He endeavored to control his desires, changing his behavior, and improving his traits. His bad characteristics and his passionate pursuance of power and wealth changed into good behavior, tranquility, abandonment of superficial formalities, interest in the Hereafter, and preparing for leaving this world to the eternal abode."*¹⁸ He also started authoring his famous books like the *Ihya* and others which provide the evidence of his scholarly achievements."¹⁹

8. His Return to Teaching

At the end of the seclusion which continued for ten years he returned back to his city Tous, where he continued to live in seclusion. However, people in authority insisted that he would go back to teaching. He finally agreed and went in the month of Zul Quieda of the year 499 (H) to Nissapoor to teach at its regular school. He said, *"God has made it easy to move to Nissapoor to fulfill this mission in the month of Zul Quieda of the year 499 (H)."* The period which he spent in his seclusion was about eleven years.²⁰

Al-Ghazaly explained that going back to teaching was a completely new experience that differed from what he used to do before. He came back to teaching with a new methodology, new intention, and new objective. He said, *"I know that even though I returned back to teaching but I did not really return back. Before, I used to teach aiming at making money and gaining power. This was the intent of my words and my deeds. But now, I do not seek money or influence because of my teaching. This is my intent and my objective, and God knows that about me. My intention is to improve myself and others. I believe with certainty that there is no power except the*

¹⁶ Salvation from Misguidance (139-143)

¹⁷ Imam Al-Ghazaly by Saleh El-Shamy (25)

¹⁸ Imam Al-Ghazaly by Saleh El-Shamy (26)

¹⁹ Imam Al-Ghazaly by Saleh El-Shamy (26)

²⁰ Salvation from Misguidance (159)

power of God, the Great. I did not move but it is He who moved me. I did not do, but it is He who made me do what I did. I ask Him to make me righteous first then to use me to make others righteous. I ask Him to guide me and then use me to guide others. I ask Him to enable me to discern the truth and make me follow it. I ask him to make me able to discern the falsehood and make me avoid it.”²¹

He did not stay long in Nissapoor and returned back to his town Tous. He established a school for students and a dormitory for Sufis near his house. He spent his time reciting Quran, keeping the company of those whose hearts are conscious of God, and teaching. He died after a period during which he suffered because of plots that his enemies plotted against him. However, God saved him of the consequences of these plots.²²

In his last days he continued to study the Prophetic Traditions (Hadeeth), keeping the company of those who narrate them, and reading the two authentic books of Hadeeth. Had he lived longer he would have excelled in the science of Hadeeth. This is a great blessing of God that he made him devote the last days of his life studying the Sunnah and the Hadeeth of the Prophet (pbuh). His children were all females. He was well off financially; he was offered money, but he did not accept it.²³

Some people criticized him for making grammatical mistakes in his speech. He admitted these errors, corrected them and explained that he never delved deeply in the study of grammar. However, he was very eloquent in expressing himself.²⁴

9. A List of the Books Authored by Al-Ghazaly Arranged Chronologically

This is a list for the books which have been ascertained to be authored by Al-Ghazaly arranged in a chronological order.

- The First Phase: 465 (H) to 478 (H).

During this phase Al-Ghazaly's teacher, Abo Al-Ma; li Al-Gouyani was still alive.

- The Bag in the details of the School of Thought (*Al-Ta'liqah fi Firoo' Al-Madhab*)

²¹ Salvation from Misguidance (159-160)

²² Biographies of Celebrities (19:325)

²³ Biographies of Celebrities (19:326)

²⁴ Biographies of Celebrities (19:326)

- The Sieved in the Principles of Jurisprudence (*Al-Mankhool fi Usual Al-Fiqh*)
- The Second Phase: 478 (H0 to 488 (H)
 - The Comprehensive in the Details of the School of Thought (*Al-Baseet fi Froot Al-Madhab* -Ibn Khalqan said it was a unique book on Islam)
 - The Abridged (*Al-Waseet*, an abridged version of *Al-Baseet*)
 - The Brief (*Al-Wajeez*)
 - The Essence of the Shafie' Jurisprudence (*Al-Kholasah fi Al-Fiqh Al-Shafie'*)
 - The Embraced in the Science of Debate (*Al-Montahal fi I'lm Al-Jadal*; Debating and Disagreement)
 - The Downsides of Disagreement (*Maakhez Al-Khilaf*)
 - Correcting the Downsides -of the Disagreement (*Tahseen Al-Al-Maakhez*)
 - The Principles and the Objectives – in the Fundamentals of Fiqh Science (*Al-Mabadii and Al-Ghayat*)
 - Satisfying Thirst – in Logical Deduction (*Shifaa Al-Ghaleel*)
 - A Decree for Ibn Tashfeen -One of the Decrees of Al-Ghazaly (*Fatwa Libn Tashfeen*)
 - The Yazeedy Decree – a decree concerning Yazeed (*Al-Fatwa Al-Yazeediah*)
 - Objectives of the Philosophers – explanation of the principles of philosophy (*Maqasid Al-Phalasifeh*)
 - Incoherence of the Philosophers (*Tahafot Al-Phalasefah*)
 - The Standards of Science
 - The Standards of Logic
 - The Point of Considering Logic.
 - The Apparent – a response for those who believe in the hidden approach (*Al-Mustazehri*)
 - The Evidence of the Truth - Refuting the hidden approach (*Hojat Al-Haq*)
 - The Fragility of the Hidden Approach (*Quawasem Al-Batiniah*)
 - The Concise Creed (*Al-Iqtisad fi Al-I'tiqad*)
 - The Holy Message in Doctrine (*Al-Risalah Al-Quodsiah*)
 - The Logical Knowledge and the Divine Secrets (*Al-Ma'aref Al-A'qliah wa Al-Asrar Al-Ilahiah*)
- The Third Phase: 488 (H) to 499 (H)
 - Revival of the Religious Sciences (*Ihyaa –U'loom El-Deen*)
- The Fourth Phase: 499 (H) to 503 (H)
 - The Salvation from Misguidance (*Al-Munqiz min Al-Dalal*)
 - The Essence of Fundamentals of Fiqh Science (*Al-Mustasfi fi I'lm Al-Usool*)
- The Last Years: 503 (H) to 505 (H)

- The Way for the Worshippers in Ascetics, Ethics, and Rituals. (*Minhaj Al-‘Abedeen fi Al- Zuhd, Al-Akhlaq, and Al-‘Ibadat*)
- Preventing the Lay People from Speaking in Theology (*Ilgam Al-‘Awam ‘an ‘Ilm Al-Kalam*)

In the Name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Introduction:

Praise be to God, the Originator, the Restorer, He does what He wills. He is the Owner of the Throne, the Magnificent. He is capable of inflicting severe punishment. He guides the chosen servants in the right way and the wise behavior. He bestows His bounty on these servants to protect their religion from the danger of the darkness of doubts and hesitation, having professed the Oneness of God. He guides His chosen servants to follow in the footsteps of His Messenger and his companions. God has flooded the hearts of servants with his subtle blessings and illuminated their hearts with light of religion. His mercy is one of the signs of His Majesty. He is one who bestows happiness and unhappiness; controls life and death; makes people laugh and cry; creates and demolishes; gives enriches and deprives; and creates the animal from a sperm drop. He is the Independent.

This life is only a passage to eternal life in the Hereafter. However, people became overwhelmed with way to the extent they forgot the destination. They worked hard to earn that which will not last. They became like wild animals racing in a jungle. This earned them misery in this life and in the Hereafter. They fulfilled the premonition given in the Quran, *“And whoever turns away from My remembrance – indeed, he will have a life of great hardship, and We will bring him blind to the Assembly on the Day of Resurrection blind.”* (20:124) Performing rituals by the force of habit; indulging habitually in lust; filling one’s heart with acts of perdition and making it lacking in the acts for salvation, constitute worse form of turning away from the remembrance of God. Those who fall in this category fall in the trap of the devil. They busy themselves with the pleasures of this life and forget their religion. They will eventually regret it.

The way is long, life is short, and the means are in short supply. It is therefore important to revive our ways of performing the rituals so that it becomes our habit; and use it to illuminate our hearts and rid them of the ills that afflicted them. This would be the best provision for the Day of Resurrection. Imam Al-Ghazaly has written a unique book, in which he detailed what needs to be detailed and summarized what needs to be summarized. The book addresses the hearts and aims at reviving the fundamentals of religion which have been forgotten. He removed the superficialities to reach for and expose the essence of religion.

Time repeats itself. The ills that were removed before came back and became widespread. The effect of the contributions of Al-Ghazaly was quickly lost. There is a great need today to bring back the book of the Revival of Religious Sciences to the attention of people. Many scholars felt this need. Several books which summarized Al-Ghazaly’s book were written, of these we mention: “The Way for the Seekers,” by the scholar Jamaldeen El bin Al-Jozi; and “A Summary of the Way for the Seekers,” by Imam Ahmed bin Abdel Rahman bin Qudamah Al-Maqdisi. The authors of these books adopted their own styles in writing their books. Al-Ghazaly’s style and approach in writing his book may be as valuable to the reader as the contents of his book. I therefore decided to summarize Al-Ghazaly’s book in a way that preserves both the contents and the style.

Principles Used in Preparing this Book:

1. I adopted the language and style of Imam Abi Hamed Al-Ghazaly as much as I can.
2. I adopted the same line of thought that he used in his book.
3. I removed all weak or fabricated prophetic traditions; many of it can be found in his book.
4. I removed all material that is related to the weak or fabricated traditions.
5. I removed the rules of jurisprudence because these rules belong to a book on jurisprudence not to a book on spiritual enhancement.
6. I removed some of the historical events that were mentioned without any further analysis or comment that tied them to the subject of the book. These events were mentioned especially in the Tenth Book in the Quarter on the acts that lead to salvation.
7. I removed some of the analysis that I considered digression from the topic being discussed because they would confuse the reader. Recognizing that the book was written at a time when many scholars were interested in the study of theology and the common practice in their writing was to provide detailed analysis that can support their arguments when involved in debates, I believe that these were included in Imam Al-Ghazaly's book to provide an argument to support his work. I believe that removing these analyses will provide a more succinct and effective exposition for the reader.
8. I removed some of the exaggerations that relate to the inspiration and secret knowledge for which Al-Ghazaly was criticised by many scholars. Al-Ghazaly was influenced by the Sufi thought that claims that God allows some of His servants to be able to see the unseen. We believe that Al-Ghazaly did not copy the Sufi's point of view, but he did not refute it either. Our position on this is that God may bestow His blessing on a person so that this person may be able to imagine some of the unseen knowledge. This opinion is inspired by the Prophet's (pbuh) tradition, when he was asked about Excellence (Ihsan) and he said, "Ihsan is to worship God as if you see Him, because even if you are unable to see Him, He certainly sees you."
9. I used the same methodology that Imam Al-Hafez Al-I'raqi used in selecting the prophetic traditions to be included and used his explanations. The methodology in selecting the traditions is given in the foot notes.
10. This book has been arranged in four quarters following Imam Al-Ghazaly's book. Each quarter consists of ten books.

Finally, I offer my apology to Imam Al-Ghazaly and the other scholars who summarized the Revival of the Religious Sciences before me and ask humbly the permission to introduce this book. I may have made some changes that were required to correct some of the errors in their books. I know that it is too much for me to ask to be included among these scholars. These scholars were like the sun whose light would obscure the light of any other star.

We love our Sheikh Imam Al-Ghazaly however, we love the truth more. I am sure that if they were still living at the current time, they would have felt the need to compose a new

summary for the book. Although there are some errors in Al-Ghazaly's book it remains a unique and magnificent book. It was said before that those who did not read the *Revival* could not be considered among the *living*. Sheikh Muhammad Khedr, one time the Sheikh of Al-Azhar said, "The book of the Revival has been written by a mortal, so it is normal to find some errors in it. However, the book's usefulness outweighs these errors. The students will gain a great deal of benefit that cannot be acquired through the study of another book." Dr. Al-Qaradawi said, "I wish a new summary of the Revival be composed in such a way that retains its spirit and warmth; preserves its educational and scholastic values; and removes the excesses, exaggerations, and weak traditions. Such a book would provide a great service to the seekers of Islamic knowledge." I wrote this book to fulfill this need.

The poorest servant of God

Eihab Badr

22/11/2007

Book 1: The Book of Repentance

Introduction

Repentance, which involves returning back to the Concealer of defects, the Knower of the hidden secrets, is the starting point of the seekers of the spiritual path, the capital of the successful, the first step of the learners, and the key for the straight path.

It is incumbent on the children to follow in the footsteps of their father. Adam (PBUH) sinned, regretted his sin and then repented. It is essential that we emulate him not only in sinning but also in repenting. Angels were created to be exclusively devoted to doing good; while the devils are exclusively devoted to doing evil without a chance to repent. It is necessary for human beings to repent when they sin.

The discussion of repentance involves four components. These are

- The First Component: The nature of repentance.
- The Second Component: The sins that require repentance.
- The Third Component: The conditions for the true repentance.
- The Fourth Component: The impulse for repentance.

The First Component: The Nature of Repentance

You should know that repentance is a concept that involves three consecutive things. One follows the other. Each one of them is required for the concept to assume its full meaning. These are knowledge, state, and action. The knowledge is a prerequisite for the state, and the state is a prerequisite for the action, in accordance to God's divine law that controls His visible and invisible kingdoms.

Knowledge is the realization of the grave consequences of sinning, and how sinning creates a barrier between the human being and everyone he loves. Losing a beloved one will cause the heart great pain. When the heart realizes that it has lost its beloved as a result for something it did, the heart will feel sorry for doing something that alienated his beloved. This sorrow constitutes remorse. When the heart becomes overwhelmed with remorse, it will move into a new state which is called volition. Volition produces an aspiration to perform a deed that has past, present, and future components. The component related to the past involves redressing the harm that he had caused when he sinned. The component that is related to the present involves abandoning the sin that he committed. The component related to the future involves the intention to abandon the sin, which alienated his beloved, to the end of life.

Thus, knowledge is the first component and it is the source of all good things. Knowledge is faith and certitude. Faith is to believe that sins are deadly poison. Certitude is to be absolutely certain that sins are deadly poison.

Thus, repentance consists of having the three components: the knowledge, the feeling of remorse, and the firm intention to abandon sinning with its past, present and future components. Sometimes, repentance and the feeling of remorse are used interchangeably. Knowledge is

considered an introduction, while intention to abandon sinning is considered the fruits of repentance. This is what has been implied by the prophetic tradition²⁵, “Remorse is repentance.”

Obligatory Nature of Repentance and Its Virtues

Many verses and traditions show that repentance is an obligatory duty. It is also quite clear for he who has deep spiritual insight and whose heart has been illuminated by the light of faith. Such a person knows that repentance is an obligatory duty because an obligatory duty is a duty that is necessary for the achievement of happiness in the Hereafter and salvation from the eternal damnation. God said, “*And turn to God in repentance, all of you, Believers, that you might succeed.*” (24: 31) and He said, “*Believers, turn to God in repentance with a sincere repentance. Perhaps your Lord will remove from you your misdeeds and admit you into gardens beneath which rivers flow.*” (66: 8)

Sincere repentance implies the immediate abandonment of the acts of disobedience, the firm resolve to continue in abandoning acts of disobedience in the future, and to take actions to redress the previous shortcomings. There is no doubt that these aspects are obligatory. In addition, feeling remorse is an obligatory duty and it is the essence of repentance. Remorse completes the rectification. Remorse is the sorrow that occurs as a result of the realization of knowledge. If you say, “Sorrow is a necessary state of the heart which cannot be controlled by the servant of God, how can it be obligatory duty?” You should know that the reason for such sorrow is the realization that his sin caused the alienation of his beloved.

There is no doubt that repentance should be done expeditiously, since it is a component of faith to recognize that sins lead to destruction. This recognition is a duty that should be accomplished promptly. Its knowledge is sought by he who knows that the awareness of the consequences of a reprehensible action is a deterrent against committing that action. The awareness of the consequences of reprehensible deeds motivates the people not to commit such deeds. Whoever does not abandon a reprehensible deed has lost a portion of the faith. This is the intent of the Prophet’s (PBUH) saying²⁶, “*The adulterer does not commit the sin of fornication while he is a believer.*” The intent of the tradition is not to deny the possession of faith that is based on the knowledge gained through spiritual perception (Mukashafah) e.g. the knowledge of God, His oneness, His attributes, His Books, and His Messengers. Such knowledge cannot be revoked by a sin like adultery. The intent is that adultery revokes a portion of faith because it leads the person away from God and consequently earns him disgust. The following is an illustrative example. A person is told by a physician not to drink a certain substance because it is poisonous. However, the person drinks the substance. It would be said that the person drank while he was not a believer. This does not mean that he did not believe that the physician existed or that he is not a physician but he was a disbeliever because he did not believe in the truth of the physician’s statement that the substance was poisonous. A sinner is essentially lacking in faith. Faith is not only one component; but faith has seventy something components, the highest component is the testimony of faith and the least is the removal of harm from the road. A person who does not believe in the testimony of faith is a person who lost all faith. The belief in each component has

²⁵ Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

²⁶ Narrated by Abu Huriarah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

to rest deep in the heart of the believer and it should be reflected on his deeds. He who has the roots of faith embedded in his heart but are not reflected on their deeds, for him the tree of faith can be easily uprooted by the strong wind which precedes the coming of the angel of death. Such a person should dread the bad ending unlike he who continuously waters the tree of faith with acts of obedience until it becomes firmly rooted.

The example of a sinner who says to a person who does good deeds, *“I am like you, I believe just as you believe,”* is like the pumpkin tree when it says to the pine tree, *“I am a tree just like you. I am a tree and you are a tree.”* The best response then comes from the pine tree which says, *“You will realize the foolishness of your statement, thinking we are equal, when the autumn wind arrives and uproots you from the ground. You are deceived by the fact that we have the same name and you neglected the thing that holds the tree firm in the ground.”* Such a conclusion will only become known at the end of life. The ties that hold the hearts of many knowledgeable persons has been ruptured by the dread of the horrific coming of death; only few can face it with firm feet. The sinner who does not fear to be doomed eternally in Hellfire, is like the healthy person who indulges in ruinous pleasures. His health provides him with false courage which makes him does not fear death, although indulgence in these pleasures definitely leads to death, which will come suddenly. If the fear of death motivates the healthy person to abstain from eating poisonous substances, then fear of the eternal damnation should be a stronger incentive for the sinner to abstain from sinning. The fear of death in this worldly life compels a person who took a poisonous substance by mistake, to throw up that substance; similarly, a sinner should stop sinning and try to make up for his sins in the rest of his life. Missing the eternal bliss and great kingdom of the Hereafter should be a strong incentive for throwing up the poison of sin. If one misses this opportunity, then he is doomed to Hellfire. One then, should hurry to repentance before the poisonous effect of sin contaminates the spirit of faith beyond repair. Losing this opportunity before death will result in the eternal damnation of the person. He will be one of those described in the verse, *“Indeed, We have put shackles on their necks, right up to their chins, so that their heads are kept aloft. And We have put before them a barrier and behind them a barrier and covered them, so they do not see. And it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them- they will not believe.”* (36: 8-10) Do not think mistakenly that the verse is referring to the disbelievers. It has been explained before that faith has seventy something components, and that, *“The adulterer does not commit the sin of fornication while he is a believer.”*

He who has lost of the components of faith, will eventually lose the root of faith itself. The knowledge of the spiritual perception (*Mukashafah*) and the knowledge of the daily practices go hand in hand with each other like the root and the branch. Both are needed at the same time, one of the them is the root and the other is the branch. If the knowledge of one’s daily practices does not motivate the person to do good deeds, then it is useless. A person who has the knowledge but does not apply it in his life will not have an excuse in the Hereafter. That is why if a disobedient scholar and an ignorant transgressor commit the same sin, the scholar will be punished more severely than the ignorant person. God knows best.

Exposition of the Fact that Repentance is Obligatory for Everyone and in Every Situation

This fact is apparent from the verses of the Book. God said, *“And repent to God all of you Believers, perchance you may succeed.”* (24: 31) This verse address all believers. It is also obvious from the spiritual insight that repentance is obligatory for all people and in all situations; since repentance means turning away from the road that leads away from God. No person, in his right mind, is unable to reach this conclusion.

The fact that no human being, not even the prophets, is ever free from sin indicates that repentance is required at all times. Many stories are told in the Quran about the mistakes that prophets committed and their repentance. If a human being does not physically commit a sin, he will at least think about it; and if he does not think about it he will struggle with the whispering of Satan which will put thoughts in his mind that will distract him away from the remembrance of God. If he was able to overcome the susurrations of Satan, he may suffer a deficiency in the knowledge of God, His attributes, and His deeds. All these are shortcomings that require repentance. No human being is free from these shortcomings. The deficiency will vary from one human being to another. The Prophet (PBUH) said²⁷, *“Indeed, my heart becomes beclouded, so I seek God’s forgiveness seventy times every day.”* God honored him, saying, *“That God may forgive you your sins, that which is past and that which is to come; and may perfect His favor on you; and may guide you on a straight path,”* (48: 2)

If you say that the thoughts and concerns that distract the heart are flaws and that perfection is only attained after these flaws have been remedied; then you can also say that our shortcomings in knowing the essence of the majesty God is a flaw, and that greater perfection can be attained by increasing our cognition of the essence of the majesty of God. Remedying the shortcomings constitutes a turning away and turning away is repentance. But remedying these shortcomings is a virtue. Remedying these shortcomings is not a religious duty. Therefore, repentance should not be obligatory in these cases. Achieving perfection is not an obligatory religious duty.

You should know that human beings by their nature are prone to succumb to their carnal desires. Repentance does not mean only to abandon these carnal desires but also to compensate for the damage they caused. Each carnal desire that a person pursues creates a darkness that fogs one’s heart just like the fog that forms on the surface of a polished mirror by the breath coming out of a person’s mouth. As the darkness of the carnal desires accumulates, it forms a stain just like the scum which accumulates on the polished surface of a mirror causing it to rust beyond any repair. This is mentioned in the Quranic verse, *“Verily, their hearts are covered by rust because of what they used to earn.”* (83: 14)

It is not enough for a person to resolve to abandon the carnal desires in the future, but one should also remove the stain that has been formed on the heart. Doing good deeds will produce a light that will engulf the heart and removes the stain that was caused by the darkness of sins. This is

²⁷ Narrated by Al-Agharr al-Muzni (RA) and reported by Muslim

the meaning of the Prophetic tradition²⁸, “*A good deed will remove an evil deed which preceded it.*”

It is therefore, necessary for the person to remove the effects of the evil deeds by doing good deeds. This is appropriate for a heart that was originally polished but accumulated stains as a result of succumbing to sin. The initial polishing of the heart is different. In this case it requires a long process. Removing the stain off a mirror is much easier than manufacturing the mirror in the first place.

If you say that repentance in this case is a virtue and it is not a religious obligatory duty, you should know that there are two types of obligatory duties. The first type is a general obligation that applies to every one of the people. These are the duties which, when performed by everyone, will not cause the dysfunctionality of the universe. To clarify this, one can argue that if becoming conscious of God as He deserves is made an obligatory duty for each and every one, then all people will abandon pursuing the means of earning their living and will completely refuse to engage in the activities of the worldly life. This will result in the destruction of the worldly life and consequently will result in nullifying God consciousness completely. The second type of obligatory duties are the duties that are required to bring the person closer to God and to grant him the rank of the good abode among the righteous. This can be achieved only by repenting from the all sins that were mentioned.

The religious duties that have been made obligatory for each and every person are means for basic salvation. The duties beyond this are the duties that are necessary for the achievement of the bliss beyond the basic salvation. These are the duties that were made obligatory for the prophets, the righteous, and the scholars. This explains why the Prophet (PBUH) replaced the clothes that distracted him during his prayer. Did he (PBUH) not know that replacing the dress is not an obligatory religious duty? Nevertheless, he (PBUH) replaced it because he realized that the dress had an adverse effect on his heart that prevented him from achieving the blessed rank that God promised him.

Abu Suleiman Al-Darani told the truth when he said, “If the sensible person does not cry the rest of his life over the time of his life that he missed without remembering God, this would be enough to cause him grief till he dies. How can he spend the rest of life living in the same ignorance that he lived in before?” He said this because he knew that a sensible person would be saddened by the loss of a jewel which used to be his. His sadness would be multiplied if the loss of the jewel resulted in his destruction. Each hour of one’s life is a precious jewel which cannot be replaced, this hour can help you achieve the eternal bliss and save you from the eternal misery. Which jewel can be more precious? If your heedlessness caused the loss of this jewel, then your loss is enormous. If you spend this hour earning a sin, then you have been doomed. Only ignorance can prevent you to cry over committing this sin. Being ignorant is the greatest affliction that a person can suffer. However, those who are afflicted with ignorance are not aware of their affliction. The slumber of heedlessness prevents him from becoming aware of his

²⁸ Narrated by Abu Dharr (RA) and reported by Al-Nassaie

ignorance. People are asleep, when they die they will wake up and they will find the truth. He who is bankrupt will suddenly realize that he is actually bankrupt.

Luqman said to his son, “My son, do not delay repentance, because death comes suddenly. Those who procrastinate about repentance subject themselves to two types of risk. The first, delaying repentance allows the darkness produced by sins to accumulate to such extent that the state of the heart will be irreversible. The second, death may come suddenly leaving no time for repentance.

God entrusted the heart and the lifetime to His servant. Those who betray the trust and do not repent for losing the trust are in great danger.

Fulfilling the terms of Repentance renders it Acceptable

You should know that if you understand the concept of the acceptance, you will be certain that a true repentance will be accepted. Those who see with the spiritual insight which they derive from the lights of Quran, recognized that each and every sound heart has been accepted by God and will enjoy the nearness of God in the Hereafter. He will be prepared to use his eternal eye to look at the countenance of God. They also recognized that each heart has been created originally in a sound condition. Each person is born with a sound initial natural disposition. The corruption of the natural disposition of human beings is a result of the accumulation of sins which covers the human face with the darkness of sins. However, the feeling of remorse removes the darkness of sins. The darkness of sins cannot resist the light of obedience, just like the darkness of the night cannot resist daylight, and the dirt on the dress cannot resist the white soap. A king does not like to wear a dirty dress, similarly, God does not accept a dark heart to be in His nearness. Using a dress while performing mean chores makes it dirty, however it can be cleaned using hot water and soap. Similarly, indulging the heart in carnal desires soils it and to clean and purify it one should wash it with tears and the pain of remorse. God accepts only pure clean hearts in His nearness.

It is your responsibility to cleanse and purify your heart, because acceptance has been ordained in the irrevocable eternal divine decree. This acceptance is referred to as success in the verse, “*He has succeeded who purifies it.*” (91: 90) A person who thinks that true repentance may not be accepted, is like a person who thinks that sunshine does not remove darkness. Or like a person who thinks soap does not clean a dirty dress. Soap will not be able to clean a dress which has been penetrated by dirt just like a heart which has been stained by the accumulation of sins.

It has been said, “*The continuous remorse of a sinner leads him to paradise. Iblis will say, ‘I wish I did not tempt him to sin.’*” Abd Al-Rahman ibn abi Al-Kassem said, “*We were discussing the repentance of the disbeliever, that has been referred to in the verse, ‘Say to those who have disbelieved if they cease, they will be forgiven what they have done before.’ (8: 38) He said, ‘I hope the Muslims will have a better fate with God. I have learnt that the repentance of a Muslim is equivalent embracing Islam anew.’*” Umar (RA) said, “*Accompany those who repent often. They are soft hearted.*”

If you say that those who repent are always in doubt whether their repentance will be accepted or not. I say, that the doubt that people entertain about whether their repentance will be accepted is actually a doubt regarding the fulfilment of the necessary conditions which make the repentance

a true repentance. There are delicate conditions that should be fulfilled for a repentance to be a true repentance. This will be explained later.

The Second Component: The Sins that Require Repentance

Repentance involves abandoning the sin. One cannot abandon that which he does not know. Since repentance is an obligatory duty, then its prerequisites are also considered obligatory duties. Thus, knowing what constitutes a sin is an obligatory duty. Anything that contravenes the commands of God is a sin. The topic is very long and we will not be able to cover all the details. We will summarize its categories and how they are related to each other.

Categories of Sin Related to the Attributes of Human Beings

The human being has many attributes, however, sins originate in four types of attributes. These are the majestic attributes, the satanic attributes, the beastly attributes, and the barbarous attributes. They are given as follows:

1. **The Majestic Attributes**
These include arrogance, supremacy, love of prestige, praise, long life, and wealth. These traits are a source of a number of capital sins. People are heedless of these traits and do not consider them sins. However, these are among the annihilating sins which have been discussed before.
2. **The Satanic Attributes**
These include envy, transgression, trickery, deception, treachery, hypocrisy, and spreading corruption, and innovation in religion.
3. **The Beastly Attributes**
These include gluttony, greed, theft, and indulgence in sexual lusts.
4. **The Barbarous Attributes**
These include anger, hatred, assaulting people, and murder.

These four attributes vary in their strength and effect on the human being. The most powerful of them is the category of the beastly attributes, followed by the barbarous attributes, then the satanic attributes, and finally the majestic attributes. These are the sources of all sins. These sins spring from their sources to reach the senses. Some sins spread to the heart like disbelief, innovating in religion, hypocrisy, and having bad intentions toward people. Some spread to the eyes and hearing, some spread to the tongue, some spread to the stomach and the private parts, some spread to the hands and legs, and some spread to the whole body.

Another way for the categorization of sins, is to divide them into sins which transgresses the right of God like neglecting to perform the rituals; and sins which transgresses the rights of people like not paying zakat, murder, slander, and usurping money. It has been said that these sins belong to three divisions. A division includes the sins that are forgivable, another for the sins that are not forgivable, and a third division which includes the sins that the human being has to atone for. The first category includes the sins that constitute a transgression against the right of God. The second division is the sin of associating partners with God. The third division includes the transgressions that a person committed against other people.

A third way for the categorization of sins is to divide them into capital sins and minor sins. The companions and the scholars of the second generation differed in the number of sins in each category.

Abu Taleb Al-Mekki said, “*The capital sins are seventeen, I assembled them from various traditions due to Ibn Abbas (RA), Ibn ‘Umar (RA), Ibn Massoud (RA), and others.*” These are

1. Four of the Heart
These include associating partners with God, persisting in committing acts of disobedience, despairing of the mercy of God, false feeling of being safe of the plot of God.
2. Four of the Tongue
These include perjury, slandering chaste women, making false oath, magic.
3. Three of the Stomach
These include drinking alcohol, usurping orphan’s money, dealing in usury.
4. Two of the Sexual Nature
These include committing adultery and homosexuality.
5. Two of the Hand
These include committing murder and theft.
6. One of the Legs
This includes fleeing a battle.
7. One of the Whole body
This includes being undutiful to one’s parents.

This list is not exhaustive. The list neglected to include sins which are considered capital sins like beating an orphan, torturing poor people and others.

We suggest three levels for capital sins. These are

First level includes sins which prevents the person from recognizing God and His Messengers. This amounts to disbelief. Disbelief is the biggest sin. A person’s ignorance of God is a barrier between the human being and God. The only way to remove that ignorance is knowledge. The person’s knowledge of God determines the nearness of the person to God.

Second level pertains to human beings, since their survival ensures the continuity of the human race and its awareness of God. Murder is definitely a capital sin but is less heinous than disbelief.

Third level pertain to wealth and property, since it ensures the livelihood for people. People’s property should be protected. Theft, fraud, usurping orphans’ money, and usury are capital sins.

Exposition of the Method of Assigning Higher and Lower Ranks in The Hereafter for Good Deeds and Sins committed in the Worldly Life

You should know that this worldly life belongs to the visible domain of the material world and that the Hereafter belongs to the transcendent domain of the unseen. The term worldly life is meant to indicate your state before death, while the Hereafter is your state after death. One can only explain life in the transcendent domain in terms of the visible domain by the use of parables. It was said, “People are sleeping, they wake up only when they die.”

In the Hereafter, people are divided into four groups: the doomed, the chastised, the redeemed, the prosperous. A parallel example for this from our worldly life, is when a king occupies a province he will kill some of its people, these are the doomed; he will chastise some for a period of time, but he will not kill them, these are the chastised; he will spare some, these are the redeemed; and he will reward some of them, these are the prosperous. A fair king will only assign people to each category depending on their deeds. He will only kill those who deserve to be killed, those who are persistent in denying the king's right to rule. He will chastise those who acknowledge him as a king but fail in serving him as he wishes. The chastisement they will receive will commensurate with their shortcomings. He will redeem those who acknowledge him as king and served him faultlessly, but did not excel in their service to deserve the reward. Those who spent their life serving the king faultlessly with excellence, will deserve to be rewarded.

Each category of these four categories can be further divided into a large number of divisions. Similarly, people in the Hereafter will be classified into a large number of divisions depending on their deeds in their life time.

The First Rank

This is the rank of the doomed, those who have despaired of the mercy of God. These are the people who denied God, His Messengers, and His Books. They will be denied the pleasure of gazing at the countenance of God. The ultimate happiness in the Hereafter is to be able to gain the pleasure of gazing at the countenance of God. One of the knowledgeable people said, "We are not afraid of Hellfire, nor are we looking for mating with the beautiful virgins of paradise. Our main quest is meeting God and avoiding being placed behind the veil.

The Second Rank

This is the rank of the chastised. This is the rank of those who embraced the root of faith but did not act upon it. The cornerstone of the believe in the oneness of God is to worship God alone. A person who follows his whims and carnal desires takes his whims and carnal desires as gods. He utters the statement of the belief in the oneness of God but does not practice it in reality.

The belief in the oneness of God is not complete unless a person stays on the straight path, "*Those who said, 'Our Lord is God,' then remained on the straight path.*" (46:13) A person who swerves away from the straight path will feel the pain twofold. First he will experience the pain of being removed from the proximity of God, losing the happiness which one experiences when he is able to gaze at the countenance of God. Each sin increases the distance between the sinner and God. Then he will be punished according to the sin he committed. The length and severity of the chastisement will depend on the strength of the person's faith and the degree of succumbing to his whims.

It should be mentioned that no human being can remain on the straight path all the time. Every human being will eventually follow his whims to some extent.

We say that the chastisement of a person, who accepted firmly the fundamentals of faith, avoided all capital sins, excelled in the performance of the five pillars, and committed few minor sins without persistence, will amount only to a reprimand. When his account is settled, his good deeds will over weigh his bad deeds. It has been stated in the traditions that praying the five daily

prayers and Friday prayers, and fasting the month of Ramadan will atone for the sins committed in between. The Quran stated that avoiding capital sins is a cause for the forgiveness of the minor sins. The least level of atonement is that chastisement will be averted, if not also accounting. A person in this category is a person who has heavy scales of good deeds. He will enjoy a pleasant life. He may join the companions of the right, or even those who are in the close proximity of God depending on the strength of his faith.

A person who committed capital sins or neglected some of the pillars of Islam, may be forgiven if he performed a true repentance before his death. It is stated that a repentant is like a person who has not committed a sin. But if he died before offering his repentance, then he runs a great risk. He may die while he is persistent in his sin. This will shake his faith and will cause him to have a bad ending.

No one will be released from hell fire except those who believe in the oneness of God. This belief does not include a person who utters the words with his tongue only. The perfect belief in the oneness of God comprises not only the oral testament but also the belief that everything starts with God. Its sign is not to be angry at any human being because what happens to him. Rather, he does not pay attention to the means but he considers the One who initiates the means.

The degree of the belief in the oneness of God varies from one person to another. Some may have a belief as heavy as a mountain, others may have a belief the weight of an ounce, and still others may have a belief the weight of a mustard seed or an atom. The first to be released from Hellfire are those whose belief in the oneness of God is as heavy as a mountain. The last to be released are those whose belief is only the weight of an atom.

The most common reason that will cause people who believe in the oneness of God to be admitted to Hellfire is the wrongs they committed against other human beings. It has been mentioned in the tradition that a person will stand in front of God on the Day of Judgment having done good deeds whose weight may amount to the weights of mountains enough to admit him to paradise. However, people whom he had wronged in his life will take away from his good deeds until nothing will be left for him. Then they give him from their bad deeds enough to admit him into Hellfire.

The Third Rank

This is the rank of those who will escape the punishment. They will escape the punishment but they will not achieve happiness or prosperity. They are the people who neither excelled in their service to deserve the reward, nor did they have shortcomings to deserve punishment. Most probably, these will be the insane, the youngsters, and the feeble minded from among the disbelievers; and those who did not receive the message. These are the people of the Heights. When A'isha (RA) heard about the death of a young boy, she said, "A bird of the birds of paradise." The Prophet (PBUH) said, "How do you know?"

The Fourth Rank

This is the rank of the prosperous. These are the knowledgeable who do not imitate others. These are the ones who will be in the close proximity of God. Their reward will defy any human

description, as has been mentioned in the Quran, “*And no soul knows what has been hidden for them of comfort for eyes.*” (32: 17)

Explaining how a Minor Sin becomes a Capital Sin

You should know that there are several reasons for a minor sin to evolve into a major sin. Among these are persistence and insistence. It has been said that, “*No sin remains minor with persistence, and no sin remains major while seeking forgiveness.*” Pardon is more likely to be granted for a single capital sin which is not followed by another, while it is difficult to expect the same pardon for a person who is persistent in committing the same minor sin over and over again. However, it is difficult to imagine a situation where a person would jump suddenly into committing a major sin. A capital sin is usually preceded by a number of minor sins. Temptation and seduction usually precede adultery, animosity and angry fighting usually precede murder.

Another reason for a minor sin to evolve into a major one is belittling the sin. God minimizes the sins that His servant considers significant. A heart that resents sin will consider every sin significant. This resentment will prevent the person to become familiar with sinning. While a heart that belittles sinning will become used to it. It has been narrated that a believer considers his sins as a mountain hanging over him and fears that the mountain may fall on the top of his head, while a hypocrite considers his sins as insignificant as a fly that stood on his nose and then flew away.

A third reason for making a minor sin a major one is to feel happy, show pride, and brag about doing a minor sin. He considers his ability to commit such sins a blessing and is heedless of the fact that sins are the cause of misery. A minor sin will grow into a major one as the sweetness that the person feels for committing the sin increases.

A fourth reason is to misunderstand God’s protection of his secret discretions. He wrongly assumes that God’s respite is bestowed on him as a sign of God’s favor. He does not understand that God is giving him respite to give him a chance to indulge more in his sin. The Quran refers to these saying, “*And they say among themselves, ‘Why does not God punish us for what we say?’ Sufficient for them is Hell, in which they will burn, and wretched is the destination.*” (58: 8)

A fifth reason is to commit a sin in secret and then talk about it and reveal his own secret. This amounts to committing two sins. First, he transgressed against God who protected his secret. Second, talking about his sins in the open desensitizes people to these sins. His narration will motivate evil desires in the hearts of those who listen to him. The Prophet (PBUH) said²⁹, “*Everyone in my nation will be forgiven except those who declare their sins. God protects the secret of a man who committed a sin in secret, but then the man goes around the next day telling people about what he had done. God protected his secret by night and he divulged his secret during the day.*”

A minor sin committed by a scholar who have followers who emulate him amounts to a capital sin because of its effects on those who emulate him. This scholar will eventually die but he will

²⁹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

leave behind a legacy of bad deeds that will be emulated by many people. The Prophet (PBUH) said³⁰, “*Whoever enacted a good deed in Islam, will get its reward and the reward of all those who would emulate him – without them missing any of their reward – and whoever enacted a bad deed in Islam, he will be punished for it and for all of those who would emulate him. Those who emulate him will also be punished for their bad deed.*” God said, “*Indeed, it is We who bring the dead to life and record what they have put forth and what they left behind.*” (36: 12) What left behind refers to the actions which ensue after the original act and the actor have gone.

The Third Component: The Requirements for Perfect Repentance, and its Endurance to the End of Life

We have mentioned that repentance consists of remorse that produces resolve and intention. Remorse is a product of the knowledge that acts of disobedience form a barrier between the person and his beloved. There are specific conditions that need to be fulfilled for each of the knowledge, remorse, and resolve to last to the end of life; and there are signs that indicate that each has been perfected. These will be explained below.

Knowledge provides an understanding of the reasons behind seeking repentance. This will be explained later. Remorse is the pain that the heart feels when it realizes that it has lost contact with the beloved. Its signs are continuous grief, sorrow, and the flowing of tears. A person who realizes that an affliction has befallen his child or one of the people dear to him grieves and weeps for a long time. Who is dearer to the person than himself? What affliction is more severe than Hellfire? What is more indicative of an earned punishment than committing a sin? Who is truer in the words they say than God and His Messenger (PBUH)? If a person was told by a physician that his son is terminally ill and that he will die, then the person will be shocked and will be overtaken with sorrow. His child is not dearer than himself, nor is the physician truer than God and His Messenger. Death is not more severe than Hellfire. Illness is not a cause of death more than acts of disobedience are a cause of God’s wrath. The greater the remorse one expresses for having committed a sin the greater is the hope that God will forgive the sin. Soft heartedness and intense weeping are signs that the remorse is genuine. One of the signs of genuine remorse is when a bitter taste replaces the sweet taste of sin in one’s heart. This way one will hate committing a sin instead of being lured by the pleasure it provides.

If you say that sins are desired for the pleasures they bring, how would committing a sin leaves a bitter taste? I say, “Take the case of a person who enjoyed eating honey that was mixed with poison. The person was unaware that there was poison in the honey because the taste of the honey did not change as a result of the presence of the poison. However, the poison produced its effects and the person became seriously sick and his limbs became paralyzed. If the person was very hungry and was offered this honey again, would he eat again from the honey? He would not eat from it and his experience may even prevent him from eating any other kind of honey.”

³⁰ Narrated by Jareer Al-Baghi (RA) and reported by Muslim.

The resolve that is associated with repentance, which constitutes the determination to redress the harm caused by sin, has implications related to the past, the present, and the future. The implications for the present consist of abandoning every prohibited act and the fulfillment of every obligatory duty. The implications regarding the past are to remedy the effects of all harm that has been caused. The implications regarding the future are to continue to perform acts of obedience and to avoid acts of disobedience until one dies.

One of the conditions for true repentance is to look back and reflect on what he had done since he reached the age of puberty. He should investigate his shortcomings in performing the obligatory acts of obedience and the prohibited commands which he transgressed. He should redo the prayers which he did not perform or performed but may be rendered unacceptable for one reason or another. If he does not remember for certain how many prayers he has to redo, he should make the best guess he can. He should do the same for all other obligatory rituals.

He should also try to remember all acts of disobedience he has committed. He should classify these into two divisions. One includes the transgressions he committed against God and another which includes the transgression he committed against people. Repentance for the transgressions against God involves feelings of remorse and sorrow. He should also do good deeds which are appropriate to the enormity of the sins he committed, following the Prophet's (PBUH) advice³¹, *"Be conscious of God wherever you are, and follow a bad deed with a good deed. The good deed will remove the bad deed."* God said, *"Indeed, good deeds drive away bad deeds."* (11: 114)

Transgressions against people involve transgression against God as well. God prohibited people to wrong each other. The atonement for the transgressions against God can be achieved by experiencing feelings of remorse and sorrow, resolving not to do similar things in the future, and doing good deeds proportionate to the transgressions that have been done. He could remedy harming people by treating them kindly; remedy the usurping of property by giving away money in charity; and remedy backbiting by praising those whom he had wronged. However, this is not enough. He has to redress the harm that he committed against people. Injustices committed against people involve life, money, honor, or hearts. These injustices constitute pure harm.

Murdering a person by mistake is redressed by paying the required ransom to the family of the deceased. In case of a premeditated murder, then legal retribution should be enforced. If he was not identified, then he should confess his guilt to the next of kin of the victim. The next of kin could either forgive or ask for retaliation to be executed. His repentance is not complete until he does this. He should not hide his guilt contrary to the case if the crime was adultery, theft, highway robbery, drinking alcohol, or similar transgressions. In these cases, if he was not identified, then he should not reveal his identity. He should avail himself of the protection of identity that God bestowed on him. He should apply the legal ruling on himself using different methods of struggle and punishment. Forgiveness in cases of transgressing God's limits is close to the repentant, the remorseful. However, if he chose to declare his guilt to the authorities and he was punished using the legal rule, then his repentance will be a true repentance and God will accept

³¹ Narrated by Abu Dharr (RA) and reported by Al-Termidhi.

it. The support for this opinion lies in the stories of Ma'iz ibn Malek (RA) and the woman from the tribe of Ghamid.

Transgressions involving money or property need to be redressed. The perpetrator has to review his records and identify the transgressions he had committed during his life. That includes also the time before he had reached puberty. He should identify his crimes and approach those whom he wronged, give them back their dues, and seek their forgiveness. If he could not identify his victims, then he should do many good deeds. This is the way a repentant should follow to redress the harm he committed against people.

Slandering people can only be redressed by seeking the forgiveness of the victim.

One should seek the people whose hearts were wronged. Wronging the hearts includes assaulting people verbally or committing backbiting against them. One should ask them for forgiveness. He should do good deeds to cover the cases where he could not reach some of them.

The implications of resolve on the future, consists of pledging a firm covenant with God not to return to committing these sins in the future.

There are different opinions regarding whether partial repentance could be accepted. Like a person who repents for doing a specific sin but commits other sins. This requires an explanation as follows:

Case 1: It is possible for a person to repent for doing a capital sin but continue to commit minor sins. He knows that capital sins are abhorred by God and a cause of His wrath. One is hopeful that it is easier to receive God's forgiveness for minor sins. Thus, it is possible that one regrets doing capital sins and seeks God's forgiveness for them, while he does minor sins.

Case 2: He may seek God's forgiveness for one capital sin while doing another, thinking that the one he is repenting from is more grievous in the sight of God. Capital sins may differ in their gravity. An example is the person who abandons drinking alcohol but commits adultery, thinking that alcohol is the gate to all evils.

Case 3: He may seek to repent for one or more minor sin, while continuing to commit a capital sin. Like the one who abandons backbiting but continues to drink alcohol. This is also possible. It is possible because every believer dreads sinning and regrets committing sins. However, the pleasure one derives from the sin may overtake the pain that one feels as a result of committing the sin. In this case the remorse in one's heart is not enough to motivate the person to resolve to abandon the unlawful. Such a person may say that even though Satan overcame me in one sin, I should not give up resisting him in another sin. It may be that I conquer him regarding one sin so it becomes an atonement for the other sin that I committed.

This is the situation that each Muslim finds himself in. The acts of each Muslim is a mix of acts of obedience and acts of disobedience. The Prophet (PBUH) said³², "*Remorse is repentance.*" He did not say that he has to regret all the sins he committed. And he said³³, "*He who repents is*

³² Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

³³ Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah.

like a one who did not sin.” He did not say that one has to repent for all the sins he committed. This means that one can make a partial repentance.

If you ask, *“Is the repentance of the person who committed adultery then became impotent constitutes true repentance?”* I say, *“No, because perfect repentance is to regret what you have done and to have the resolve not to do it again, while you are capable of doing it. If you are not capable of doing it, then there is no meaning for the resolve to abandon it.”* However, if the person realized after he had become impotent the harm that resulted from his sin and felt remorseful, to the extent that this remorse would have prevented him from reoffending had he been capable of committing the act, then I hope that this remorse would atone for his sin.

The truth in all of this, is that the darkness of the heart which results from sinning can be removed by two things: genuine remorse, and firm resolve not to reoffend in the future. In case, one loses the capability to reoffend, then the resolve not to reoffend is meaningless. However, in this case, if the feeling of remorse is strong enough it may suffice for the repentance to be complete.

Consider the case of two people who repented: one who does not entertain an urge to sin and another who entertains an urge to sin but he struggles and controls that urge. Who of the two is in a better situation? You should know that the scholars differed in their opinions regarding this question. The truth is that there are two reasons which may cause the lack of urge to sin. These are

1. It may be that the person has lost interest in this particular pleasure. In this case the person who is interested in the pleasure but is struggling against his carnal desire is better. The ability to struggle against the desire to sin and to control the urge to sin is a measure of the certitude that the person has in his religion. This certitude produced the resolve not to sin.
2. It may be that the person’s certitude and hard struggle against the urge to sin eliminated his carnal desire. He succeeded in controlling his carnal desire and forcing himself to seek satisfaction of the carnal desire only through lawful means. This person has a higher rank.

Types of People Regarding the Permanence of their Repentance

You should know that the people are ranked into four categories regarding the permanence of their repentance. These are

1. The first rank includes the person who repents and remains sincere in his repentance to the end of his life. He redresses what he had done in the past and never entertains thoughts of sinning, except for the minor habitual sins that all people, except the prophets, commit. This is a permanent repentance. Those who enjoy such repentance are the foremost in doing good deeds, they replace bad deeds with good deeds. This kind of repentance is called, **“Pure repentance.”** The person who enjoys this kind of repentance has a, **“Reassured soul,”** the soul that returns to its Lord, well-pleased and pleasing.
2. The second rank includes the person who repents and remains on the straight path, obedient in all major commands. He abandons all major sins; however, he still commits

sins; not because he intentionally wants to sin but he is afflicted with these sins in the course of his life. Whenever he sins, he regrets his sin, becomes remorseful, and resolves not to return to it again. The soul of such person deserves the rank of the, “**Reproaching soul.**” This is a high rank but it is inferior to the previous rank.

3. The third rank includes the person who repents and remains faithful in his repentance for a while, then he suffers an urge for a pleasure which overcomes his resistance. He commits the sin to satisfy his urge, knowing that he is sinning but unable to control his urge. He is persistent in performing all acts of obedience and for the most part abandons committing sins even though he entertains the urge to sin and is capable of sinning. However, sometimes he loses control and is overwhelmed by one or two urges to sin. When he sins, a feeling of regret fills his heart; and he feels remorseful. He wishes that God enables him to resist and control his carnal desires. He resolves to repent and struggles to control himself in face of the temptation, but he falls for the temptation and delays his repentance. This kind of person has a, “**Tempting soul.**” These are the people who are referred to in the verse, “*And there are others who have acknowledged their sins. They had mixed a righteous deed with another that is bad.*” (9: 102) On the one hand, one hopes that God will forgive him because of his persistence in performing acts of obedience and his resentment to committing sins; but on the other hand there is a risk for his procrastination because he may die before seeking repentance. Dying before repentance puts his destiny in God’s. God may bestow His grace on him and forgive him. In this case, he will join the previous rank. But if he is overcome by his own misfortune and overwhelmed with his own carnal desire, then he will be destined to the bad end that he was doomed for.
4. The fourth rank includes the person who repents and remains faithful in his repentance for a while, then he relapses, commits sins, and does not regret doing sins. He indulges in sin heedlessly pursuing his pleasures. He becomes one of those persisting in sin. Such a person has a soul that commands evil, a soul that flees goodness. One fears the bad end that this person may end up having. His fate will be decided by God’s will. His end may be evil and he would be doomed to unlimited misery, or he may die believing in the oneness of God and remains in Hellfire for a period after which he would be released.

What a repentant person must do immediately if he reoffends?

A repentant who sins whether intentionally, overcome by his carnal desire, or unintentionally should repent and feel remorseful for his sin. He should act to atone for his relapse. If he was unable to muster the resolve to abandon sinning in the future, then he would have lost one of the components of repentance. He should not neglect the second component: performing good deeds to erase the bad deeds. He would then become one of those who mixed a good deed with a bad deed. Good deeds which atone for bad deeds could be performed by the heart, the tongue, or the senses. Let the good deed produce the opposite effect to the bad deed which he committed.

Sins committed by the heart can be atoned for by pleading to God for forgiveness. Sins committed by the tongue can be atoned by confessing his wrongdoing and pleading to God for forgiveness. Sins committed by the senses are atoned by performing acts of obedience, giving charity, and performing rituals.

It is narrated in the literature that one can atone for his sin if he immediately performed eight acts after he had committed the sin. Four of the acts are acts of the heart. These are repentance or the resolve to repent, loving to abandon sins, fearing the punishment for doing the sin, and hoping that God will forgive the sins. Four of the acts are acts of the senses. These are praying two raka'a immediately after committing the sin; asking for forgiveness from God seventy times and saying "Glory be to God the Great, *تسبحان ربي العظيم وبحمدة*" a hundred times; giving charity; and fasting one day.

If you say how can asking for forgiveness be useful while the person is still persisting in sinning? You should know that there are a countless number of traditions which illustrate the virtues of reciting supplications seeking God's forgiveness. These supplications are mentioned in the Book of the Remembrance of God. To the extent, that God linked the supplications seeking forgiveness with the life of the Prophet (PBUH) among the Muslims. The Quran says, "*But God would not punish them while you (Muhammad) are among them, and God would not punish them while they seek forgiveness.*" (8: 33) That is why some of the companions said³⁴, "*We had two assurances of clemency: the presence of the Prophet (PBUH) among us and seeking forgiveness. Now that the Prophet (PBUH) has gone, we are left with only one: seeking forgiveness. If this is also gone, we are doomed*"

We say, seeking God's forgiveness using only the oral supplications without the participation of the heart is the repentance of the liars. But if the verbal expression was linked with the pleading of the heart on the basis of true resolve and sincere intention, then this is a good deed in itself. Such deed qualifies as a repellent of bad deeds.

In summary, repentance has two fruits. The first, is to atone for the previous sins. This will render the repentant sinless, as if he has never sinned before. The second, to earn him ranks that qualify him to become beloved. Atonement also has ranks. Atonement could remove the sin completely or it may only lessen its effect.

Pleading with the heart seeking God's forgiveness is a good deed, whose reward God will never waste. I also say, that seeking forgiveness verbally is still a good deed, because keeping the tongue busy with the remembrance of God, even if it is done inadvertently, is better than engaging the tongue in vain talk or even staying silent. You should not belittle the reward for the remembrance of God, even if it is done only verbally and is uttered as a natural response to daily life events. Satan's will try to trick you not to do it by trivializing its value. People are divided into three categories in their response to Satan's trick: those who wrong themselves, those who maintain a middle course, and those who advance forward their good deeds.

The response of those who advance forward their good deeds will be that they will add the movement of the heart to the movement of the tongue, thus defeating Satan's purpose. Those who wrong themselves will fall for Satan's trick and will abandon remembering God verbally. Those who maintain a middle course will continue to remember God verbally and will pray God to enable their hearts to join their tongues in the remembrance of God.

³⁴ Narrated by Abu Musa (RA) and reported by Ahmed

Ja'far Al-Sadeq said, *“God concealed three things within three things. He concealed His pleasure in acts of obedience, do not disdain any act of obedience; you may earn God’s pleasure if you do one of these acts. He concealed His wrath in acts of disobedience, do not belittle any act of disobedience; you may earn God’s wrath if you commit such an act of disobedience. He concealed His friends among His servants, do not ridicule any of His servants; he may be one of God’s friends.”* He also added, *“He concealed His positive response to supplications, do not cease to supplicate Him, perchance you receive His positive response to your supplication.”*

The Fourth Component: Repentance as a Remedy and the Treatment of Persisting in Sinning

You should know that people are two types. These are

1. A young person who has no sensual desire; he grew up in the fold of goodness and avoiding evil. The existence of such person is extremely rare.
2. A person who is not free from sin. Such person may be a repentant person or one who is persisting in sinning.

Our goal is to identify the remedy which can be used to resolve the problem of persistence. Repentance cannot be achieved without taking its medicine. Knowing the medicine is contingent on knowing the sickness. Medicine provides the antidote for the sickness. The reason behind persisting in sin is heedlessness and lust. Knowledge is the antidote for heedlessness. The antidote for lust is to persevere in the removal of the causes of lust.

Heedlessness is the cause of all sins. God said, *“Those are the ones over whose hearts and hearing and vision God has sealed, and it is those who are the heedless. Assuredly, it is they, in the Hereafter, who will be the losers.”* (16: 108-109) The remedy leading to repentance is a mixture of the sweetness of knowledge and the bitterness of perseverance.

Knowledge

If you ask, *“Is there a specific kind of knowledge that is required for the remedy of the problem of persistence?”* You should know that knowledge in its totality provide remedy to the ills of the hearts. There is a specific type of knowledge which provides the appropriate remedy for each illness of the heart. Let us draw a parallel between the illnesses of the heart and the illnesses of the body. For the medicine to be effective in healing a patient, the patient should believe in four things. These are

1. A patient who has a physical complaint should believe that there are causes for illnesses and there are causes for recovery that have been determined by the One who cause the causes. This is the fundamental belief in medicine. The parallel in the ills of the heart is that one should believe in the fundamental divine law. According to the divine law, obedience is the cause of happiness in the Hereafter and disobedience is the cause of misery.

2. He should believe that a specific doctor has a good grasp of medicine, is skilled in his field, tells the truth, and does not deceive or lie. Similarly, one should recognize the truthfulness of the Messenger (PBUH) and believe that everything he said is correct and true.
3. He should listen to the doctor and follow his instructions to avoid things that may cause him harm. Similarly, one should listen to the verses and the traditions which urge people to remain conscious of God and which warn people against committing sins and following their desires. He should believe in the veracity of these verses and traditions so that they can produce the fear that will enable him to persevere in resisting his carnal desires. This is the another component of the remedy.
4. He should listen to the doctor when he gives him information specific to his own illness so that he would seek the things that protect him against the specific things that may cause him harm. Similarly, in case of the ills of the heart, a person needs to know that his acts are sins; he needs to know the harm that these sins will cause him; he needs to know how he can persevere in warding off these carnal desires; and he needs to know how to atone for his previous acts.

The ills of the heart became more widespread than the ills of the body. There are three reasons for this

1. A patient who is afflicted by an illness in his heart is often unaware of his illness.
2. The consequences of the ills of the heart are not seen in this life, contrary to the consequences of a physical illness. A physical illness may lead to death, which is visible and disliked. The consequence of sins is death of the heart, which is invisible in this life. People do not see what happens after death. You would see people hope for God's mercy regarding the ills of the heart while the seek remedy diligently in case of physical illnesses without relying on God's mercy.
3. The rarity of the doctors who can deal with the ills of the heart. These doctors are the scholars. In these times, they themselves became afflicted with very severe illness which they were unable to cure themselves from. To cover up their shortcomings they deceived people and prescribed for them things that increased their illnesses. This severe affliction is the love of the worldly life. They could not warn people against it, fearing that they would be rebuked for warning people against something that they themselves do.

If you ask what are the ways that can be used to admonish people, then you should know that this is a very long subject. We will limit our discussion to the approaches that can be used to resolve the problem of persistence. There are four approaches, as follows:

1. He should remind people of the Quranic verses and the prophetic traditions which warn sinners and the disobedient.
2. He should narrate the stories of the prophets and the righteous people of the earlier generations. He should remind people of the consequences of the acts of disobedience which they committed; like the story of Adam (PBUH) and consequences of his

disobedience; and the story of Jacob (PBUH). It is narrated that God asked Jacob (PBUH), “*Do you know why I separated you from and your son Joseph?*” Jacob said, “*No.*” God said, “*Because you said, ‘I fear that a wolf would eat him while you are unaware.’*” (12:13) God said, “*And do you know why I brought him back to you?*” Jacob said, “*No.*” God said, “*Because you said, ‘It may be that God will bring all of them back to me again.’ And you said, ‘Go and find out about Joseph and his brother, and do not despair.’*” (12: 83, 87)

These stories are not supported by authentic proofs from the Quran or the tradition, however, they serve the purpose of softening the hearts of people and admonishing them not to do acts of disobedience.

3. He should state that it is possible that God may punish them in the worldly life for the sins they commit. Indeed, whatever calamities a person is subjected to is a result of his acts of disobedience. Sometimes, sins cause the provision of a person to be reduced. Sins robs a person of the respect in the eyes of people and he becomes an easy prey for his enemies. Ibn Mas’oud said, “*I think that the sins of a person cause him to forget the knowledge he once had.*” Al-Fadeel said, “*Your sins will cause fluctuations in serendipity and harshness from the friends.*”
4. He should remind people of the punishments decreed for different types of sins e.g. drinking, adultery, theft, murder, backbiting, arrogance, envy, and all the other sins which are difficult to mention here. The scholar should be astute in addressing people; he should only mention the relevant punishments. He should read the body language of the person to understand his hidden maladies and address them appropriately. He should learn from the Messenger’s (PBUH) example who suggested different remedies to different people who asked for his advice.

Perseverance

This is needed because a sick person remains sick as long as he continues to ingest something which is harmful to his health. A person ingests something that is harmful to his health because he is either heedless of the harm that this matter may cause or because he finds an irresistible pleasure in ingesting it. We mentioned above the remedy for heedlessness. It remains to explain the remedy for the irresistible pleasure. This remedy was discussed in the Book on Discipline. The prescription is summarized as follows:

1. One should remind oneself of the devastating consequences of the such pleasure.
2. One should avoid gazing at the source of pleasure.
3. One should find an alternative means for attaining a similar pleasure without incurring the bad consequences associated with the prohibited source of pleasure.
4. One should, by virtue of fear, endure the pain that will accrue as a result of abstention.

If you say that it all boils down to faith, because only by perseverance can one abandon sinning, perseverance is instigated by fear, fear is the result of knowledge, and knowledge is obtained only when one appreciates the devastating effect of sins. Appreciating the devastating effect of sins is brought about by the belief in God and His Messenger (PBUH); this is faith. Does this mean that a person who persists in sinning is a disbeliever? You should know that the answer to

this question is no. Persistence in sinning is not caused by the loss of faith, but it may be caused by a weakness in faith. Every believer believes that committing sins drives him away from God and it is a cause for punishment in the Hereafter.

There are reasons which cause a believer to sin. These are:

1. The promised punishment is a matter of the unseen. It is not immediately seen. It is the nature of human beings to be readily affected by the visible and present things and less affected by things promised in the future.
2. The gratification achieved by sinning is immediate. It overpowers the soul. God said, *“But you love the immediate. And neglect the Hereafter”* (75: 20-21)
3. Every believing sinner is generally determined to repent and to atone for his misdeeds. He was promised that repentance removes his sins. His hope in a longer life drives him to procrastinate.
4. Every sincere believer believes that sinning does not entail an unforgivable punishment. He sins and expects to be forgiven relying on the grace of God.

These are four reasons which could cause a believer to persist in sinning. True, a person may persist in sinning because he doubts the truthfulness of the messengers. This is disbelief.

If you ask what is the remedy for the causes that allow one to persist in sinning. The answer is

1. The remedy for the first cause is to remember that whatever is going to happen will happen. Death is nearer to a person than his shoe laces. Who knows, the hour may be upon us.
2. To deal with the immediate gratification, one should think about the duration of the pleasure. He should ask himself, “If I cannot bear being deprived of the pleasure during my life time, which amounts only to a few days, how will I bear being deprived of the pleasure for eternity? How will I bear the eternal punishment in the Hereafter?”
3. Procrastination is remedied by thinking of the fact that most of the screams of the people in Hellfire are caused by their procrastination. A person who procrastinates assumes that he will live another day to fulfill his wish, an assumption that he has no control over.
4. Hoping for and expecting God’s forgiveness is remedied by remembering the example of a person who spent all his wealth and he and his family became destitute, expecting that God will provide for him by enabling him to find a treasure in a deserted land. It is possible that the person will find a treasure, but there is no doubt that this person is ignorant and foolish.
5. Remedy for disbelief requires a long discourse but one way that can be used to address the disbeliever is to remind him of the stories of the prophets and the reasons we should believe in them.

If you say that all these things are clear but cannot be understood without reflection, I would say, why do the hearts relinquish reflection on these matters? Why do the hearts find reflection burdensome? How can we get the hearts to reflect, especially those who believe in God? You should know that there are two causes which prevent people from reflection. These are

1. Effective reflection is the reflection on the punishment of the Hereafter and its horrors. This kind of reflection has a stinging effect and it is painful to the heart. Hearts dislike to be engaged in such reflections. They would rather think of enjoyable things related to the worldly life.
2. Reflection entails hard work that distracts people from enjoying the pleasures of life. Every human beings finds worldly pleasure in one thing or another. Reflection is an impediment in the way of seeking such pleasure.

The remedy for these two impediments is

1. He should say to his heart, “How foolish you are in abandoning reflecting about death and the Hereafter, thinking that mere remembrance causes pain? How will you be able to cope with the actual pain that accompanies death?”
2. Reflection may cause distraction from enjoying the pleasures of this life, but the distraction from enjoying the pleasures of the Hereafter, caused by the absence of reflection is much greater. The pleasures of this life are temporary and transient while the pleasures in the Hereafter are permanent and everlasting.

Book 2: The Book of Perseverance and Gratitude

Part 1: Perseverance

The Virtues of Perseverance

God mentioned the good attributes of the perseverant in many places of the Quran. God also described the benefits of perseverance, He said, “*And We made among them leaders guiding by Our command when they were perseverant and they were certain of Our signs.*” (32: 24) “*And We will surely give those who were perseverant their reward according to the best of what they used to do.*” (16: 96) “*Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured.*” (28: 54) God promised to be with those who persevere, “*Persevere, God is with those who persevere.*” (8: 46) and He promised those who persevere His support and victory, “*Yes, if you persevere and remain conscious of God and they attack you suddenly, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand angels having marks (of distinction).*” (3: 125)

When Habib ibn Abi Habib used to hear the verse, “*Indeed, We found him perseverant, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one often turning back to God.*” (38: 44) he would weep and say, “What a wonder, God gave His servant the perseverance, then He praised his servant for being perseverant.”

The True Nature of Perseverance

You should know that perseverance is a station³⁵ of the stations of religion and it is a rank of the ranks of the spiritual travelers. Every station of the stations of religion comprises three components: knowledge, states, and acts. Knowledge is the root, it produces the states and the states produce the acts. Knowledge is like a tree, the states are like branches, and the acts are the fruits. This is true for all the stations of those who travel in the path of God.

Perseverance is an exclusively human trait. Since angels are perfect and animals are deficient, neither angels nor animals enjoy such trait. Human beings are born imperfect like animals. The only lust that newly born humans have is the lust for food because they need this for survival. As the human beings grow other lusts and carnal desires develop. However, by the grace of God, humans were honored and their status was elevated above animals. God assigns two angels to each human being when he reaches puberty; one angel guides and the other strengthens the human being. God also bestows two traits on each human being: knowing God and His Messenger (PBUH), and knowing the consequences of his actions. These two traits are entrusted to the angel who guides. However, in addition to guidance, the human being needs the strength to resist the temptation to satisfy his lusts. This is the duty of the angel who is dedicated to support and strengthens the human being. Both angels may sometime suffer states of weakness and strength depending on the support that God ordains for His servant.

We will call the trait that supports the human being in resisting the desires and which distinguishes him from animals the religious impulse and we will call the demand of the carnal desires to be fulfilled the whim’s impulse. The fight between the religious impulse and the whim’s impulse is continuous, each of them takes turns in victory and defeat. The field of this battle is the heart of the believer. The angels who belong to the party of God support the

³⁵ A station is a permanent condition. If the condition is only transient, it is called a state.

religious impulse while the whim's impulse is supported by the devils who are allied to the enemy of God. Perseverance is the ability of the religious impulse to stand firm in resisting the whim's impulse.

Explaining the Statement: Perseverance is Half the Faith

You should know that the term faith is sometimes used to mean the belief in the fundamentals of religion, sometimes is used to mean the good deeds that are produced by that belief, and sometimes it is used to mean both the belief and the good deeds.

Explaining the statement that perseverance is half the faith can be done in two ways.

1. If we consider faith to include the belief in the fundamentals of religion and the good deeds that this belief produces then, faith has two components: certitude and perseverance. Certitude is the certain and unequivocal knowledge which the believer learns when God guides him to the understanding of the fundamentals of religion. Perseverance consists of the actions produced by certitude. The knowledge that disobedience is harmful and that obedience is beneficial is gained through certitude. Perseverance is the only means for a person to abandon acts of disobedience and continue to be obedient. Thus, perseverance is half the faith and certitude is the second half.
2. If we consider faith to include only the good deeds, then in this case, all the situations that meet the servant in life can be divided into two types: situations which are beneficial for the person in the worldly life as well as in the Hereafter, and situations which are harmful to the person in this life as well as in the Hereafter. In the first type of situations, the servant should express his gratitude and in the second type of situations, he should fortify himself with perseverance. Thus, perseverance is half the faith and gratitude is the other half.

Perseverance consists of being firm in supporting the religious impulse and steadfast in resisting the whim's impulse. The whim's impulse has two components, one is aroused by carnal desire and the other is aroused by anger. The carnal desire seeks the delicious gratification, while the anger is needed to escape the pain. Fasting is abstaining from the gratification of the carnal desire. Thus, fasting constitutes half the perseverance.

Names Used to Describe Perseverance in Different Situations

You should know that perseverance is manifested in two forms. These are

The first kind is physical perseverance. This involves being steadfast in enduring hardships to which the physical body is subjected. These hardships may be in the form of hard work or acts of worship that the person performs. It also includes endurance, which involves being steadfast in enduring physical punishments, chronic pain, or major surgeries. This kind of perseverance is praiseworthy if it satisfies the religious criteria.

However, the absolutely commendable type of perseverance is to be steadfast in resisting the desirable pleasures and the demands of the whim. This type of perseverance takes different names depending on the situation. Resistance of eating and sexual desires is called chastity.

Enduring calamities is called patience. Being steadfast in war is called courage. Controlling anger is called forbearance. Perseverance when a calamity befalls the person is called endurance. Enduring a tough life is called asceticism. Most of the traits which are promoted by faith constitute components of perseverance.

Degrees of Strength and Weakness of Perseverance

You should know that there are three cases for the relationship between the religious impulse and the whim's impulse. These are

1. The religious impulse overcomes the whim's impulse completely. This state can be achieved by continuous perseverance. The person is said to be one of those who persevered and won. Only few people are able to achieve this rank. Those who achieve this rank are the truthful who are brought closer to God. Those are the ones referred to in the verse, *"Those who said, 'Our Lord is God and remained on the straight path.'" (41: 30)*
2. The whim's impulse overcomes the religious impulse completely. In this case the religious impulses surrenders to the forces of evil without any resistance. This is the case for the heedless who are enslaved by their desires. These are the people who sold their Hereafter for the price of this worldly life. The Quran refers to them, *"So turn away from whoever turns his back on Our message and desires only the worldly life. That is their sum of knowledge. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who strays from His way, and He is most knowing of who is guided."* (53: 29) Most people belong to this category.
3. The fight between the two impulses continues without end with alternating results, one day the religious impulse overpowers the whim's impulse and the following day it loses. This is the category of people who are struggling not those who have secured their success. Those are referred to in the Quran, *"And others who have acknowledged their sins. They had mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. Perhaps God will turn to them in forgiveness. Indeed, God is Forgiving and Giver of Mercy."* (9: 102)

Perseverance can also be divided into two categories. The first category can only be maintained by hard and diligent struggle. This is called forced perseverance. The second type can be easily maintained without much effort. This is called perseverance. When a person remains conscious of God and maintains the strong belief that the consequence of perseverance is good, then God will make it easy for him to persevere, *"As for he who gives and remains conscious of God, and believes in the best reward, We will ease him toward ease."* (92: 5-7)

It was said that there are three ranks for the perseverant

1. The first rank includes those who shun their lust. This is the rank of the repentant.
2. The second rank includes those who are content with what God decrees. This is the rank of the ascetic.
3. The third rank includes those who love what God had decreed. This is the rank of the truthful.

We will show in the Book of Love that the rank of love is higher than the rank of contentment, which is still higher than the rank of perseverance. This applies in particular to the perseverance in face of calamities and trials.

Perseverance can also be categorized according to religious ruling into four categories: obligatory, supererogatory, offensive, and unlawful. Persevering in shunning prohibited things is an obligatory duty. Persevering in enduring hardships is supererogatory. Persevering in enduring unlawful harm is unlawful. Persevering in enduring harm which is inflicted on him in a religiously loathsome way is offensive.

Exposition of the Need for Perseverance

You should know that all the situations one encounters in this life are either situations that one likes or situations that one dislikes. A person needs perseverance in all situations. Thus, a person cannot survive without being perseverant.

Situations which a person likes include those in which the person enjoys good health, security, wealth, fame, and other worldly pleasures. Perseverance is very much needed in these situations. If he does not control his carnal desires and curb his inclination to indulge in these lawful pleasures, he will certainly be led to a state of ingratitude which will lead to transgression.

Some Gnostics say, *“A believer perseveres in the face of trials, but it takes a sincere truthful to successfully persevere in times of affluence.”* Sahl said, *“Persevering during times of affluence is more difficult than persevering during times of trial.”*

Situations which one dislikes can be divided into three categories

The First Category:

Situations which are created as a result of decisions made by the person himself. These decisions may involve acts of obedience and acts of disobedience.

1. Acts of Obedience: One needs perseverance for performing acts of obedience. Human beings are by nature rebellious. They disdain being servants and they love to be masters. An example of this is Pharaoh’s words, *“I am your supreme Lord.”* (79: 24)
An obedient person needs to persevere in three situations
 - a. The first, before performing acts of obedience. Before acting, one has to make a sincere intention avoiding any blemish of showing off; dedicating his deed sincerely to God. This is a difficult endeavor known only to those who recognize the true nature of sincere intentions.
 - b. The second, during performing the act of obedience. A person should be fully aware of the etiquette of worship and never allow himself to be distracted and become heedless of God.
 - c. The third, after the act has been completed. He should persevere in keeping his good deeds confidential; and avoid any blemish of using it to show off.

Acts of obedience include both the obligatory duties and the supererogatory acts. One should persevere in doing both. God combines them in one verse, *“Indeed, God commands justice and good conduct and giving help to relatives.”* (16: 90) Justice refers

to obligatory duties, good conduct refers to supererogatory duties, and giving help to relatives refers to gallantry and maintaining good family relations. Each one of these requires perseverance.

2. Acts of Disobedience: A servant is desperately in need for perseverance to be able to avoid these acts. The different types of the acts of disobedience have been referred to in the verse, “*And forbids immorality, and bad conduct, and oppression.*” (16: 90)
The perseverance required to enable the person to abstain from committing sins that the person has grown accustomed to is the most difficult type of perseverance. Getting used to something makes it a fifth nature. When custom and carnal desire unite, it is like two Satanic armies became allies against the army of God. Furthermore, if the sin is easy to commit, then abstention in this case becomes even more difficult. Examples of such sins are the sins of the tongue, like backbiting, lying, argumentation, and similar sins. If a person could not hold his tongue from getting engaged in these sins, then he should seek solitude. Perseverance is easier to practice when a person is in solitude.
Persevering in abstaining from a particular sin is commensurate with the strength of the impulse that causes it. Having bad thoughts is easier than committing verbal sins. Thus, even in solitude, the possibility of entertaining bad thoughts remains. The remedy for this is to engage the heart into religious thoughts that overpowers the bad thoughts.

The Second Category

Situations in which the person is faced with actions that he has no control over however, he is able to resist such actions. Examples of this are when a person is attacked verbally or physically and suffered a personal harm or loss of property or wealth. Perseverance in these situations without taking revenge can sometimes be obligatory and sometimes it is considered an act of gallantry. Some companions of the Prophet (PBUH) said, “*We did not consider a person’s faith to be complete unless he perseveres when wronged.*” The Quran says, “*And we will surely be patient against whatever harm you should cause us. And upon God let those who would rely, indeed rely.*” (14:12)

The Third Category

Situations in which the person is faced with actions which he neither has control over nor is he able to resist. Examples of these situations are the occurrence of calamities, like loss of the life of a dear person, loss of wealth, loss of health, and so on. Perseverance in such situations is the highest rank of perseverance.

Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) said, “*There are three categories of perseverance mentioned in the Quran. A person who perseveres in performing obligatory duties decreed by God is awarded three hundred marks. A Person who perseveres in abstaining from committing things decreed unlawful by God is awarded six hundred marks. A person who demonstrates perseverance in the first instant a calamity has been inflicted on him is awarded nine hundred marks.*” The last category was given a distinction over the first two, even though the first two categories involve obligatory duties while the last one involves acts of gallantry, because persevering in performing obligatory duties is within the power of each believer. But persevering when an affliction befalls the person is a very difficult task. It is the trade of the sincere truthful. One of the supplications

that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to say³⁶, “*God, I ask you to bestow on me enough certitude of faith to make the calamities of life bearable.*” This perseverance is grounded in certitude. The Prophet (PBUH) also said³⁷, “*If a person follows God’s command whenever a calamity befalls him and said, ‘To God we belong and to Him we will return. God, reward me for my affliction and replace my loss with something better.’ God will certainly accept his supplication.*”

It is thus clear from the above, that perseverance is needed in all situations. Even the person who has no carnal desires and has chosen to live in solitude cannot live without perseverance. He needs perseverance to be able to continue living in solitude, and he needs perseverance to overcome the whispering of the devil which will continue to roam in his mind. Most of these distracting thoughts are about something that one missed in the past or something that has been decreed to happen in the future. In either case, the person has no control over them and thinking about these things is a waste of time. A person who wastes a short time as short as the time one takes to exhale his breath without remembering God is a loser. This is in case his thoughts were about lawful things. Most of the times this is not the case. His thoughts will be mainly about ways to satisfy his carnal desires.

Do not imagine that an empty human heart would be devoid of Satan. Satan flows through the veins of human beings like blood. Take the example of a cup that is full of air, you would be deluded if you think that you can empty the air in the cup without replacing it with water or another fluid. You can only remove a volume of the air equal to the volume of the water that you put into the cup. Similarly, if you want to prevent Satan from flowing into a heart, you have to keep that heart busy with the remembrance of God. Satan will become the companion of a person who becomes heedless of the remembrance of God for a moment. The Quran says, “*And whoever is blinded from the remembrance of the Lord of Mercy – We appoint for him a devil, and he is to him a companion.*” (43: 36)

If you reflect, you will reach the conclusion that your carnal desire is your most avowed enemy. The real perseverance is to persevere in abstaining from attempting any reprehensible movement. It is more preferable to abstain from reprehensible inner movements. This requires enduring perseverance that lasts until death. We ask God to bestow His bounty and generosity on us and grant us success.

The Prescription for the Achievement and Maintenance of Perseverance

You should know that He who brought the malady to existence has, also created the remedy and promised the recovery. Although it may be difficult to acquire or maintain, it is possible to achieve perseverance using a mixture of knowledge and action. Knowledge and action are the ingredients of medicines that cure the ills of the heart. Each malady requires different types of knowledge and action. There are different ills which prevent the achievement of perseverance, each requires its own medicine. We will mention some examples of these medicines.

³⁶ Narrated by Ibn ‘Umar (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi and Al-Nassaie

³⁷ Narrated by Um Salamah (RA) and reported by Muslim.

Suppose for example that a person finds it difficult to persevere against sexual desire. The desire may overwhelm his senses or his thoughts and he is no longer able to control himself. His heart may become busy thinking about it, to the extent that he is distracted from remembering God, reflecting, or doing good deeds. To such person we say that perseverance is the struggle of the religious impulse against the impulse of the whim. If we wish for one to triumph over the other, we must strengthen the one and weaken the other.

The impulse of the whim can be weakened using the following three methods:

1. We should consider the ways this desire is strengthened through different types and quantities of food. The remedy for this is fasting in addition to avoiding types of food which enhance the desire.
2. One should avoid the sources which excite the desire. One should avoid looking at scenes which inflame the sexual desire. Such scenes move the heart, and the heart inflames the desire. The remedy is to seek seclusion and stay away from scenes that inflame the desire.
3. One should engage into lawful sexual activities which can be obtained through marriage. Lawful sexual activities can satisfy all normal sexual needs. This is the most effective remedy for most people. Reducing food intake weakens the body and may not be effective in controlling the desire. The Prophet (PBUH) said³⁸, *“Young people, I advise you to marry, it helps you to lower your gaze and to keep your chastity. Whoever could not afford it should fast. Indeed, fasting provide you with a protective shield against your desire.”*

The religious impulse can be strengthened using the following two methods:

1. To remind oneself of the benefits of keeping up the struggle to develop oneself and hold oneself to the path of integrity. One should continually remember and contemplate the narrations about the virtues of perseverance and its fruits in this life and in the Hereafter. It has been narrated that the reward that a persevering person gets when a calamity befalls him outweighs what he may have lost, because his loss will only last as long as his life lasts, while he will continue to reap the benefit of his reward forever. These are all matters of true knowledge, which is part of belief and belief waxes and wanes in strength as a matter of course. When belief grows in strength then so does the motivation from faith and vice versa. The strength of belief is what is referred to as certitude and that is the engine for the resolve to persevere.
2. To progressively train the religious impulse to wrestle with and overcome the impulse of the whim, starting with easier tasks and increasing the difficulty gradually. The joy in overcoming the desire will gradually embolden the self to continue the struggle and to have hope of further triumph.

This is the recipe for attaining and maintaining all types of perseverance. The most difficult task is to hold back the susurrations of the self. It is more difficult particularly for those who are able to curb the visible desires and devote their time to reflecting and remembering God in seclusion.

³⁸ Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The whispering of the self will continue to plague their thoughts. The only remedy for this is to cut off completely all attachments with the inner and the outer surroundings. This is accomplished by fleeing the extended family, the nuclear family, wealth, fame, companions, and friends; seeking solitude in a corner after having secured a little amount of food; and being content with what one has. However, this is not enough. One has to be interested in one thing only: the remembrance of God. This requires the complete devotion of the heart. However, time rarely passes by without the occurrence of events that distract the heart.

Another important type of distraction, is being engaged in earning one's livelihood. However, having severed all attachments with the world, he will have more time to reflect and during these times that the heart will be clear and able to reflect.

It is essential for the person to clean the heart from the weed of desires before he can sow the seeds of the determination and sincerity. The heart can then be subjected to the wind of mercy. This has a better chance to happen during the Holy days like the day of Arafat, Fridays, and the during Ramadan.

This is the recipe for persevering against the susurrations and the distractions. This is the highest level of perseverance. However, persevering in severing the ties is more preferable than persevering against the susurrations.

The Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, the Quran, the Tablets of Abraham (PBUH) and Moses (PBUH), and every other revealed Book, were revealed to invite people to the eternal kingdom. They are required to be kings in this life and kings in the Hereafter. For someone to be a king in this life, he has to live an ascetic life and be content with the little one receives. For one to be a king in the Hereafter, one has to seek the nearness of God. Being close to God in the Hereafter guarantees eternal existence, honor, and contentment that no one has ever experienced.

An ascetic person is the person who is able to control his desires and anger. His desires and anger become subservient to the motivation from faith and the counsel of belief. By forcing his desires and anger to submit to the religious impulse, the human being is liberated and earns supreme authority. The person will be no longer subservient to his desires and anger. A king once asked an ascetic person, if he needs any favor from the king. The ascetic person said, "*How can I ask you for a favor, when my kingdom is greater than yours?*" The king wondered about him and asked for an explanation. The ascetic person said, "*You are enslaved by my slaves. You are enslaved by your desires and your anger. But I have control over desires and anger.*" This is how one owns the kingdom of this life and it leads to owning the kingdom in the Hereafter.

Having known these matters is not enough, one has to combine knowledge with action. The action consists of three things

1. He should avoid positions of eminence. It is difficult to persevere against seeking eminence when one has the means. Similarly, a person who is excited by motivating scenes should keep away from them. If he does not do that then he has disavowed the blessings of God Who has made the earth a spacious place to pursue His pleasure. The Quran says, "*Indeed, those whom the angels take, in death, while wronging themselves –*

the angels will say, 'In what condition were you?' They will say, 'We were oppressed in the land.' The angels will say, 'Was not the earth of God spacious enough for you to emigrate therein?' For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination.” (4: 97)

2. He should change his life style, leading a simpler life. Instead of wearing elegant and expensive clothes, he should dress modestly. Similarly, in all his actions and habits. Replacing habits with their opposites is the remedy.
3. He should embark on these changes gradually. He should not move suddenly from one extreme to another. This is against the nature of human beings. He should change one habit at a time until he completes his task.

This is the way to persevere against the susurrations, the physical desires, and the love for eminence. This should be added to the rules of struggle against the self which have been mentioned in the Book of the Training of the Soul. Use this combination as a constitution to understand the ways of gaining the different types of perseverance.

One should follow a gradual routine to arrive at the full state of perseverance. When one reaches this state, it will be difficult for him not to persevere.

It has been mentioned that the verse, *“You who believe, persevere, and endure, and remain steadfast, and be conscious of God that you may be successful,”* (3: 200) means one should persevere for the sake of God, endure with the help of God, and remain steadfast with God. It was said that, *“Perseverance for the sake of God is independence; perseverance with the help of God is survival; perseverance with God is loyalty; and perseverance in staying away from God is desertion.”*

Part 2: Gratitude

This book has three divisions. The first division deals with the essence, virtues, and true meaning of gratitude; its categories, and its rules. The second division deals with true meaning of the God's favor and its general and special components. The third division deals with which is better perseverance or gratitude.

First Division: The Essence of Gratitude

The Virtue of Gratitude

You should know that, although God said, *“Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of God is greater;”* (29: 45) but He connected showing gratitude and remembering Him, He said, *“And remember Me, I will remember you and be grateful to Me and do not disbelief.”* (2:152) He also said, *“What would God gain from your punishment if you showed gratitude and believed?”* (4: 147) He said, *“Indeed, We will reward the grateful.”* (3: 145) Knowing the high rank of the those who show gratitude, Satan slandered human beings saying that most of them are ungrateful, *“And You will not find most of them grateful.”* (7: 17) God promised to give unconditional reward to those who are grateful, *“And remember when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you are grateful, I will surely increase you in favor.’”* (14: 7)

The True Meaning of Gratitude

You should know that gratitude is one of the ranks of the learnt scholars. It consists of three components: knowledge, state, and action. Knowledge is the root, it produces the state, and action is produced by the state. Knowledge relates to acknowledging God's favor. The state is celebrating the favor. The action is to strive to please the Benefactor. Action comprises the works of the heart, the senses, and the tongue.

1. Knowledge has three components: acknowledging the favor, acknowledging the fact that a favor has been bestowed on him, and acknowledging the Benefactor and His attributes which produce the favor and cause the favor to be bestowed on him.

This knowledge is not complete until one realizes that all favors and blessings are from God. God control all the means through which His favors are bestowed. This knowledge is the basis for the belief in the oneness of God. You should know that this knowledge prevents the actions of the human being from being tainted by any type of associating partners with God.

If a king has done a person a favor and that person showed gratitude to the king's minister or storekeeper thinking that the minister or the storekeeper had a share in bestowing the favor, then that person is associating someone else as a benefactor with the king. In this case, he does not see the king as the sole benefactor. His gratitude would be divided between the king and the minister or the storekeeper. However, if he realizes that the minister or the storekeeper were forced to deliver the favor and they were only a means for delivering the favor, then he will devote his gratitude exclusively to the king. This does not taint the gratitude with any sign of associating partners with the king.

Similarly, every person that delivers a favor from God to you is compelled to do so, he is only a means for the delivery of the favor. God has forced him to deliver the favor to you and made him think that it is best for him to do so. Thus, he would be doing you a favor thinking that it is good for him to do so. In fact, he would think that he is doing himself a favor by doing you a favor.

If you truly understand this, then you have known God and recognized His deed. You would become a believer in the oneness of God and this enables you to be grateful to God. In fact, this knowledge is quite sufficient in itself to make you grateful.

2. The State: Arriving at the recognition explained above will lead you to acquire the appropriate state to be able to show gratitude to God. This state will generate in your heart a mixture of feelings which includes a joy for God, humility, and submission to God. These feelings are in themselves an expression of gratitude, provided that your joy is for the Benefactor not for the gift itself nor the act of giving.

To explain this let us give an example. Consider a king who was going on a trip and he gave someone a horse. The person who received the horse will entertain a feeling of joy. The reason for the joy could be one of three

- a) The person may be happy that he was given a gift.
- b) The person may consider the gift a sign of the king's kindness and care.
- c) The person may be happy that he was given a tool that he can use to serve the king better. Having a horse will make him able to travel with the king and be close to him. His nearness to the king is in itself a reason for joy.

These are three ranks

- a) The first rank is void of the essence of gratitude. The source of joy is the gift not the giver.
- b) The second rank is considered gratitude because the source of joy is the giver not the gift. However, the joy in this case is not caused by the fact that the person knows the essence of the giver but because it is a sign of the kindness of the giver, a kindness which may produce more gifts in the future. This is the rank of the righteous who worship God and show gratitude to Him fearing His punishment and hoping for His reward.
- c) The third rank is the perfect gratitude. The person considers God's gift as a means which brings him closer to God. It enables the person to communicate with God and enjoy the sight of His face forever. Its sign is to be pleased only with the worldly things that will produce pleasure in the Hereafter; and he would be saddened with any favor that will distract him from the remembrance of God and takes him away from the path of God.

3. The Action: These are actions which are produced by the feeling of joy that developed as a result of knowing the Benefactor. These are actions produced by the heart, verbally, or by physical action.
 - a. Using the heart to show gratitude involves having the intention to do good and to help God's creation.
 - b. Using the tongue to show gratitude involves the remembrance of God and praising Him for His favors.
 - c. Using physical actions to show gratitude involves using the senses and body parts in performing acts of obedience and abstaining from committing acts of disobedience.

The earlier generations used to ask each other about their conditions with the intention of expressing gratitude to God verbally. So that both the one who asks and the one who is responding express their obedience to God. This is not a sign of hypocrisy. A person who is asked about how he feels may choose to express his gratitude to God, may choose to complain about his condition, or may choose to remain silent. Expressing gratitude is an act of obedience, while complaining is an abhorred sin. How could a complaint not be abhorred? How can a person complain about the King of kings who controls everything to one of His helpless slaves?

If a person needs to complain it is better for him to complain to God.

Ways to Show Gratitude to God

The question that needs to be answered is how can we show gratitude to God for His favor, while the ability of showing gratitude is in itself a favor from God? This question occurred to David (PBUH) and Moses (PBUH). Each one of them asked God, "*How can I express my gratitude to You, while expressing gratitude is in itself a favor from You?*" God's answer was, "*Understanding this is an expression of gratitude.*"

If you say, "I understood the question, but I am unable to understand the meaning of what was revealed to them. I do know that it is impossible to show gratitude to God, but I do not understand how this knowledge constitute an expression of gratitude? Knowledge is also a favor from God, how can it be also an expression of gratitude? It seems that the end result is that whoever does not show gratitude is actually grateful; and accepting the second favor from God is an expression of gratitude for the first favor."

You should know that, by asking this question, you are knocking on the door of the spiritual knowledge. This knowledge ranks higher than the knowledge of daily transactions. However, we will mention few of its features. There are two views.

1. The first view is to look at the matter through the lens of the belief in the absolute oneness of God. This leads to understanding that God is the Grateful, and He is the One who deserves gratitude; and He is the One who loves and the One who is loved. This arises from the realization that nothing has true existence except God and that everything will perish except God's countenance. This is the permanent and eternal truth, because other than God, nothing exists independently.

This explains the response of Habeeb ibn abi Habeeb (RA) when he read the verse, *“Indeed, We found him (Job) perseverant, what an excellent servant. Indeed, he was repeatedly turning back to God.”* (38: 44) He said, *“How astonishing, He gave and He praised.”* In this sense when God praised the Job’s perseverance, He was, in terms of absolute reality, praising Himself, since Job’s perseverance was fundamentally a gift from God. Thus, He is the One who praises and He is the One who is praised. Sheik Abu Saeed Al-Meheeny reacted similarly when he read the verse, *“God will bring forth a people He will love and who will love Him.”* (5: 54) He said, *“He will love them. Let Him love them. It is right that He should love them because in so doing He is in fact loves Himself. He is the One who loves and He is the One who is loved.”* This is a high rank of understanding that you may not be able to comprehend without a more limited analogy. Consider the example of a (human) author. An author who likes his book, he in the ultimate analysis, likes himself. An artisan when he is moved by the beauty of what he has made is, in the ultimate analysis, moved by his own self. Everything in the universe is the product of God’s authoring and fashioning so that in the ultimate analysis when He loves the creation He loves Himself, and if He only loved Himself, He would love the creation. The Sufis refer to our recognition of this unity as a state of self-annihilation, meaning that when a human being is in this spiritual state or this state of reflection and recognition, this human being becomes aware only of God’s existence and nothing else exists in his awareness. People mock this Sufi terminology because they imagine that the Sufi claims that he no longer exists, when that is not what is meant. Rather the meaning is an awareness of God so intense and so focused as to obliterate the person’s awareness of any lesser existence

2. The second view is the view of those who did not reach the state of self-annihilation. These are two categories.
 - a) The first category, includes those who acknowledge nothing except their own existence. They refuse to believe in the existence of God. These are the blind because they denied what has been proven to be true.
 - b) The second category, includes those who are half blind. The seeing eye acknowledges the existence of God. The blind eye causes him to lose sight of the fact that there is no true existence except the existence of God. Thus, such a person is associating partners with God. If his eye sight gets better, he will be able to differentiate between the existence of God and the existence of the servant of God. This will move him into the boundary of the belief in the oneness of God. As his eye sight gets better and better, he will move closer to the point of the complete belief in the oneness of God. The Books that God revealed to His messengers and prophets embody the remedy which improves eye sight. The Messengers and the Prophets are the ones who apply the remedy to improve the eye sight of people. This explains the response of the Prophet (PBUH) to the command of God, *“Prostrate and draw near.”* (96: 19) The Prophet (PBUH) said³⁹, while prostrating, *“I seek refuge in Your forgiveness from Your punishment; I seek refuge in Your pleasure from your wrath; I seek refuge with You*

³⁹ Narrated by Aiysha (RA) and reported by Muslim

from Yourself. I do not count the praise that is due to You; You are praised as You praised Yourself.” First, he only saw the acts of God, *“I seek refuge in Your forgiveness from Your punishment.”* Then, he moved closer, he became detached from the acts and saw the attributes of God, *“I seek refuge in Your pleasure from your wrath.”* Then, he moved closer, became detached from the acts and attributes and saw the Devine Himself, *“I seek refuge with You from Yourself.”* This last statement is seeking refuge in God Himself irrespective of His acts and attributes. However, He still felt his shortcomings so he said, *“I do not count the praise that is due to You; You are praised as You praised Yourself.”* This states that God is the One who praised and is the One worthy of praise. Everything started from Him and everything will return to Him. Everything will perish except His countenance. This can be better understood using an example. Consider a situation of a servant who lives far away from the king. The king wants him to be present in his court. He sends him a vehicle to bring him to the court, clothes to wear and money to buy food. The king is doing this for one of two reasons

- i. The first, the king needs the servant to be present in his court to serve and perform certain tasks.
- ii. The second, the king does not need the servant’s service. The servant’s presence in the court is not needed and his services are not required. The only reason for the king’s gifts is to make his servant enjoy being in the presence of the king.

In the first case, the servant has to show his gratitude by performing the tasks that he was brought to perform.

In the second case, even though the servant’s service is not required, he could show gratitude or ingratitude. The way to show gratitude in this case is to use the gifts that were given to him to improve his lot not to serve his master. Not using the gifts or using them in such a way that further distances the servant from the king constitutes an act of ingratitude. If the servant rides the vehicle to travel to the court, wore the clothes during his trip, and spent the money to buy food during his trip, then this constitutes an act of gratitude. The king gave his servant gifts so he can use them to serve the servant’s and to bring him closer to his court. Similarly, the blessings and favors of God are vehicles for His servants to draw near to Him. God is independent and does need His servants. The servant can show his gratitude to God by using God’s favor to perform acts of obedience. Using God’s favor in performing acts of disobedience, is an act of disbelief. A servant who neglects using the favor either way, is still an ungrateful person. Everything God created on earth is to serve as a means for human beings to achieve happiness in the Hereafter and drawing closer to God. The more a person uses God’s favors in performing acts of obedience, the better the expression of gratitude is.

The Determination of What God Loves and What He Hates

You should know that one cannot be fully grateful unless one is able to determine what God likes and what He dislikes. Similarly, one cannot abandon ingratitude unless he knows what

pleases God and what displeases Him. Gratitude consists of using God's favor in doing what pleases Him; and ingratitude is the opposite of that. Ingratitude consists of using God's favor in doing what displeases God or neglecting God's favor completely. One can determine what pleases God and what displeases Him using one of two senses: hearing which has been supported by the Quran and the tradition; and the spiritual insight of the heart which is to be gained through reflection. This last one is difficult. It is therefore, rare.

God sent His messengers to ease the way for people and to teach them all the rules that govern the actions of people. He who does not apply these rules in all his actions will not be able to express gratitude to God.

Using the spiritual insight of the heart one can understand God's rationale behind the creation of each and every existing creature. There is a rationale behind the creation of each and every creature in the universe. Behind that rationale there is a purpose, and the purpose is the beloved. The rationale may be visible and may be hidden. Examples of visible rationales, are the rationales behind the creation of the Sun. There are many rationales behind the creation of the Sun. One of them may be that the creation of the Sun produces days and nights. People work during the day and sleep during the night. Light is needed for work and darkness is needed for sleep. This is one of the rationales behind the creation of the Sun. There are many other rationales behind the creation of the Sun which are more complex than this.

Similarly, there is a rationale behind the creation of clouds, the stars, the different limbs of animals and so on. Many people do not know these rationales, and those who know some do not know all. The Quran says, "*And you, humankind, have not been given of knowledge except a little.*" (17: 85) He who uses something in other than the purpose that it was created for is ungrateful. A person who uses his hand to assault another person has committed an act of ingratitude, because the hand was created to defend oneself against harm or to do something useful.

The objective of the creation of the human race and the creation of the world with the means it has, is for people to use whatever means God created in the world to reach for God. Human beings cannot reach God unless they love him, seek His companionship in this life, and abandon the delusions of the worldly life. God's companionship cannot be achieved except by the continuous remembrance of God; and God's love cannot be achieved except through knowledge obtained from continuous reflection. Continuous remembrance of God and reflection cannot be attained except by the survival of the body. The body can only survive by food and food cannot be obtained without having a land to cultivate, water, and air. This could not have happened without the creation of the heaven and earth and the different visible and hidden body parts. All of this has been created for the sake of the physical human body. The human body is the vehicle which carries the soul. What will return to God is the soul which achieved its security through long periods of worship and seeking knowledge. This is why God says, "*And I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me. I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me.*" (51: 56-57) Thus, using anything in performing an act of disobedience constitute an act of ingratitude.

Let us mention one example of the hidden rationales - which is not completely invisible, to learn a lesson that teaches us how to be grateful to God. One of God's favors is the creation of money. Money, whether paper or coins, has no value in itself, but life cannot be sustained without it. People need money to be able to conclude business transactions. Each person needs for his life a number of different commodities. He may have something in abundance while he has shortage of another. Exchanging one commodity with another requires a medium that can be used to evaluate the value of each commodity. This medium is money. A person may have a camel that he does not need while he needs Saffron. Another person may have Saffron in abundance while he needs a camel to ride. If they wanted to exchange these commodities, then they will have to evaluate the price of each using money. Thus, money has been created to serve as a means for exchange of commodities among people. Money is like a mirror. The mirror itself has no color but reflects all colors. Similarly, money is not sought for itself but it is sought because it is the means to acquire everything. Any person who uses money in a way that defeats the purpose for which it was created is an ungrateful person. Hoarding money or using it to practice usury is an expression of ingratitude. Worse than hoarding money is using it for buying utensils made from silver and gold. This is like hiring a dignified state director to do a job of sewing or to collect taxes. These are jobs that can be carried out by people of lower status. Utensils made out of pottery, lead, and copper are quite efficient in keeping food.

A person who uses money in usurious transactions has committed an act of ingratitude and wronged himself. Money was not created to be traded for money but was created to be traded for other things.

This is an example of the one of the hidden rationales behind the creation of money. This example sets a standard for the measure of gratitude and ingratitude in each human activity. There is a rationale behind the creation of everything, and that rationale should be observed. Only those who understand the rationale behind the creation of things can fulfil the rationale, *"He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good."* (2: 269) However, you will not be able to find gems of wisdom in hearts which are used to collect the trashes of lust nor hearts which are used as playfields for Satan. Only those who have intellect are able to remember.

Having understood this example, you should use it to measure all your actions: your movement, your stillness, your talk, and your silence.

Other examples can also be cited. If you use your right hand to clean your private parts, then you have revoked the rationale behind the creation of the hands. God gave you two hands; He made one stronger than the other. The normally strong hand deserves to be used in doing honorable deeds. Honoring the weaker is an act of injustice and God only commands justice. In addition, some of the acts that a human being needs to do in his daily life are noble, like holding a Quran, and some are abject, like removing filth. Holding the Quran using your left hand and removing filth using the right hand constitutes an act of ingratitude because you assigned a mean act to the noble hand. You have debased the right hand, wronged it, and strayed away from justice.

Similarly, spitting in the direction of the Qiblah or facing the Qiblah while defecating or urinating defies the rationale behind the creation of directions and the creation of the space. God created directions to provide you with space for your movements. Some directions are considered noble and others are considered ignoble. God established His house along one of the noble directions. God meant to attract your heart to His house, so that your whole body would be attracted to it. This helps in providing you with the right demeanor during acts of worship.

Similarly, putting on your shoes, starting with the left foot is considered to be an act of ingratitude. Shoes provide a useful function because they protect the feet. When seeking a benefit one should start with the more noble benefit. This is justice and a fulfillment of the rationale behind its creation. A person once gave a huge amount of wheat in sadaqah (Charity). When asked about it, he responded, *“I wanted to put on my shoes, but I forgetfully started with the left foot. So, I wanted to give sadaqah to atone for such deed.”*

All such acts are expressions of ingratitude, however, Gnostics may consider some acts as sinful, while the same acts are considered detested by the scholars of jurisprudence. The acts of disobedience are like layers of darkness one of them is darker than the other. A master may punish his servant for using a knife without permission, but if the servant used the knife to kill the master’s child, then there is no place for blaming the servant for using the knife without permission. Such necessity for observing the proper order of priorities is the rationale behind the etiquette of consideration that the prophets followed. It is also the reason for not asking the lay people to abide by an extremely stringent code of jurisprudence. However, one should know that all reprehensible acts are acts of injustice; they are considered to be acts of ingratitude; and they distance the person further from God.

In summary, God has created everything for a purpose. He made the actions of some people a way to help in realizing the purpose. He made the actions of others to resist the achievement of the purpose. Any action which helps in the achievement of the purpose is an act of gratitude while any action that defies the purpose is an act of ingratitude.

The true nature of gratitude is that the servant of God is used to achieve the purpose for which everything has been created. People who express high level of gratitude are loved by God and are brought very close to Him. The closest to God are the angels. The angels are ranked; each one has an appointed station. The highest in rank is Israfeel (PBUH). Angels have a high rank because they are noble and dutiful. God appointed them to help the prophets. The prophets are the most noble creatures on earth. They come next to the angels in rank. The prophets are good in themselves. God used them to guide people to the right path and to perfect His wisdom.

Second Division: Favors That Deserve Gratitude

In this division we will discuss God’s favors that deserve our gratitude. We will mention the true meaning of God’s favors, their categories, their ranks, and their types, in general and in particular. However, you should know that favors that God bestows on His servants are limitless, *“And if you should count God’s favors, you could not enumerate them.”* (14: 34)

The True Nature of the God's Favors and Their Categories

You should know that each good thing, each pleasure, and each happiness is considered a favor. Everything that a person desires and is affected by it is also considered a favor. But the true favor is the happiness in the Hereafter. Calling anything other than that a favor or happiness is either a mistake or is done in a figurative sense. Calling the worldly happiness which does not lead to happiness in the Hereafter, happiness is absolutely wrong. Everything that leads to the achievement of happiness in the Hereafter deserves to be called a favor; because it leads to the true happiness.

We will consider the different classifications of the means for attaining happiness and the pleasures that we may call favors.

The First Classification

All matters that concerns us can be classified into

1. Matters that are beneficial in both this life and the Hereafter, like seeking knowledge and having good character.
2. Matters that are harmful in both this life and the Hereafter, like ignorance and having bad character.
3. Matters that are beneficial in this life and harmful in the Hereafter, like enjoying lusts and desires.
4. Matters that are harmful and painful in this life but beneficial in the Hereafter, like curbing our desires and controlling ourselves.

Matters that are beneficial in both this life and the Hereafter are considered, indeed, favors. The opposite to these are matters that are harmful in both this life and the Hereafter. These are indeed, a curse. Matters that are beneficial in this life and harmful in the Hereafter are considered absolute curse by those who use have intellect, while they are considered favors by those who are ignorant. Matters that are harmful and painful in this life but beneficial in the Hereafter, are considered favors for people of intellect while the ignorant thinks they are a curse.

The Second Classification

You should know that the good and the bad means and ways, in this life, are tangled together. Good things - like wealth, family, progeny, fame, and many other - never happen in pure form. But they can be classified into

1. Matters whose benefit is more than their harm, like having barely sufficient wealth, prominence, and other means.
2. Matters whose harm is more than their benefit, like abundant wealth and extreme prominence.

Matters whose benefit balances their harm, and these are different for different people. A pious person may use his abundant wealth in the service of God and in charitable causes. Thus, abundant wealth becomes a favor. Another may have barely enough wealth, but he is discontent and ever complaining about his lot asking for more. In this case, barely enough wealth becomes a curse.

The Third Classification

You should know that blessings can be classified into blessings which are sought for their own sake, blessings which are used to achieve other blessings, and blessings which are both sought for their own sake and because they are the means to achieve other blessings. An example of the first category is the pleasure of looking at the countenance of God. An example of the second category is money. Examples of the third category are health and security.

Blessings which are sought for their own sake are the true blessings. These which are sought for their own sake and because they are the means to achieve other blessings are also considered true blessings but they rank lower than the first category. These which are not sought for their own sake but because they are the means to achieve other blessings are not considered blessings in their own right but they are considered means. They are considered true blessings if they are used to achieve true blessings otherwise they may be considered a curse.

The Fourth Classification

You should know that blessings can be classified as those which are beneficial, pleasurable, and beautiful. Pleasurable blessings provide immediate gratification. Beneficial blessings are those whose benefit is realized in the Hereafter. The beautiful are the blessings which are considered good in all circumstances. Evils are also classified into harmful, reprehensible, and painful. Both blessings and evils are either total or partial. A total evil is an evil which incorporates the three characteristics. Examples of total blessings are knowledge and wisdom. Scholars consider knowledge and wisdom as beneficial, pleasurable, and beautiful. An example of total evil is ignorance. Ignorance is harmful, reprehensible, and painful. The ignorant will feel pain when he realizes that he is ignorant. His desire to acquire knowledge may be hampered by arrogance. Such person will remain forever in pain.

Partial blessings and evils are blessings or evils which incorporate one or two of the above mentioned characteristics, but not all three. Like a beneficial blessing that is painful. An example of which is amputating a severely infected finger. Some acts can combine the characteristics of being beneficial and harmful at the same time. Like a person ridding himself of heavy coins at sea for fear of drowning. The act is beneficial to the person because it may save his life and it is also harmful because it results in loss of money.

The beneficial could be classified as necessary or unnecessary. An example for a necessary beneficial blessing is the belief in God and good characters. They are necessary for achieving happiness in the Hereafter. By this we mean the two components of the belief in God and good character: knowledge and action.

An unnecessary beneficial blessing is an act which can be easily replaced by another.

The Fifth Classification

You should know that a blessing is a pleasurable thing. Human beings are unique in enjoying certain pleasures. However, they may also share some pleasures with other creatures. The pleasure that human beings enjoy can be classified into three categories: intellectual pleasures, physical pleasures that are shared with some animals, and physical pleasures that are shared with all animals.

Knowledge and wisdom are examples of intellectual pleasures. These are pleasures that are enjoyed by the heart which has the intellect. These are rare and noble pleasures. They are rare because knowledge is only appreciated by scholars and sages. Scholars and sages are rare. They are noble because they are permanent pleasures. They are everlasting in this life as well as in the Hereafter. They are not boring like other pleasurable things like food and sex.

Examples of physical pleasurable things that human beings share with some animals are the pleasures of authority, predominance and appropriation. Such desires are enjoyed by lions and tigers.

Examples of pleasurable things that human beings share with all animals are food and sex. These are most common and least noble. That is why it is shared by all creatures.

Human hearts are classified into four categories. These are

1. A heart that loves God only. It finds its comfort in increasing its knowledge of God and reflecting upon Him.
2. A heart that does not appreciate the pleasure of knowledge and the meaning of the companionship of God. It finds its pleasures only in having influence, eminence, wealth, and the other material pleasures.
3. A heart that is mostly devoted to the enjoyment of the companionship and knowledge of God and reflecting on Him; but sometimes is overcome by its human traits.
4. A heart that is mostly devoted to the enjoyment of human desires; but sometimes it turns to the enjoyment of the knowledge of God.

The first type, if it exists at all, it will be rare. The second type is the predominant type in this world. The third and fourth types do exist, although, they are rare. However, their rarity differs from one time to another. They were abundant during the times of the prophets and the messengers of God. But, as time passes by their existence dwindled.

The Sixth Classification

This is a comprehensive classification. You should know that a blessing may be sought for its own sake, while another may be sought because it is the means for the achievement of a goal. The goal is the happiness in the Hereafter. This goal has four characteristics: everlasting existence, happiness that is not tainted with grief, knowledge that is not tainted by ignorance, and wealth that after which there is no poverty. This is the true blessing. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁴⁰, *“There is no living like the living in the Hereafter.”*

As for the means, they are classified into four types: the spiritual virtues, the physical virtues, the external blessings that surround the person (like wealth and family), and the means that combine the external factors and the internal results, like success and guidance. We elaborate on these as follows:

1. The first type are the spiritual virtues which are grounded in the belief and good characters. Belief includes the science of manifestation (Mukashafah), and the science of

⁴⁰ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

daily transactions. The science of manifestation is the science dealing with the knowledge of God, His attributes, His angels, and His messengers. Good character consists of two components: suppressing the desires and controlling anger. It is called chastity and observing justice.

Thus, the spiritual virtues that brings people closer to God are four: the science of manifestation, the science of daily transactions, chastity, and justice. The perfection of the four spiritual virtues cannot be achieved unless the physical virtues (health, strength, beauty, and long life) have been achieved. Similarly, the physical virtues cannot be perfected unless the four external blessings (wealth, family, eminence, good lineage) which surround the person have been obtained. The benefit of the four surrounding blessings cannot be realized without the presence of the four blessings which are appropriate for the internal spiritual blessings. These are guidance, sound judgment, physical means of success, and support which are bestowed on the servant by God. The total sum of these blessings are sixteen.

2. The second type is the physical virtues. If you ask what are these? You should know that, it is not a secret that a person needs health, strength, beauty and long life; no chore can be completed without them. You may underestimate the importance of beauty, saying, that health, strength, and long life are sufficient to achieve tasks. However, beauty is a blessing.
3. The third type is the external blessings. If you say, why would one need wealth, family, and eminence; then you should know that these constitute a vehicle to arrive at the goal. A poor person seeking knowledge is like a soldier without a weapon. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁴¹, “*The best wealth is the wealth in the hand of a righteous man.*”

Good family and children are needed. We have mentioned their importance in the Book of Marriage. You should also know, that things that relieves your heart from the worries about the requirements of this life are good for your Hereafter, because you will be able to devote more of your time to matters of religion. Eminence provide a protection against humiliation.

The worldly favors are usually adulterated; their benefits are mixed with their evils. One should approach them cautiously. They should not be approached except by those who are sure in their ability to take the good and leave the bad. The rest of the people, I reckon, these are the majority of people, who are unable to detect risky situations, should abandon these favors.

4. The fourth type God given guidance, sound judgment, physical means of success, and support. Having the physical means for success ensures success. This provides the way

⁴¹ Narrated by Amr ibn Al-Ass (RA) and reported by Ahmed.

for the reconciliation between the person's will and destiny that God has decreed. This includes both happy and bad outcomes but normally it is used for happy outcomes only.

Guidance is indispensable for the achievement of happiness. The person's will may incline to that which provides happiness in the Hereafter, however, this is not enough because a person has to know first what are the things that lead to happiness in the Hereafter. Guidance helps the person to identify the things that lead to happiness in the Hereafter. The Quran says, "*Our Lord is He, Who gave each thing its form and then guided.*" (20: 50)

Guidance has three levels. These are

- a) The first level is the ability to discriminate between the path leading to goodness and the path leading to evil. This has been referred to by the verse, "*And We have shown him the two ways.*" (90:10) This has been provided to all human beings. Information to differentiate between the two paths have been provided by the human intellect and the messengers that God sent to guide people. Means of guidance, that God provided to all human beings, are the Sacred Books, the Messengers, and human intellect as can be seen from the verse, "*And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance.*" (41: 17)
- b) The second level of guidance is achieved by people who strive in the way of God. Those who strive in the way of God, are rewarded by more guidance from Him. "*And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to our way.*" (29: 69) "*And those who are guided – He increases them in Guidance.*" (47: 17)
- c) The third level is the light that rises in the world of prophethood and those who allied themselves to God. This level is reached through a long path of self-struggle. It provides guidance beyond that which can be achieved by human intellect (it should be known that guidance received through human intellect is the basis which defines human responsibility.) This is the absolute guidance. This is what is referred to in the verse, "*So is one whose breast God has expanded for submission and he is given a light from his Lord.*" (39: 22)

The first two levels of guidance are merely a prelude to the third level.

Sound judgment is the Divine guidance which supports the individual to achieve his goals. It strengthens the person in his pursuit of righteousness and dampens his drive in the pursuit of evil deeds; as God said, "*Indeed, We have given Abraham his sound judgment before, and We knew him well.*" (21: 51) Sound judgment is an intrinsic trait. It is happiness conducive guidance.

The physical means of success optimize the effort of the person in his pursuit of his goal.

Thus, to achieve one's goal a person needs guidance but guidance alone is not sufficient; sound judgment is also essential. In addition, to guidance and sound judgment a person

still needs the physical means that helps him achieve his goal. Guidance identifies the goal, sound judgment motivates the person to move towards the goal, and the physical means helps the person to actually achieve the goal.

The Divine support is the overall framework for the process. It sharpens the spiritual insight and strengthens the external means of success. It is referred to in the verse, *“Jesus, Son of Mary, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the Holy Spirit.”* (5: 110) It brings the person close to infallibility. It is a Divine existence that swims inside the human being; giving the person the strength to seek and perform righteous deeds and to avoid evil deeds. Support provides inherent, intangible protection against evil. This is what is meant by, *“And she certainly determined to seduce him, and he would have inclined to her had he not seen the sign of his Lord.”* (12: 24)

These are the basic blessings of God. They will only be achieved by a person on whom God bestows clear understanding, attentive hearing, insightful and humble heart, sincere teacher, sufficient wealth to satisfy the needs, and eminence that provide protection against assaults.

An Example for Showing that God’s Blessings Are Countless

You should know that we have grouped God’s blessings under sixteen main types. Physical health is one of these groups. Let us try to enumerate the blessings that lead to the achievement of this blessing. Here is an example.

One of the means for maintaining sound physical health is eating. Eating is an action. An action involves movement. For a movement to take place, it needs a body that moves. The body needs power to be able to move and a will to move. The body has to have the knowledge that it needs to move. For one to eat, he needs food. The food needs to be grown, then, it needs to be prepared. The chain never ends. This leads to the conclusion that God’s blessings are countless.

The Reason People Forsake Gratitude

You should know that the reasons people are turned away from expressing their gratitude are ignorance and heedlessness. Their ignorance and heedlessness prevented them from recognizing the blessings of God. He who does not recognize a blessing cannot express his gratitude for such blessing. In addition, when they recognize that they have been blessed by God, they only express their gratitude verbally by saying, *“Praise be to God, Thank God.”* They do not realize that the essence of gratitude is to use the blessing to achieve the goal for which it was created: to show obedience to God. However, there are those who recognize the blessings of God and they know how to express their gratitude to Him but they still do not show their gratitude. They have been prevented from showing their gratitude because they are overpowered by their lust and controlled by Satan.

Heedlessness is caused by several reasons, one of these reasons is that people think that they do not need to show gratitude for a blessing that all people have been endowed with. They only recognize a blessing if it is unique to them. They do not thank God for the air they breathe, even though they realize that without this air they will suffocate. They may show gratitude if they

were saved after having been suffocated. This is absolute ignorance because they only recognize a blessing after they have lost it. One should show gratitude for the blessings while he is able to enjoy them.

We have mentioned that people are inclined to show gratitude for the blessings which are unique to them. Let us mention three of the blessings: intellect, character, and knowledge.

Everyone of God's servants is happy with an intellect that God has endowed him with. Each one thinks that he has the best mind among people. If that is what he believes, then this warrants showing gratitude to God for this unique blessing.

Everyone sees the shortcomings of others. He thinks that he is free of these shortcomings. This should give him reason to show gratitude to God for creating him free of these shortcomings.

Everyone knows his inner most thoughts and ideas. Things that would scandalize him among people, if they become public. Why then he does not show gratitude to God for covering up his shortcomings and evil thoughts?

People should be grateful to God for the basic blessings that they have been endowed with; as can be gleaned from the hadith⁴², "*He who gets up in morning and find himself safe in his dwelling, healthy in his body, having secured his daily sustenance; it is as if he owns the whole world.*" One remedy for the ungrateful hearts is to remember that blessings which have not been appreciated will be taken away.

Third Division: Common Features that which Bring Perseverance and Gratitude Together

A Common Feature Shared by Perseverance and Gratitude

You may say that the previous discussion on the blessings of God shows that the blessings of God exist in every existing thing. This leads us to conclude that trials do not exist. What is then the need for perseverance? And if trials exist, what is the meaning for expressing gratitude for being subjected to trials? Some claim that we do express our gratitude in all cases: when we are endowed with God's blessings and when we are afflicted with a trial. How can we then express our gratitude when we are afflicted with trials? How can we be grateful for something that requires us to be perseverant? Perseverance is associated with pain while gratitude is associated with happiness, and pain is the opposite of happiness.

You should know that trials exist and blessings exist. The loss of blessings is a trial and the absence of trials is a blessing. We mentioned previously that there are two types of blessings: total and partial. Similarly, there are two types of trials: total and partial.

A total trial in the Hereafter is being distanced from God, either temporarily or forever. Disbelief, disobedience, and bad character are total trials in this life. Poverty, sickness, and fear are some of the partial trials in this life.

⁴² Narrted by Mohdan Al-Khatemi (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

Absolute gratitude should be expressed for total blessings. However, no one is required to show perseverance when afflicted by a total trial in this life. Disbelief and disobedience are total trials in this life, one should not persevere in being a disbeliever or disobedient. A disbeliever should relinquish his disbelief and a disobedient should relinquish his disobedience. A person is not commanded to persevere in facing a trial that can be resisted or averted. A person who does not drink until he suffers pain is not commanded to persevere in enduring pain, but should remove the pain by drinking. People are commanded to show perseverance in face of calamities which are beyond human control. Thus, perseverance in this life should be exercised in cases of partial trials. One can even imagine that partial trials are a blessing and therefore require an expression of gratitude, hence the combination of gratitude and perseverance.

Wealth may become a trial. A wealthy person may be killed by someone who wants his money. Similarly, health could be a trial as well. Any blessing in this life could become a source of a trial, and any trial could become a source of a blessing. A person may be better off poor and ill rather than rich and healthy because, had he been rich and healthy he would have transgressed the limits of God. God said, *“And if God had extended the provisions for His servants, they would have committed tyranny throughout the earth.”* (42: 27) *“No, indeed, man transgresses; because he sees himself self-sufficient.”* (96: 6-7)

It is easy to imagine that every blessing of the sixteen types of blessings, mentioned earlier, can be a trial as well, except belief in God and good character. As an example, knowledge is a blessing from God, it is one of the attributes of God, however, it could sometimes become a trial. Examples of this is not knowing when the individual will die. Such loss of knowledge is a blessing because if the individual knows when he will die, he will continue to live the rest of his life feeling unhappy. Similarly, not knowing the bad feelings which people may entertain about him, is a loss of knowledge but it is also a blessing. If he knew how bad people think of him, he will be saddened and will become vindictive.

Similarly, the fact that God has concealed the time of the Day of Judgment, the night of the power, the hour during which the supplications are accepted on Fridays is a blessing from God. Not knowing these times induces people to strive hard in the way of God.

You should know that any partial blessing or partial trial warrant both perseverance and gratitude. If you ask how? Then You should know that there are five reasons that should make the heedless person celebrate a partial trial when he has been afflicted. These are

1. One should remember that he could have been afflicted with a more grievous calamity.
2. One should remember that he could have been triad in his religion. ‘Umar (RA) said, *“I have never been afflicted with a trial, except that God gave me four blessings with this trial: I was not tried in my religion, I was not afflicted with a greater affliction, I was not deprived of God’s pleasure, and I had the hope in God’s reward.”*
3. One should remember that any punishment that one suffers in this life could have been delayed to the Hereafter. A punishment in this life is a temporary punishment; one can find ways to endure it, while a punishment in the Hereafter is permanent.

4. One should remember that whatever affliction befalls the person has been decreed in the Mother of the Book. There is a way one can evade such an affliction. Since, it has already happened one can feel relieved. This is a blessing.
5. One should remember that the reward for enduring the affliction is greater. Afflictions that befall people in this life provide a path to happiness in the Hereafter in two ways:
 - a. Afflictions in this life are like a bad tasting medicine. A child may feel bad when he is prevented from playing. This may be a blessing because if the child spends all his time playing he will not learn nor acquire a good character.
 - b. The most destructive sin is loving this worldly life. The most important route for salvation is to turn the heart away from the home of delusions. Enjoying the blessings of God in a continuous way without an interruption of a calamity or an affliction causes the heart to feel safe and makes it inclined to find its comfort in this life. The world becomes like a paradise for him. This will make his departure from it, at the time of death, extremely difficult. When a person is afflicted and subjected to calamities in this life, the world becomes like a prison for him. He will not find it a comfortable place. He will enjoy his departure from such a bad place. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁴³, *“The worldly life is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the disbeliever.”*

The Supremacy of Blessing over Trials

You may say that this discussion shows that trials are better than blessings in this life. Should we then ask God to afflict us with trials? I say, not at all. The Prophet (PBUH) used to seek refuge with God from the trials of this life and the trials of the Hereafter. He and the other Prophets (PBUT) used to say⁴⁴, *“Our Lord endow us with a good thing in this life and with a good thing in the Hereafter.”*

This issue is so clear that it does not need further proof or citations of texts that support it. Trials become blessings in two ways

1. Trials are a blessing compared to what could have happened with in regard to life or religion.
2. Trials are a blessing because of the expected reward.

We should then ask God to perfect His blessings on us in this life and to save us from calamities and trials. We should ask God to reward us in the Hereafter for our gratitude. God is able to grant a bigger reward for gratitude than He would grant for perseverance.

What is Better, Perseverance or Gratitude

You should know that people differed in their opinions regarding this. Some said perseverance is better and some said gratitude is better. We say that there are two ways to answer this question.

The easy approach involves paying attention to the face value of the matter and does not involve delving into the details of the essence of the matter. This is the approach which we should use to

⁴³ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

⁴⁴ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

explain things to the lay person. This approach uses what can be understood from the legal rules. This leads to the conclusion that perseverance is better than gratitude.

The second approach is used to explain the matter to the scholars. We know that each of them consists of three components: knowledge, state, and action. One should compare every two corresponding components.

When we compare the knowledge in both, we find that the knowledge for both may go back to the same root. A grateful person knows that God endowed him with two eyes, while a perseverant person knows that blindness is God given. These two pieces of knowledge are equivalent to each other. We showed that perseverance can be applied in performing an act of obedience and abstaining from an act of disobedience. In this respect, perseverance and gratitude are united. Perseverance in performing an act of obedience is the essence of showing gratitude. Gratitude is to use God's blessings in a way that fulfills the intended reason for which they were created. While, perseverance is to support the motivation from faith and cause it to stand firm against the motivation from desire. Gratitude and perseverance are two different names for the same thing. Supporting the motivation from faith to stand firm against the motivation from desire is considered perseverance. But it can also be considered an expression of gratitude because it uses the motivation from faith to accomplish the goal for which it was created.

The channels for perseverance are three: obedience, disobedience, and trials. We have discussed its rule in the cases of obedience and disobedience. Trials is the loss of a blessing. The blessing may be an essential blessing like the eyes, or a complementary blessing like an increase in the earnings over the what is needed for the necessities. A perseverant person should not complain about losing the eyes and should express his content for what God has decreed. He should not use this affliction as an excuse to commit acts of disobedience. A seeing person should be grateful to God for the blessing of eyesight. His gratitude should be expressed in using his eyesight to perform an act of obedience and he should not use it to commit an act of disobedience. Each act of these involves perseverance.

As for complementary blessings, like the need for extra money for living. Perseverance involves striving against poverty, while the gain of an excess is a blessing. One should show gratitude by spending the excess in good charitable deeds.

If you want a decisive answer, I would say that perseverance is better than gratitude. If you want more details, I say perseverance has three levels. The lowest level is for a person to feel unhappy but does not complain. The second level is to feel content. The highest level is to show gratitude for being afflicted with a trial.

Similarly, the levels of gratitude are numerous; we have mentioned its highest level. Feeling shame for being blessed by one blessing after the other is a kind of gratitude. Worrying about not being able to show sufficient gratitude is a kind of gratitude. Apologizing for not being able to offer enough gratitude is a kind of gratitude. Recognizing that it is God who endows the blessings even though the person is not deserving of such blessings is a kind of gratitude.

Book 3: The Book of Fear and Hope

Exposition of the Essence of Hope

You should know that hope is one of the stations of the travelers on the path and the states of the seekers. A station refers to a permanent and well established condition while a state refers to a transient and temporary condition. Hope has three components: a state, knowledge, and action. The state is the fruit of knowledge and the state implies action. Hope comprises these three components. If you think of something that occurred in the past, this is called remembering. If you think of something that presently exists, this is called yearning. If you think of something that is expected in the future, this is called anticipation. If you are anticipating something harmful, then, your heart will ache and this is called fear. If you are anticipating something you like, then the heart will be comforted and this comfort is called hope. Hope is the comfortable feeling that fills the heart when it is waiting for something it likes to occur.

For a desired thing to occur, its prerequisites should occur first. When most of the prerequisites have occurred then anticipating the desired thing is called hope. However, if none of the prerequisites have occurred then anticipating the thing to occur is a delusion. In this case, anticipating the occurrence of the desired thing is foolishness not hope. However, if it is not known whether the prerequisites have occurred or not, then anticipating the thing to occur is more like a wish. In all circumstances, hope and fear are only used in relation to situations which may or may not occur. Hope and fear are not used in relation to situations which will certainly occur. One cannot say, I hope for the rising of the Sun at the time of Sun rise or I fear the setting of the Sun at Sunset, because these two events are certain to occur. But one can say, I hope that rain falls and I fear it may not fall.

Those who have sound hearts know that the worldly life is the planting fields for the Hereafter. The heart is like the land, faith is like seeds, and acts of obedience are the tools that prepare the land for cultivation and bring water for its irrigation. The heedless heart that has been immersed in the pleasures of life is like a marshland in which seeds do not grow. The Day of Resurrection is the day for harvest. Everyone will harvest that which he planted. Only the seeds of faith will produce plants to be harvested. Thus, faith could not fill a malicious unethical heart.

No plant can grow in a marshland. Similarly, the hope for forgiveness. A person seeking God's forgiveness is like a farmer. A farmer who sowed healthy seeds of good quality in a good arable land, made sure that the land is well irrigated, cleaned the land from the weeds and anything that prevents the plant from growing, and sat waiting for God's grace to keep away the thunderstorms and other catastrophes that may ruin the plant; this waiting is called hope. But if he chose bad seeds, sowed them in a hard land, did not irrigate the land, did not care for his plant, and waited for the plant to grow; this waiting can only be called foolishness. If he sowed the seeds in a good arable land, however he did not have access to water to irrigate the land, but waited for the rain to come down to irrigate the land, then this is a mere wish.

Hope is only used to describe waiting for a desired thing to happen provided that all the prerequisites (which are under human control) that need to be done for the arrival of the desired thing to happen have been done. Things which are not under human control are left for the grace of God. *“And there followed them successors who inherited the Scripture while taking the commodities of this lower life and saying, ‘We will be forgiven.’”* (7:169)

God disparaged the man who owned two gardens, who said, *“I do not think this will ever perish. And I do not think the Hour will occur. And even if I should be brought back to my Lord, I will surely find better than this as a return.”* (18: 35-36) It is appropriate for an obedient person, who strives to abstain from committing sins, to expect God to perfect His blessings on him. Blessings are only perfected for those who are admitted to paradise. It is also proper for a disobedient person who repents and makes up for his past transgressions to expect to be forgiven. It is appropriate to entertain hope only after the means for the desired thing to happen have been achieved. This is why God said, *“Indeed, those who have believed and those who have emigrated and fought in the cause of God – those expect the mercy of God.”* (2: 218) Which means that these are the people who deserve to hope for God’s mercy.

The Virtue of Hope and Encouraging People to Have Hope

You should know that acting out of hope is better than acting out of fear. Because the closest person to God is the one who loves Him most. Love dominates hope. There are traditions that encourage people to entertain hope, especially at time of death. God said, *“Do not despair of God’s mercy.”* (39: 53) This verse prohibits the root of despair. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁴⁵, *“God said, ‘I am in accord with what my servant expects from Me.’”*

The Recipe for Hope and the Way to Attain a Hopeful State

You should know that this recipe is useful for one of two people. A person who has been conquered by despair, to the extent that he abandoned worshipping God; and a person who has been overwhelmed with fear, he immersed himself in performing acts of worship to the extent that it caused his family harm. These are two people who went to the extreme in two opposite directions: of heedlessness and excessive worship. These two examples of people need a recipe to bring them back to the moderate way.

A third type of person continues to perform acts of disobedience and deceives himself, thinking that God will forgive him. This person will not benefit from the recipe for hope. On the contrary, such recipe will become a poison for him. Such self-deluded person can only benefit from the recipe for fear and the means for arousing fear.

It is thus, imperative that those who take on the responsibility of counseling people to understand the ailment of each person and to administer only the remedy most effective for each ailment.

Attaining and maintaining a state of hope can be achieved through reflection and reading the verses and traditions which give rise to hope.

As for reflection, one should contemplate all the blessings that God bestowed on His servants, which we have mentioned in the Book of Gratitude. When a person reflects on such blessing, he will realize that God not only provided us with the necessities that are required for the maintenance of our daily life but also provided us with complementary means to make this life beautiful and enjoyable. One should ask, how would a Divine guidance that provided us with the means to enjoy our lives be interested in driving us to eternal destruction? Considering the

⁴⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

situations of most people in this world, we find that they enjoy a state of security and peace. God's law does not change. One can thus, expect that the situation of most people in the Hereafter will be a situation of security and peace. God is the God of this life and the Hereafter, and He is Most Forgiving and Merciful in regard to His servants. Reflecting on this will strengthen the feeling of Hope.

One should also reflect on the rationale behind Islamic laws and how it caters for the interests and benefits of people in this life. This is indeed a mercy from God.

There are countless number of verses traditions which evoke feelings of hope in the heart of the human being. God said, *"Say, 'My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is Forgiving, and Giver of Mercy.'"* (39: 53) He also said, *"Indeed, your Lord is the possessor of forgiveness for the people despite their wrongdoing."* (13: 6) Abu Jaafar Muhammad ibn Ali used to say, *"The verse which evokes most hope is the verse, 'And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied,'" (93: 5) because the Prophet (PBUH) will not be satisfied knowing that a member of his nation is in Hellfire. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁴⁶, "God has divided His mercy into one hundred parts. He kept ninety-nine parts for himself and He dispensed one parts to address the needs of people for mercy in this worldly life. This is the part that evokes mercy among people, and motivates the female horse to raise its foot for fear of stepping on its baby."* On the Day of Judgment, God will combine the hundred parts of mercy and will dispense it over all His creatures. Each parts of mercy will fill the gap between the earth and the sky.

⁴⁶ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

The Essence of Fear

You should know that fear is the pain and apprehension which a heart suffers in anticipation of the occurrence of an evil future event. Fear has three components: knowledge, state, and action. Knowledge is obtained as a result of recognizing what causes the undesired event. Knowledge of the cause of the undesired event is the main source of the agony of the heart. This agony is fear. The fear of God may arise as a result of knowing God and His attributes; and knowing that He could destroy the whole universe and no force would be able to stop him. Fearing God, may sometimes arise as a result of realizing the extent of transgressions one committed against the limits of God. Sometimes, fearing God may be the result of both.

The more a person recognizes his own shortcomings, and the more a person appreciates the Majesty of God and His independence, the more he will be God fearing. The person who knows himself and his Lord best, is the most God fearing person. God said, "*Indeed, only those who have knowledge, from among His servants, fear God.*" (35: 28) Perfect knowledge produces a majestic awe and agony of the heart. The awe and agony then spell over the whole body, the senses, and the characteristics. The agony and fear will cause skinniness and paleness of the body; fainting; and crying. It may cause the gall bladder to explode which will lead to death; it may affect the brain and destroys the intellect; or it may become strong enough to cause utter despair. The agony and fear may control the senses and forces them to perform acts of disobedience and abstain from performing acts of disobedience. It has been said that fearing God means refraining from what makes you deserving of His punishment. The effect of fear on the characteristics entails controlling the lust and spoiling the pleasures. This will cause the person to hate the desired sins, the same way a person will hate honey if he realizes that it contains poison.

Fear will burn the desires, discipline the senses, fill the heart with awe, and rid the person of arrogance and envy. The person will be busy observing his own behavior and striving to control himself. The strength of the observance and control depends on the strength of fear in the heart of the person. The least of the degrees of fear is that which makes the person refrain from the prohibited things. Abstaining from prohibited things is called piety. If the level of fear increases to the extent that the person will not only refrain from doing prohibited things but will also refrain from doing things whose permissibility is not certain, then this is called God-consciousness. God consciousness is to refrain from doing that which may be doubtful and only do the things whose permissibility you are certain of. Sincere God consciousness is attained by a person who refrains from doing that which is permissible as a precaution against doing that which is doubtful. If you add to this the sincere devotion to worship, to the extent that he does not build a house that he does not live in; he does not gather what he does not eat; he does not pay attention to a world that he knows will desert him; and does not breath a single breath except for the sake of God, then this is the sincerity in devotion. He who does this deserves to be called a sincere devotee. Sincere devotion includes God consciousness; and God consciousness includes piety; and piety include chastity. Chastity is abstinence.

Thus, piety ranks higher than chastity, God consciousness ranks higher than piety; and sincere devotion ranks higher than God consciousness.

The Degrees of Fear and its Variations between Weakness and Strength

You should know that fear is praiseworthy. However, not all fears are praiseworthy. Fear is God's whip which He uses to drive His servants to persevere in seeking knowledge and to do deeds which bring them closer to Him. Fear can be excessive, deficient, or moderate. Moderate fear is praiseworthy. Transient fear which causes one to shed tears when listening to Quranic verses or when witnessing an emotive event, and which quickly disappears after the impact has subsided, has no benefit. This is like striking a strong animal with a very thin stick that does not cause the animal any pain and therefore, is unable to force the animal to move in the desired direction. Lay people's fear is of this kind. The fear that the Gnostics experience is different. Al-Fadeel ibn Iyad said, *"If you were asked, 'Do you fear God?' Then keep silent because if you say, 'No,' you would have become a disbeliever; and if you say, 'Yes,' then you would have become a liar."*

Excessive fear that transgresses the limit of moderation and leads to despair is reprehensible, because it prevents people from acting and it may lead to sickness or insanity. The objective of fear is to act like a whip which drives people to act. A commendable action is an action which achieves the goal that it was meant to achieve. An action which does not lead to the achievement of its objective is a reprehensible action. The objective of fear is to motivate the person to be cautious, pious, and God conscious; and to induce him to strive, to perform acts of worship, to reflect, to remember God, and to perform all deeds that bring him closer to God. All these require a healthy body and a sound intellect. Anything that undermines these means is reprehensible.

Thus, fear is useless if it does not produce action, it becomes like a weak whip that does not have any effect on the movement of the animal. Fear which produces action has different ranks. The first rank is for fear which cause the person to become chaste. This will cause him to abstain from following his lust. A higher rank is awarded to fear that produces piety. The highest rank is assigned to fear which induces the person to become a sincere devotee. A sincere devotee is a person who has devoted himself inwardly and outwardly completely to God. He would have no interest in anything except God. However, a person who reaches this state should be healthy in body and sound in intellect. If such a state causes the person to lose his mind or health, then it becomes a sickness that should be remedied, if possible.

Different Types of Fear

You should know that fear is the result of the premonition that a detestable thing is about to happen. A detestable thing can be detestable in its own right or it could be detestable because it leads to a detestable consequence. A sin is detested because it leads to a punishment in the Hereafter. A sick person detests fruits that may cause him death. A person experiences fear when his mind entertains the premonition that he will face one of these two types of fear. The stations of the fearful differ according to what causes them fear.

Gnostics fear death before repenting; they fear recanting on repentance; they fear breaking one's covenant; they fear straying away from the straight path; they fear becoming slaves to their

desires; they fear committing the sins of backbiting, treachery, or deception; and they fear of being scandalized before death.

Each one of these fears has a benefit. The benefit is to avoid the things that cause these fears. Those who are afraid that they become slaves to a specific habit, they should stay away from such habit. Those who fear the entertainment of evil thoughts should cleanse their heart of these evil thoughts, and so on.

Those who fear can be divided into those who fear to sin and disobey and those who fear God having known His Majesty and attributes which no doubt deserves fear and awe. This latter fear is higher in rank. Fear of sinning is the fear of the righteous while fear of God is the fear of those who believe in the oneness of God and those who are sincere devotees. This is the fruits of knowing God. Those who truly know God and His attributes, know that God deserves to be feared, even without transgressing His limits. Indeed, if a sinner truly knew God, he would have feared Him and did not fear being a sinner. A person who knows God and His attributes knows that it is the eternal decree of God that makes a disobedient person to sin and makes an obedient person to do good deeds. Thus, it is imperative for any sane person to fear God who decrees what He wills.

The second group of those who fear are those who envision in their minds the detestable things, like the pangs of death, the questioning by the two angels in the grave, or the fear of standing in front of God on the Day of Judgement. All these are detestable things which warrant fear. The fear of highest rank is the fear from being distanced from God. This the fear that the Gnostics experience. The lesser ranks of fear are the fears experienced by the doers, the righteous, the ascetics, and the rest of the worlds.

The Virtues of Fear

You should know that there are two ways to discover the virtues of fear: meditation and reflection; and verses and traditions. Reflection shows that the virtue of anything is measured by its ability to lead to the joy of meeting God in the Hereafter. It is clear that the joy of meeting God in the Hereafter is only achieved through gaining His love and companionship in the worldly life. His love can only be attained through knowing Him and knowing God can only be achieved through continuous reflection. To be able to engage in continuous reflection one has to disengage his heart completely from the love of this worldly life. To disengage the heart one has to abandon the pleasures of this world, and one cannot abandon the pleasures unless one is able to suppress his desires. Nothing suppresses desires more than the fire of fear. Fear is the fire that burns desires. The virtue of fear is measured by its ability to subdue desires.

The verses and traditions speaking about the virtues of fear are numerous. God said, “*Guidance and mercy for those who are fearful of their Lord.*” (7: 154). “*God being pleased with them and they with Him. That is for whoever has feared his Lord.*” (98: 8) “*But for he who has feared the position of his Lord are two gardens.*” (55: 46)

The Prophet (PBUH) said⁴⁷, “*A man who weeps for fear of God will not be admitted to Hellfire.*”

⁴⁷ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

Which is Better, Prevalence of Fear or Prevalence of Hope?

The question of which is better fear or hope, is an irrational question. It is like asking which is better bread or water. The answer to this later question is bread is better for hungry person but water is better for a thirsty person. A person who is both hungry and thirsty will have to consider which need he desires to fulfil first. If his hunger is more pressing than his thirst, then bread is better for him; but if his thirst is more pressing than his hunger, then water is better for him. If his feelings for hunger and thirst are the same, then bread and water are also equal for him. The value of something which is used to achieve a certain goal is measured by the ability of the thing in achieving that goal. Hope and fear are two remedies that are used to heal the hearts. Their value to the person depends on the malaise that needs to be healed. If the dominant malaise of the heart is the false sense of security from the wrath of God, then the fear is the preferred remedy. Similarly, fear is better for a sinner. However, if the dominant malaise of the heart is the despair of God's mercy, then hope is the preferred remedy. For things which are not valuable in themselves, but their value lies in the achievement of specific goals, it is better to use the word "more beneficial" rather than the word "better" when comparing one thing to another.

In summary, we say that fear is more beneficial for most people because most people are sinners. A balance between hope and fear is more beneficial for a pious person who abandoned hidden as well as obvious sins. That is what it said, *"If the hope and fear of a believer were measured, they would balance each other."* 'Umar (RA) said, *"I fear if all people were to be admitted to paradise except for one person, I would be that person; and I hope if all people were to be admitted to Hellfire except for one person, I would be that person."*

The Recipe that can be used to Achieve a State of Fear

Fear occurs in two different ways, one of them higher than the other. To illustrate this let us use the following example: the fear that a father experiences and the fear that a young child experiences when facing a lion or a serpent. A child may not experience fear when encountering a serpent or a lion, being unaware of the danger they pose. He may even try to approach the serpent or the lion. However, when he detects signs of fear from his father and seeing his father fleeing away from the beast, he will become fearful and he will follow his father, because he trusts his father and he knows that his father's fear must have been for a reason. The father's fear is fear based on knowledge, while the child's fear is an imitation of his father's fear.

You should then know, that there are two stations for the fear of God. One is to fear His punishment and the second is to fear God in His own right. The scholars and the tender hearted recognize the attributes of God, fear God because He is God and they know that He deserves to be feared. Those are the people who understand the secrets of the verses, *"God warns you of Himself,"* (3: 28) and *"Be conscious of God, as He rightly deserves to be conscious of."* (3: 102)

So, the first of the two stations of fearing God is the fear of God that most people experience. This fear is acquired as a consequence of the belief in the fact that people who obey God in this life will be rewarded by admission to paradise while people who disobey Him will be punished by ending up in Hellfire. Causes of disobedience are heedlessness and weak faith. Heedlessness is remedied by the continuous reminder, admonishing, and the continuous reflection on the

horrific scenes of the Day of Judgment and the various torments which the sinners will be subjected to.

The second station, the higher one, is the fear of God because He is God. The fear that the servant will be separated and distanced from God. This is the kind of fear that the scholars experience. God said, *“Indeed, the scholars from among His servants are the ones who fear God.”* (35: 28) Some of the lay people may also experience such kind of fear. But, their fear will emanate from imitation, just like the child who imitates his father’s actions.

Therefore, those who reach the top of knowledge and recognize God will, by necessity, fear God. Those do not need a recipe for attaining fear; because he who knows God, knows that God does what He wills without any concern and perfects what He wants without any fear. God brought the angels nearer to Him without having done anything that deserves this honor; and He banished Iblis without having committed a previous sin. God’s power is described in His saying, *“Those are in paradise and those are in Hellfire, without a concern on My part.”* If you think that God punishes only the sinners and rewards only the good doers, then you should consider the fact that He did not provide the obedient with the means to obey so that he obeys whether he likes or not; and He did not provide the sinner with the means to sin so that he sins whether he likes it or not. Sin is imperative once heedlessness, the desire, and the ability to satisfy the desire were provided. There is a rationale behind this. The elite of the Gnostics who were given the light of guidance recognize this rationale. The rest of the believers should believe in it when they hear it.

The Quran from beginning to end is full of terrifying verses for those who read it carefully. It is enough to read one verse, *“I am forgiving to whoever repents, believes, does good deeds, and then becomes guided.”* (20: 82). He made forgiveness contingent upon four conditions: repentance, belief, doing good deeds, and guidance. Any one of these conditions is in itself a formidable task. Even more scary is the verse, *“But as for the one who had repented, believed, and done good deeds, perhaps he will be among the successful;”* (28: 67) and, *“We will attend to you, prominent beings;”* (55: 31) and *“Then, did they feel secure against God’s scheme? No one feels secure against God’s scheme except the losing people.”* (7: 99)

The risk of a bad ending and the fear that one will not be steadfast at the time of death increases the heat of fear. How can one feel secure against the change of heart, when we know that the heart of a believer can be changed anytime by God. The state of the heart changes more easily than the turning of boiling water in a pot. God said, *“Indeed, no one should feel safe from the punishment of their Lord.”* (70: 28)

Sahl used to say, *“The seeker of knowledge is concerned about being tested by sin, while the knowledgeable scholar is concerned about being tested with disbelief.”*

There are signs that precedes a bad ending. These include being involved in an unsubstantiated religious innovation, hypocrisy, arrogance, and other reprehensible attributes. Many companions of the prophet were extremely fearful of becoming hypocrites. Al Hassan said, *“Knowing that I am free of hypocrisy, is better than owning the whole world.”* Hypocrisy in their understanding was not the kind of hypocrisy which negates the faith but it is the hypocrisy that is mixed with the faith, so the person becomes a hypocrite Muslim. It has various signs. The Prophet (PBUH)

said, *“There four characteristics which define a true hypocrite - even though he may be praying, fasting, and claiming that he is a Muslim. He lies when he speaks, he breaks his promise, he betrays the trust, and he exceeds all limits when he clashes with others. If a person has one of them, then he has one of the characteristics of hypocrisy.”*

Now, you have known that the fear of the Gnostics is caused by their concern about the bad ending, and what precedes it of false religious innovations, acts of disobedience, and hypocrisy. Is there a human being who can be free of all of these? Only a hypocrite would think that he is free of all these characteristics. It was said, *“He who thinks that he is safe from hypocrisy, is a hypocrite.”*

What does a Bad Ending Mean?

You should know that bad endings have two degrees. One is more grievous than the other. The calamitous degree occurs, at time of death, when the heart is overwhelmed by doubt or disbelief. The soul is taken away in a state of doubt or disbelief. This will establish an eternal barrier between the person and God. Consequently, the person will be distanced from God forever and will suffer eternal damnation.

The lesser degree occurs, at the time of death, when the heart is overwhelmed with the love of one of the pleasures of the worldly life. The heart will be satiated with this love and there would be no room in the heart for any other feeling. This will cause the heart to be fully attached to the worldly life. Consequently, a barrier between the servant and God will be established. When the barrier is established, the servant will suffer the torment. Hellfire does not burn any other than those who are separated from God by a barrier.

If you ask about the reasons that cause a bad ending, then you should know that they are numerous. However, we can mention them in general. Ending life in a state of doubt or disbelief is caused by one of two reasons. One reason can be envisaged in the case of a person who is perfectly pious, ascetic, and a doer of good. An example of this is a person who is ascetic but has made false religious innovations. His ending is extremely hazardous, even though he may have done many good deeds. What I mean by making false religious innovations is to adopt and advocate wrong beliefs about the essence, attributes, and actions of God. He may discover, during the last minutes while he is on his death bed suffering the agony of death, that he was wrong in adopting these beliefs. This may happen because it is one of the characteristics of death that secrets are discovered. However, if his soul was taken before he had a chance to correct his wrong beliefs and to become steadfast in the true fundamentals of faith, then his ending will be an evil ending. These are the people referred to in the verses, *“And there will appear to them from God that which they had not taken into account,”* (39: 47) and *“Shall we inform you of the greatest losers as to their deeds? Those whose effort in the worldly life has been lost, while they think that they are doing good deeds.”* (18: 103-104)

Anyone adopts false beliefs about the essence of God, His attributes, or His actions - whether he arrived at these beliefs using his own intellect or imitating someone else, he will be in this

hazardous condition. Asceticism and righteousness are not sufficient to repel this danger. The only way to salvation is to adopt the true and correct beliefs.

The second reason is having a weak faith to start with, coupled with the capitulation of the heart to the love of the pleasures of the worldly life. Having a weak faith will weaken the person's love for God and will strengthen the love for the world. There will be no place in the heart for the love for God, except may be in a superficial way which does not have any effect in controlling the desires of the self or abandoning the way of Satan. Thus, the person will become more indulgent in the pleasures of life. This will cause the heart to become dark and hard. This darkness will overshadow the light of the weak faith, eventually the heart will be covered by a layer of rust. As death approaches, and the time of departure from life becomes near, his love for the worldly life will increase. Realizing that it is God who decreed his death and hating that decree, he may entertain in his mind a hate for God instead of loving Him. If it happened that his soul was taken at this moment, then his ending will be an evil ending; and he will be destined to eternal damnation. A person who finds that the love for God is greater in his heart than the love for the worldly life, will be safe from the danger even though he may still have some love for the worldly life in his heart.

The second degree of evil ending is less in its gravity and consequence than the first degree evil ending mentioned above. A person whose life ends in this state is not necessarily destined to eternal damnation. This degree also has two reasons. These are

1. Long history of acts of disobedience, even though his faith may be strong.
2. Weak faith even though he may have not committed a great deal of acts of disobedience.

At the time of death, the person is inclined to remember the things that he used to do during his life. If the person has done a great deal of good deeds, then most probably he will be remembering these righteous acts. The person who used habitually to commit acts of disobedience, will also remember these acts. If his soul is taken while he is enjoying the remembrance of one of the pleasures of the worldly life, his state will be a state of disobedience and a barrier will be established between him and God. The person who dies remembering the righteous deeds which he used to do is safer in this respect. A person who did not commit sins is even safer in this respect.

The person who wants his thoughts to remain in the area of righteous deeds and do not wander to the area of sins and evil deeds at the time of death must strive during his life to control his desires and should take recourse to abstinence both physically and by the heart. This will prepare him for the remembrance of righteous deeds at the time death.

It is therefore important to prepare for the time of death early and not to procrastinate. One should continue to remember God, cleanse his heart from the love for the worldly life, abandon the sins of the senses and the heart, and stay away from observing sinful scenes and their people. You should know that this will not be easy to do unless you remain content with the necessities of life. The necessities of life are what you require to satisfy the bare necessities of food, clothes, and housing. Anything beyond this is luxury. Eating should be looked at as a necessary function, one has to do it to survive. Eating is a necessary function for the body just like defecating is a

necessary function for the body. Eating should not be more important for you than defecated, because if your concern is to get food into your stomach, what you get out of your stomach decides your value.

If you satisfy your necessary bodily needs, like eating and defecating, with the intention that you are able to perform the rituals of worship, then you should satisfy certain criteria regarding your eating habits. These criteria are related to when you eat, how much you eat, and what you eat. These are

1. One should be satisfied with at least one daily meal and fast regularly.
2. One should only fill the third of the stomach.
3. One should not seek delicious food, but should eat whatever he can find.

Examples of the State of Fear of Prophets and Angels

‘Ayisha (RA) said⁴⁸, “*The Prophet (PBUH) used to dread God’s punishment whenever, the wind blew.*” God said, “*And Moses fell unconscious.*” (7: 143)

The Prophet (PBUH) asked⁴⁹ Gabriel (PBUH), “*How come I never saw Michael laughing?*” Gabriel (PBUH) said, “*Michael never laughed since the fire was created.*”

Examples of the State of Fear of the Companions, the Second Generation, and the Righteous

It has been narrated that Abu Bakr (RA) said to a bird, “*I wish I were like you bird, I wish I were not created a human being.*” Abu Dhar (RA), “*I wish I were a tree that can be pruned.*” It is narrated that ‘Umar (RA) used to faint whenever he heard a verse of the Quran being recited. ‘Umar (RA) used to weep often to the extent that the tears left marks on his face. ‘Umar (RA) said, “*Whoever fears God, will never take revenge and whoever remained conscious of God, will never do whatever he desires.*” ‘Umar (RA) recited surat Al-Takweer, once, when he reached the verse, “*And when the pages are spread,*” he fainted. One day he listened to someone reciting surat Al-Tur. When he heard the verse, “*Indeed, the torment of your Lord will occur,*” he became sick. His sickness made him stay in bed for a month.

The face of Al-Hassan used to become extremely pale whenever he made wudu. When he was asked about it, he said, “*Do you realize in front of whom, I am preparing myself to stand up.*”

‘Umar ibn Abdel Aziz said, “*Heedlessness is a blessing of God, it saves people from dying of the fear of God.*”

⁴⁸ Narrated by Ayisha (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

⁴⁹ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Ahmed and Ibn Abi Dunia

Book 4: The Book of Poverty and Asceticism

Part 1: Poverty

Love of the worldly life is the crown of sins and evil; its hate is the mother of all acts of obedience and the foundation for acts that brings people closer to God. We have elucidated its evils explained why one should hate it in the Quarter of Annihilators. In this book we elucidate the virtues of hating the worldly life and becoming ascetic. This the climax of salvation. There is no salvation without abandoning and distancing oneself from the worldly life. Deserting the worldly life can happen in one of two ways. The first, is when the worldly life becomes inaccessible to the servant. This is called poverty. The second, is when the servant becomes detached from it. This is called asceticism.

The Essence of Poverty and the Different of States of the Poor

You should know that poverty is that you do not own something you need. We do not call losing an amount of money that is not needed, poverty. If you understand this meaning, then you will realize that everyone in existence, except God, is poor; because everyone needs the grace of God to continue in its existence. A person whose existence does not depend on anything else is enjoying absolute independence. Only God has this status, *“God is free of need and you are the needy.”* (47: 38) This is the abstract meaning of poverty. Here we are going to discuss poverty in the sense of the need for money. We say that anyone who does not own money is poor as long as he is need of this money. There are five states for poverty.

1. The First State. This is the highest state. A person in this state hates to own wealth and he turns away from owning it for fear of its harm and distraction. This is the state of asceticism; and this person is an ascetic person.
2. The Second State. A person in this state neither shows joy nor does he show dislike for owning wealth. He is in a state of indifference regarding owning wealth. This person is a content person.
3. The Third State. A person in this state prefers to own rather than not to own wealth. He desires wealth. However, his desire to own wealth is not strong enough to motivate him to spend an effort to earn money. If he is happy to accept wealth and enjoy it if it comes without effort on his part. This person is a satisfied person.
4. The Fourth State. A person in this state does not seek wealth because he is unable to seek it. However, he is interested in seeking wealth even if he has to work for it. This person is an eager person.
5. The Fifth State. This is the case of a person who lost money which he needs for his necessities. Examples of this is a person who is hungry because he cannot afford bread, or a naked person who cannot afford clothes. This is a destitute person.

These are five states for poverty. The highest is asceticism. Asceticism may be coupled with destitution, this results in extreme asceticism as will be explained later. There is still another state which is even higher. This is a state of a person who does not care about wealth, one way or the other. He does not experience joy when he gets it, nor does he experience sadness when he does not have it. An example of people in this state is ‘Aiysha (RA). One day she received a hundred thousand Dirham from the state, she gave it all away to the poor. Her servant said, *“You could have saved some money to buy food for the day.”* ‘Aiysha’s (RA)said, *“I would have, had you reminded me.”* A person in this state is a person who is free of want. It is no concern for him

whether he has or do not have money. The term, “free of want,” is different in this case from the same term when it is used to describe God, whose freedom of want is absolute. It is better to call the person in this state as self-sufficient to keep the term “free of want” exclusively to describe God, the supreme one who is free of want. It is also different in its meaning when it is used to describe an extremely rich person. A person who loves wealth is a poor person in a sense, since he is always in need to own wealth. He is self-sufficient in the sense that he has enough money to satisfy his needs, but he still needs wealth in his hands.

You should know that asceticism is a degree of perfection for the righteous. Some of the righteous are brought closer to God. However, one should note that for those brought closer to God asceticism may be considered a shortcoming, because what may be considered good deeds for the righteous may be considered shortcomings for those who are brought closer to God.

Both those who hate or desire the worldly life are preoccupied by it. Preoccupation with anything other than God creates a barrier between the servant and his Lord. A person who is preoccupied by himself and his desires is veiled from God. Perfection entails disallowing the heart to be distracted away from the beloved by the love or hate of something else. The heart cannot harbor two loves at the same time. Similarly, the heart cannot harbor love for one thing and hate for another at the same time. A person who is preoccupied by the hate of the worldly life is heedless of God just like the one who is preoccupied by its love. However, the one who is preoccupied by the love of the worldly life is going on a path that leads away from God; while, hopefully, the one who is preoccupied by the hate of the worldly life is going on a path that brings him closer to God. It is hoped that the latter’s heedlessness eventually dissipates and becomes replaced with a state of witnessing.

You should not think that hating the worldly life is an objective in itself. One should hate the worldly life because it is a barrier between him and God. One cannot become closer to God without removing this barrier.

It is thus clear, that perfect asceticism is achieved when the person has no desire regarding the presence or absence of the pleasures of the worldly life. The perfection of the states of contentment, satisfaction, and eagerness is achieved when the person desires the absence of the pleasures of the worldly life. However, this constitutes imperfection a person in the state of the self-sufficiency.

Perfection regarding wealth is achieved when wealth and water enjoy the same status. The presence of abundance of water does not hurt you. Similarly, one should be bothered by the lack of water, if he has enough to satisfy his needs. One should not preoccupy oneself by fleeing nor hating abundant water. One should take from it the amount that satisfies his needs, and the needs of those around him. He should not keep it from those who needs it. One should deal with wealth in the same way.

If you ask, “Why did the prophets and the righteous people flee away from wealth?” I say, they also ran from abundant water. They only drank enough to satisfy their thirst. They never stored it in bottles. They left the water in the rivers and wells for those who need it.

The Prophet (PBUH), Abu Bakr (RA), and ‘Umar (RA) received great wealth. They did not shy away from it but they dispensed of the money appropriately. They treated money like water. Those who shy away from wealth, because they fear the dangerous consequence of owning wealth, are weak. It is appropriate for them to hate wealth and to run away from owning it. This is perfection. Most people are like that but not the prophets and the righteous. However, a strong man who does not fear the dangerous consequences of owning money, may shy away from money to become a role model for the weak to follow.

In summary, there are six ranks. The highest is the self-sufficient. It is followed by the ascetic, then the content, then the satisfied, and then the eager. The destitute may also be ascetic, content, and satisfied. However, the term “poor” is used to describe one of the five: the ascetic, the content, the satisfied, the eager, and the destitute. The self-sufficient is not considered poor. He can only be called needy because he is in need of God in all his affairs.

The Virtue of Poverty in General

There are a number of Quranic verses which praise the poor, *“For the poor emigrants who were expelled from their homes and their properties, seeking bounty from God and His approval and supporting God and His Messenger. Those are the truthful,”* (59: 8) *“Charity is for the poor who have been restricted for the cause of God, unable to move in the Land.”* (2: 273) The last verse is meant to praise the poor. The verse even described them as poor before using the other characteristics. This indicates clearly that poverty is praised.

The Prophet (PBUH) said⁵⁰, *“The poor people of my nation will enter paradise before the rich by 500 years.”* He (PBUH) also said⁵¹, *“Should I tell you about the kings of the people of paradise?”* The companions (RA) said, *“Yes.”* He (PBUH) said, *“Every weak, humiliated person, covered with dust, having a disheveled hair. Nobody cares about him. However, if he asks God, God will respond favorably to his request.”*

Abu Al-Dardaa (RA) said, *“The person who owns two Dirhams will be subjected to a more severe reckoning than that to which a person who owns only one Dirham will be subjected.”* ‘Umar (RA) gave Saeed ibn Amer (RA) a sum of a thousand dinars. Saeed (RA) went home showing great sadness. He divided the money in lumps and gave it all to the poor. Then he prayed and he was weeping while he was praying. When his wife exclaimed at what he was doing, he told her, I heard the Prophet (PBUH) saying, *“The poor people of my nation will enter paradise before the rich by 500 years.”*

Some wise people said, *“We pity the son of Adam. He is fearful to be poor. If he became as fearful to be thrown in Hellfire, he would be saved. If he desired to enter paradise as much as he desires to be rich, he would get both. If he is fearful of God in secret as well as in the open, he would become happy in this life as well as in the Hereafter.”* Luqman said to his son, *“Do not despise a man for his cheap clothes, both of you worship the same God.”* Yahya ibn Moadh said, *“To love the poor is one of the characteristics of the messengers. To favor them for your*

⁵⁰ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi.

⁵¹ Narrated by Harithah Ibn Wahab (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

company is one of the characteristics of the righteous. Fleeing their company is one of the signs of hypocrisy.”

The Merits of Particular Kinds of Poor People

The Prophet (PBUH) said⁵², *“Blessed he who has been guided to Islam, and was content to have barely enough subsistence.”* The Prophet (PBUH) also said⁵³, *“God, make the subsistence of the family of Muhammad, the bare minimum.”*

There are many traditions narrated about contentment and satisfaction. ‘Umar (RA) said, *“Indeed, those who are greedy will always be needy. Those who are not interested in what others have are, indeed, rich.”* Ibn Masoud (RA) said, *“An angel at the throne of God, calls on every day. He says, ‘Son of Adam a little that suffices you is better than abundance that causes you to transgress.’”* A wise man said that wealth is to wish for little and be content with what suffices you. Abu Dharr (RA) was sitting with a group of people. His wife came to him, she said, *“You are sitting here, and we have nothing at home to eat.”* He said, *“We are facing an obstinate obstacle; only those who have a light burden will be able to pass through it.”* She was happy with his answer.

The Excellence of Poverty over Wealth

You should know that people are divided regarding this issue. Al-Junaid, Al-Khawas, and many others opted to prefer poverty over wealth. While, Ibn ‘Ataa said, *“The wealthy person who shows gratitude and fulfills his obligations is better than a poor person who perseveres.”*

We need to deal with this issue in more detail. It seems that doubt can only occur in two cases. The first case, is who is better: a poor person who is perseverant, and is not keen on gaining more wealth, but he is content and satisfied with what he owns; or a wealthy person who is not stingy and he spends his wealth in charitable causes.

One might think that the wealthy person is better than the poor person, because they are equal in their lack of stinginess. In addition, the wealthy person is spending his money on charitable causes. We think that this is the rationale behind Ibn ‘Ataa’s opinion. However, the wealthy person who is enjoying his wealth, even though it is permissible, cannot be better than the perseverant poor. This is supported by a tradition. Poor people went to the Prophet (PBUH) and complained that the wealthy people are getting more rewards because they spend more in the way of God. The Prophet (PBUH) taught them words to use in singing the praise of God (tasbeeh.) However, the wealthy people learnt these words and started to use them in praising God as well. So, the poor went back to the Prophet (PBUH) complaining that the wealthy people are doing the same. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“This is the bounty of God; He bestows it on whomever He wishes.”* Ibn ‘Ataa used this tradition to support his opinion. In addition, he said that the free of want is one of God’s attributes, it must then be better.

⁵² Narrated by Fudallah ibn Ubaid Al-Ansari (RA) and reported by Muslim

⁵³ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim.

However, the tradition can be explained in a different way. The bounty of God mentioned in the tradition could be a reference to the *tasbeeh* performed by the poor and that God will give them a better reward than the reward He will give to the wealthy for the same deed.

The second reasoning that he used, was that the free of want is one of God's attributes, therefore, it must be better. This was addressed by scholars, who asked, "*Did God become free of want on the basis of acquiring material means?*" He could not answer. Other scholars argued that arrogance is one of the attributes of God, so by the same token, it should be better than humility. This indicates that poverty is better because the attributes of the servants of God like fear and hope are better for human beings. They should not try to assume the attributes of God.

In general, one should remember that the worldly life should not be renounced for its own sake but it is renounced because it constitutes a barrier between the servant and God. Similarly, poverty is not sought for its own sake but because it removes the barrier between the servant and God. Many wealthy people were not barred from God on account of their wealth. Many poor people were distracted away from God by their poverty. The main objective of the human being on this earth is the love of God and seeking His nearness. Both poverty and wealth could be obstacles that bar the servant from coming close to God. The love for the pleasures of this life is the fundamental obstacle that distract people from loving God. The love of the world and the love God cannot be combined in the same heart.

Both he who loves the worldly life and he who hates it can be preoccupied by it. A person who loves something will be preoccupied by it whether he has it or not. The preoccupation may be more in the case he does not have it, or it may be more when he has it. The worldly life is the beloved of the heedless. Those who do not have it are busy trying to get it, and those who have it are busy trying to enjoy it and not to lose it. If you consider which is more dangerous, I say, the poor is safer, since the tests that one is subjected to are more dangerous for the one who owns wealth. The companions said, "*We persevered when we were tested with the lack of wealth; but we did not persevere when we were tested with the abundance of wealth.*" This is a natural human trait. Some are excepted but they rarely exist. The laws of Islam are designed to address normal people and they are not designed to deal with the exception, hence owning wealth is disparaged while poverty is praised. Jesus (PBUH) said, "*Do not look at the wealth of the those who are interested in this worldly life, because the glitter of their wealth overshadows the light of your faith.*"

The excellence of the poor or the rich is based on the degree of the attachment of each to wealth. Their rank would be the same if their attachment to wealth is the same. However, this could be misleading. The rich may think that he has no attachment to wealth, while the love of wealth is buried deep in his heart. He may not be aware of this love, however, he will become aware when he loses wealth. He should test himself by dispensing of his wealth by giving it to the poor. If he discovers that his heart could not bear giving his wealth away, then he should know that he was deluded in his thinking. This is the situation that most of the rich are in, except the prophets and the righteous. Since, this is impossible or rare, we should then state the general rule that poverty is more beneficial and it is better for all people.

Al-Dahak said, *“It is better for a man to persevere and ask God to reward him for his perseverance, when he is unable to buy something that he desires, than to spend a thousand Dinar for the sake of God.”* A poor man complained of having a big family and little money and asked Bisher Ibn Al-Hareth to pray for him. Bisher said, *“When your family says, ‘We do not have flour nor bread,’ then you pray for me because your prayer will be better than my prayer.”* He also used to say, *“The example of a rich man worshipping God is like a garden established on rubbish, and the example of poor man worshipping God is like a diamond necklace in the neck of a beautiful woman.”*

How can one doubt the excellence of poverty over wealth, when the best course for a rich man is to earn permissible living and to spend in charity; and that would only make his reckoning on the Day of Judgment take longer. Sufian said, *“The poor chose three things: the comfort of the soul, the detachment of the heart from worldly pleasures, and the light reckoning. The rich chose three things: toil of the soul, engagement for the heart, and tough reckoning.”*

In summary, a person who does not care whether he has wealth or not, can be described as someone free of want in a way that approaches God attribute of being free of want. In this sense it is a virtue. However, being described as one who is free want because one has wealth is not considered a virtue.

The second case, is who is better: a poor person or a wealthy person when both are frugal.

Let us consider a person who has no money. He is eager to earn money, hence he strives hard to earn money, and then, becomes wealthy. This person went through two situations, from lack of wealth to becoming wealthy. Which of these situations is better for him? We should consider his situation. If he is seeking to earn money to address his essential needs and to be able to devote his time for the fulfillment of his religious duties, then having money is better for him. Poverty will drive him to earn his living and a person busy earning a living has no time for reflections and the remembrance of God.

If he is seeking more than what satisfies his essential needs or his intention was not to use the money as a tool to help him fulfill his religious duties, then poverty is better for him. This is because both the rich and the poor are similar in that the two of them are eager to make money. They do not intend to use the money to help them fulfill their religious duties, and they will not be prone to commit a sin: the rich because of his wealth, and the poor because of his poverty. However, they differ in that the rich will be happy that he owns wealth, which will strengthen the love of the worldly life in his heart; while the destitute poor will hate the worldly life and it will become like a prison for him, a prison that he looks forward to free himself from.

The Etiquette for the Behavior of the Poor

You should know that there are certain rules that should be observed by a poor person. These rules govern the inner-self as well as the outer physical behavior, the way he mixes with people, and the deeds he should perform.

As far as his inner-self behavior, he should not harbor any hatred for what God has inflicted upon him of poverty. He may hate poverty, but he should not hate God’s act. It is like hating being

treated by Arabic Cupping, because it is painful; but not hating the action or the person who is performing it. This is the least one can do. Not doing this is prohibited and it frustrates the reward that God has decreed for poverty. A higher rank is attained by being content with his condition. A higher rank is attained by he who desires and enjoys being poor, because he recognizes the dangers of wealth. He should have the inner feeling of trusting God completely, being secure in his belief that God will provide him with the necessities. He should dislike to get any more provisions that needed to address his bare necessities. Ali (RA) said, “*God punishes by poverty and rewards by poverty.*” The signs that a person is being rewarded by poverty are the improvement in his manners, the obedience of the commands of his Lord, the lack of complaints for being poor, and showing gratitude to God for his condition. The signs that it is a punishment are bad manners, disobedience to God, excessive complaints about his condition, and ingratitude.

The external physical behavior includes showing chastity and perseverance, hiding his suffering and poverty, and hiding that he is hiding his poverty. God said, “*An ignorant person would think that they are self-sufficient because of their self-restraint.*” (2: 273) Sufian said, “*The best of deeds is perseverance when affliction falls.*” And another scholar said, “*Hiding being poor is one of the treasures of righteousness.*”

As far as his behavior is concerned, he should not humble himself to a rich man on account of his wealth. On the contrary he should act proudly when dealing with wealthy people. Ali (RA) said, “*How beautiful for a wealthy man to humble himself to a poor man, seeking God’s reward.*” He should not seek mixing with wealthy people nor seek their companionship. These are the early symptoms of coveting. Al-Thawri said, “*You should know that a poor person who seeks the companionship of the rich is a hypocrite and a poor person who seeks the companionship of people in authority is a thief.*”

As far as his deeds are concerned, he should not lethargic in performing acts of worship because of his poverty. He should spend in charity; whatever little extra money he would have. The little money he spends in charity may be better than the large sums of money a rich man may spend.

He should not save any money. Whatever money he has left, after satisfying his needs, he should give it away in charity. There are three ranks for those who save.

One should only save enough to satisfy his needs for a full day (a day and a night) . This is the rank of the sincere truthful people.

One should save enough to satisfy his needs for forty days. If he saves enough to satisfy his needs for a time longer than forty days, then he is considered to be in the category of people having long hope. This is understood from the fact that God commanded Moses (PBUH) to come for a meeting with God in forty days. It is understood from this that we are allowed to plan for things in our life within forty days. This is the rank of the God conscious.

One should save enough money to satisfy his needs for a period of one year. This is the rank of the righteous. This is the maximum length of time allowed for saving.

People who save enough to satisfy their needs beyond these periods are lay people.

Etiquette for Accepting Donations Given Without Asking for them

There are three issues that should be considered by a poor person regarding donations given to him. These are the money he receives, the objective of the donor, and his own intention.

The Donation (Gift)

A poor person should make sure that the donation he is receiving is permissible. No doubts should taint its permissibility. If he is doubtful, then he should avoid accepting it.

The Objective of the Donor

The donor may have different objectives. He may want to please the heart of the poor and to seek his love; this donation can be considered a gift. There is no harm in accepting a gift, because accepting the gift is a Prophetic tradition⁵⁴. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) used to accept the gift but did not eat charity. A gift should be accepted as long as it is not followed by reminding the person who is receiving it that it is a favor from the donor. The Prophet⁵⁵ (PBUH) accepted gifts from some and rejected gifts from others. ‘Umar (RA) said, *“If you are given money without asking for it or hoping to get it, then take it.”*

The donor may be seeking God’s reward. This implies that the donation is a charity or poor-dues. In this case the recipient should consider his own situation; does he deserve the poor dues? If he has doubts, then taking it is doubtful. If the donor wants to give him charity because of his religious demeanor, then he should consider his inner-self. If he was committing a sin discretely and he knows that had the donor known about his sin, he would not have given him charity, then it is not permissible to take this money.

The donor may have wanted to be known or to be seen as a person who is giving money. This can also be combined with the other objectives. The recipient should not accept this money because in accepting the money he provides support for the donor’s corrupt objective.

The Intention of the Recipient

The recipient should consider whether he is in need of this money to satisfy a necessity or he can make do without it. If the recipient has real need for the money and the objectives of the giver are sound, then it is better for him to take the money. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁵⁶ to ‘Umar (RA), *“If you are given money without having asked for it or hoping to get it, then take it.”* Some scholars said, *“Whoever was given and did not accept, will ask and will not be given.”* Serry Al-Saqty once gave Ahmed something, Ahmed refused to take it. Serry said to Ahmed, *“Beware of refusing something given to you.”* Ahmed said, *“I only refused because I have enough provision for a month. Keep what you want to give me with you till the end of the month, when I run out of provision, I will take it from you.”*

If he was given money that he does not need, then there are two cases. If he is used to look after other poor people, then he can take the money and use it in charitable spending. But if he only wants the money for his own needs and he seeks the way of the Hereafter, then he should not take it, because it is beyond his necessary need.

⁵⁴ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Abu Dawoud

⁵⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Abu Dawoud and Al-Tirmidhi

⁵⁶ Narrated by ‘Umar (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

If he is accepting the money to spend seeking the reward in the Hereafter, then he can do one of two things

1. He can take openly and give back discretely, or he can take openly and spend it discretely. This is the station of the sincere truthful, however, this difficult to do.
2. He should refuse to take the money and leave it to the donor to give to those who are in need.

In summary, having abundant provision beyond that which satisfies the person's necessary needs is a test and a trial, so that God would know how will you deal with it. God said, "*Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We test them, which of them is best in need.*" (18: 7) It is a lenient act of God that you are given enough to satisfy your necessary needs. So, you should be able to differentiate between leniency and trial. The Prophet said⁵⁷, "The son of Adam has no right to accept anything beyond three things: food that sustains him, a dress that covers him, and home that shelters him. He will have to account for anything that is given beyond this."

A recipient should accept the money as long as the above mentioned conditions have been satisfied. He should realize that the money he is receiving is a gift from God not from the donor. The donor is only a means to get the money to him.

The Prohibition of Asking Without Need

The Etiquette for Asking

The correct opinion about this is that asking is generally prohibited unless it is done out of dire necessity or there is an essential need for asking. There are three reasons for the proscription of asking

1. Asking is in essence a complaint against God; because when one asks he exposes the fact that he is needy. This is an expression of the lack of God's bounty. This is a complaint.
2. Asking humiliates the person in front of other human beings. A believer should not humiliate himself except to God alone.
3. Asking is annoying to those who are asked. A person who is being asked may not want to give, if he was forced to give then it is an act of showing off. If he persisted in not given, he will feel bad about it. If he gives, he loses money; and if he does not give, he loses prestige. Both of these are annoying to the one being asked.

The Prophet (PBUH) said⁵⁸, "*Whoever asked people for money, while he has enough, is like asking for burning coal.*" The Prophet (PBUH) addressed a group of people who accepted Islam. He took their pledge to listen and to obey him, and he gave them a subtle command. He said⁵⁹ "*Do not ask people anything.*" The Prophet (PBUH) commanded Muslims often not to ask. He said⁶⁰, "*Whoever asked us, we will give him. However, whoever asked God, God will make him rich out of His bounty. We love more the person who does not ask.*"

⁵⁷ Narrated by Uthman ibn Aafan (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

⁵⁸ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

⁵⁹ Narrated by Awf ibn Malik (RA) and reported by Muslim

⁶⁰ Narrated by Abu Saeed Al-Khudri (RA) and reported by Ibn Abu Al-Dunya

You have known that asking is permissible in the case of necessity. There are four situations to consider. These are

1. A person who is destitute and has no money for food. If the person is afraid to perish or become sick, or is in severe need for clothes to cover his naked body, then he is allowed to ask for help as long as the help requested is permissible, the donor is inwardly content to help, and the recipient is unable to work to obtain sustenance or clothes.
2. A person who is asking for things, while having similar things and he is no need for more, is not allowed to ask. Asking in this case is prohibited.
3. A person who is in need for an important thing, like a sick person who needs a medicine, even though the risk for not taking the medicine is probable but not certain; or a person who have clothes but he does not have enough to protect himself against the cold of the winter; or a person who needs help to hire a vehicle for a ride and he is hardly able to walk; should be allowed to ask for help because this constitutes a definite need. However, it is preferable for him not to ask.
4. A person whose need is deemed unsubstantial, like a person who is asking for another shirt to cover up the tears in his shirt; or a person who is asking for something to eat and he has bread, is not allowed to ask. The request of such a person is prohibited because his request embodies the three undesired outcomes for asking: complaint against God, humiliation, and annoying those who are being asked. If his request is free from the three desired outcomes, then his request is allowable but it is disliked.

If you ask, how can one make a request that is free of the three undesired outcomes, then the answer is as follows:

1. To avoid that asking is interpreted as a complaint against God, one should express his gratitude to God, express his independence of people, and does not show his dire need. His request should be, *“I am satisfied with what I have, but my ridiculous self requires another shirt to put on over the shirt which I presently have, and which satisfies my need.”* This does not make the request sounds like a complaint.
2. To avoid humiliating oneself to people, he should ask those who are close to him or a wealthy person who is used to helping people. Those will not look down upon him because of his request.
3. To avoid annoying people by asking them for help, he should not ask a specific person directly, but he should hint at his need for help so whoever is willing to help will help. However, he should avoid making these subtle remarks in the presence of a prominent person, who may feel obliged to help.

If you say, what if he accepted money from someone, knowing that the donor gave the money only because he felt obliged to give. I say, this absolutely prohibited. He should not accept this donation. This is similar to confiscating someone’s wealth or forcing him to give it away. If you say that this is an inner feeling that is difficult to ascertain. The recipient may think that the donor is giving willingly, while in actual fact, he felt obliged to give. My answer is, that is why the God conscious abandoned asking as a principle. They did not ask anyone anything. Asking in this case is only allowed on account of a necessity, similar to allowing eating pork, or the meat of a dead animal. They made an exception in two cases. These are

1. In case of necessity. The Prophets, Suleiman (PBUH), Moses (PBUH) and al-Khidr (PBUH) did ask. Indeed, they must have realized that they were asking those people who were willing to give them.
2. Asking friends and brothers. They used to take what is theirs without asking or seeking permission.

The criterion for the permissibility of asking is to know that if the one you are asking knew about your need, he would have offered to help without you asking him.

The one who is asking may face two different situations. A situation in which he has no doubt that the person whom he is asking is quite content to offer his help. Another situation, is when the person who he is asking is certain that the person whom he is asking for help dislikes to offer his help. The request in the first case is permissible while in the second case it is prohibited. There are many other cases in between these two extremes. One should seek the counsel of his heart. Let a person abstain from committing the doubtful and only do what is doubtless.

What is the Amount of Wealth Which Makes Asking Prohibited?

The criterion which can be used to determine whether a person is rich or poor is difficult to stipulate. We are not in a position to determine such criterion. This is a criterion that needs to be set by the Quran or the Sunnah.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“The son of Adam has three rights: Food to sustain him, clothes to cover his private parts, and a home to shelter him. He will be accountable for anything he has beyond these.”* So, let us make these needs the standard needs for a human being.

The Types of Needs

The needs are mentioned in the tradition and we could add to it the need for a ride for the traveler if he cannot walk, and similar needs that he and his family need.

The Amounts

As far as clothes are concerned, one needs one set of clothing like a shirt, a pair of pants, and shoes. One should not need another set. Similarly, one can decide what is bare minimum regarding furniture. One should not use fancy clothes or expensive furniture. As far as food is concerned, a “Mudd⁶¹” of anything edible is enough, as decreed by religious law.

The Frequency

There is no doubt of the immediate need for food, clothes, and shelter. As for the future, there are three levels. These are

1. What he needs for tomorrow.
2. What he needs in forty or fifty days.
3. What he needs for one year.

If he has enough to satisfy his essential needs for a year, he is not allowed to ask. However, it is difficult to estimate the needs accurately, therefore it is left for each one to decide what is enough

⁶¹ About 500 gm of wheat

for him and his family. A person should seek the council of his heart. Those who are secure in their faith and are not worried about future provisions have a higher rank with their Lord. Weakness in faith and listening to Satan's susurrations are the reasons for the doubt about future provision. "*Satan threatens you with poverty and commands you to commit indecencies; and God promises you forgiveness and a bounty from Him.*" (2:268)

Asking is an indecent act that has been made permissible only in cases of dire needs. The case of a person who asks for something to address a future need is more severe than the case of a person who inherited money but he is saving it to address a need that may arise at the end of the year. Both cases are permissible but they are grounded in the love of the worldly life, the hope to live long, and the lack of trust in God's bounty. This characteristic is one of the most destructive characteristics.

The Types of Those Who Ask

Bisher said the poor are three types. These are

1. A poor person who does not ask, and if he was given, he does not take. He will be with the spiritual people in the highest place in paradise.
2. A poor person who does not ask, and if he is given, he accepts. He will be with those who are brought closer to God in the Gardens of Ferdoos.
3. A poor person who asks only when he is in need. He will be with the truthful of the people of the right.

Therefore, everyone disparaged asking. Asking combined with poverty degrades the rank of people. Shaqiq Al-Balkhi asked Ibrahim ibn Adham upon his arrival from Khorasan, "*What is the condition of your poor friends?*" He said, "*They are grateful when they are given, and they persevere when they are deprived.*" Ibrahim thought that his statement was a commendation for the poor. Shaqiq said, "*This is the same as the condition of the dogs of Balkh.*" Ibrahim then asked Shaqiq about the condition of the poor in Balkh. He said, "*They are grateful when they are deprived and they prefer others over themselves when they are given.*" Ibrahim kissed Shaqiq's head and said, "*You told the truth, professor.*"

There are many ranks for the people in situations of contentment, perseverance, gratitude, and asking. The seeker of the path to the Hereafter should recognize these ranks. This is the way to elevate his own rank.

Part 2: Asceticism

This part of the book deals with the essence of asceticism, its virtue, its ranks, and its applications in eating, clothing, dwelling place, and other aspects of life.

The Essence of Asceticism

You should know that asceticism is an honored station of the stations on the path of those who are seeking their Lord. Like all stations, this station is comprised of knowledge, state, and action. Asceticism is turning away from one thing to another that is better than it. Asceticism, then, involves a thing that one turns away from, and another, that one desires. However, the thing that one turns away from should also be desirable in one of its aspects, otherwise turning away from it is not called asceticism. An ascetic person is a person that is renouncing something that he desires, like wealth. Thus, a person who barter this life for the Hereafter is an ascetic person that renounces this life in favor of the Hereafter. Similarly, a person who barter the Hereafter for this life is an ascetic who renounces the Hereafter in favor of this life. However, asceticism is usually used in connection with favoring the Hereafter over this life not the other way around.

Thus, asceticism is renouncing the pleasures of this life in favor of gaining the Hereafter. Or renouncing anything other than God in favor of becoming nearer to God, this is the highest degree. One should be able to attain the renounced thing, in order that renouncing it constitutes an act of asceticism. Renouncing a thing that is unattainable does not constitute an act of asceticism.

The knowledge needed for asceticism is the realization that the thing that is being renounced is detested in comparison to the thing that is pursued. The example of this is a businessman who knows that the selling price of a commodity is more than the actual value of the commodity. Otherwise he will not be interested in selling the commodity. Similarly, the same is true for the person who realizes that whatever God has is better and everlasting; and realizes that the Hereafter is better and everlasting because of its inherent qualities. The Hereafter is like a jewel, while this life is like a piece of ice. Sun melts the ice, but it is unable to change a jewel. Thus, a jewel is better and everlasting than the ice. However, it is not difficult for a person who owns ice to barter it for a jewel. This is the example of this life and the Hereafter. This life is like a piece of ice placed under the sun, it continues to melt; while the Hereafter is like a jewel that is everlasting.

The desire to barter this life for the Hereafter increases as the certitude in God and the knowledge of the difference between this life and the Hereafter increase. The person who has strong certitude sells himself as the verse says, *“Indeed, God purchased from the believers their lives and their wealth in exchange for Paradise.”* (9: 111) He then, told them that this is a profitable deal for them, *“So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted.”* (9:111)

Thus, the knowledge needed for asceticism is only that the Hereafter is better and everlasting. A person may realize this knowledge but is unable to renounce this life in favor of gaining the Hereafter. Because of his weakness, his lust and being overpowered by Satan. Or because being

deluded by the promises of Satan which causes him to procrastinate until death snatches him. He would be left with nothing except regret.

The sign of desire is to hold tight to what you have and the sign of asceticism is to spend what you have. If you gave away some of the worldly pleasures, then your abstinence is limited to the things you gave away. This is not absolute asceticism. If you do not have wealth or other worldly things, then you are not expected to be ascetic, because you cannot give away that which you do not have. Satan may delude you into thinking, even though you do not have wealth, you can still be ascetic. You should not be deluded by his tricks and you should ascertain for yourself by a strong covenant from God. You will not be able to ascertain your ability to give something unless you have it.

You should know giving away wealth to show generosity or as a means of endearment is not considered asceticism. This is only good manners. Asceticism is to renounce this life because of the realization that it is detestable in comparison with the Hereafter. A true ascetic person is the one to whom the pleasures of the worldly life have been delivered without effort on his part, but he gave them up voluntarily, even though he could have kept them and enjoyed them without suffering a diminution of reputation. He gave them up because he was afraid that enjoying these pleasures would deprive him the companionship of God or the reward in the Hereafter.

The Virtue of Asceticism

God said, *“So, he came out before his people in his adornment. Those who desired the worldly life said, ‘Would that we had like what was given to Qarun. Indeed, he is one of great fortune.’ But those who had been given knowledge said, ‘Woe to you! The reward of God is better for he who believes and does good deeds.’”* (28: 79-80) God lauded asceticism by attributing asceticism to the scholars and describing the knowledgeable as ascetic. God said, *“Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them, which of them is best in deed.”* (18: 7) It was mentioned in the interpretation that the person who is best of deeds is the person who is most ascetic. Thus, asceticism is described as the best of deeds. God said, *“Do not stretch your eyes toward that which We have given for enjoyment to parties of them - the splendor of the life of this world - through which We test them; but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.”* (20: 131) God described the disbelievers as those, *“Who love the life of this world more than the Hereafter.”* (14: 3) This indicates that the disbeliever must have the opposite characteristic. Thus, a believer is the one who loves the Hereafter more than the life of this world.

There are many traditions which disparage the worldly life. We have mentioned many of them in the Book of Disparaging the Worldly Life in the Quarter of the Annihilators. Here we will focus on the virtue of loathing the worldly life, which is one of the means for salvation. This is what we call asceticism. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁶², *“Whoever wakes up in morning and his concern is the material gain of this world, God will confuse his affairs, disperse his belongings, make him feel poor, and he will only get in this life what God had decreed for him. He who wakes up in the morning and his concern is the reward in the Hereafter, God will straighten his affairs for*

⁶² Narrated by Zaid ibn Thabet (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

him, will preserve his belongings for him, will fill his heart with the sense of being rich, and the material gains of this worldly life will reach him without effort.”

God said, *“He who was given wisdom, has been given much good.”* (2: 269) It was said that if a person remains truly ascetic for forty days, then God will make the springs of wisdom flow in his heart and his tongue will utter wise words. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁶³, *“The Prophets before me used to be tested by extreme poverty, to the extent that one of them would not have more than one garment to put on. Some of them were tested by lice to an extent that they would be almost killed by lice. But all of them loved this more than you love a gift given to you.”* When the verse, *“And those who hoard gold and silver and they do not spend it in the sake of God,”* (9: 34) was revealed, the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, *“May the world be ruined, may the Dinar and Dirham be ruined.”* ‘Umar (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) saying, *“Messenger of God, God prohibited us to save gold and silver, what should we save?”* He said⁶⁴, *“Let each of you have a tongue which continuously sings the praise of God, a heart which continuously expresses its gratitude, and a wife who helps him gain the reward of the Hereafter.”*

It was narrated that Saying, *“There is no deity but God,”* protects people from the wrath of God as long as they do not favor this life over the Hereafter. If they prefer this world over the Hereafter and say, *“There is no deity but God,”* God will say, *“You are lying.”* Some of the companions said, *“We investigated all good deeds, we did not find that the best way to attain the reward of the Hereafter is to renounce the material gains of this world,”* meaning being true ascetic. Some of the companions said to some of the people of the generation that followed them, *“You do more good deeds, and you strive more than some of the companions; but they are better than you.”* When they were asked, what made them better, they said, *“They practice true asceticism better than you.”*

‘Umar (RA) said, *“True asceticism brings comfort to the heart and the body.”* Bilal ibn Saeed said, *“It is enough of a sin to desire the world while God wants us to renounce it.”* Yousof ibn Asbat said, *“I pray to God to grant me three wishes at the time of death: to die penniless, to die debtless, and to die with no flesh on my bones.”* He was granted all three wishes. Ibrahim ibn Adham said, *“Our hearts have been veiled by three covers, one will not be able to gain certitude in faith until these covers are removed. These are the joy for what we have, the sadness for what we do not have, and being jubilant when we are praised. If you feel joy for what you have, then you are covetous; if you feel sad for what you do not have, then you are dissatisfied and a dissatisfied person will certainly be punished; if you jubilate when you are praised, then you are egotistic, and egotism frustrates the deeds.”* Some of the people of the first generation used to say, *“God’s blessings in preventing bad things happening to us is more than His blessings in giving us good things.”* Al-Thawri said, *“This world is a home for twisted things not a home for straightforward things; and it is a home for sadness not a home for happiness. Whoever knew the truth of this world, will not feel joy for its prosperity and will not feel sad for its affliction.”*

⁶³ Abu Saeed Al-Khudri (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

⁶⁴ Narrated by ‘Umar (RA) and reported by al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah

Al-Hassan Al Basri said, *“I have met people who never felt joy for a material gain and never felt sad for a material loss. They considered the worldly life worth less than dust. One of them would live for fifty or sixty year without having a new garment, a cooked meal, or a bed to sleep on. They spend the night praying with tears running down their cheeks, calling upon their Lord to free their necks. When they do a good deed, they show their gratitude to God who enabled them to do it, and they ask God to accept it. They feel sad when they do something bad and they pray God to forgive them. However, they did not achieve salvation because they did not sin but because God forgave them. May God’s mercy and blessings be upon them.”*

Ranks and Divisions of Asceticism, What is Desired of it and What is Undesired

You should know that asceticism varies depending on its strength. It has three ranks. These are

1. The first rank is the lowest rank. This is the rank in which a person renounces the worldly life even though he desires it, his heart is inclined to it, and his self is turning towards it. However, he strives to control his self. This is a person who forces himself to be ascetic. This person is facing a great risk because his self may overpower him and his desires may pull him towards the pleasures of the worldly life. His asceticism may suffer a relapse and he may incline to the comforts of life a little or much.
2. The second rank is the rank of a person who voluntarily renounces the worldly life because he despises it and its temptations. This may not be difficult for him, because he is like a person who gives up one Dirham for two. However, he needs to wait a little. This person is aware of his own asceticism. He admires himself and his asceticism. He thinks that he renounced something valuable for another which is more valuable. This is still a kind of deficiency.
3. The third rank is the highest rank. This is the rank of a person who voluntarily renounces the worldly life and renounces the fact that he is ascetic. He is unaware of his asceticism, because he is unaware that he gave up something valuable. He recognizes the true worth of the worldly life. He is like a person who gave up a stone and gained a jewel. He does not see this as a trade and does not believe that he gave up anything. He believes that the worldly life in comparison to the bounty of God in the Hereafter is like a stone in comparison to a jewel. This is perfect asceticism. It is a product of the perfect knowledge. This kind of ascetic person is safe from being lured by the pleasures of the worldly life.

These are the ranks of asceticism. Each of these ranks has different levels. The level of asceticism of people in the first rank differs according to the difficulty they face in persevering. Also, there are different levels for he who extols his asceticism, the level of asceticism is commensurate with the level of the attention he pays to being ascetic.

Ascetics can be divided into three categories according to the objective they hope to gain from being ascetic. These are

1. The lowest category of ascetics comprises those whose objective is to be saved from Hellfire and the other pains like the torment in the grave and the reckoning on the Day of

Judgement. This is the asceticism of the fearful. It is as if they are content with being nonexistent, because those who do not exist do not suffer.

2. The objective of the second category is to gain God's reward and His bliss. They seek the promised pleasures in paradise. This is the asceticism of the hopeful. They did not renounce the pleasures of the worldly life fearing the pain but they renounced them hoping for eternal bliss.
3. The third category, this is the highest category, comprises those whose sole objective is to meet God and enjoy His nearness. They do not care about the pain of torment nor about the pleasures of the eternal bliss. They are fully devoted to God. He is their sole interest. These are the ones who true believers in the Oneness of God; they seek God alone. A person who seeks anything other than God has indeed worshipped that thing. Anything that is sought after is a worshipped thing; and anyone who seeks something has become a worshipper of what he sought. This is the asceticism of the loving. These are ones who achieved knowledge. Only those who truly know God, love Him.

Do not think that there will be a place in the hearts of the people of paradise for the pleasures of the virgins and the palaces, after they had enjoyed the pleasure of looking at the countenance of God. The pleasure of looking at the countenance of God in comparison to the pleasure of enjoying the virgins and the palaces in paradise is like the pleasure of owning the kingdom of the world in comparison to the pleasure of owning a bird and playing with it.

Asceticism can also be divided into categories according to what would be renounced. These are many and it is impossible to list all of them. We will try to list the principal items.

1. The most comprehensive principle is to renounce anything other than God. One should even renounce one self.
2. The second comprehensive principle is to renounce every trait that brings pleasure to the person. This includes all the natural traits of human beings, like lust, anger, arrogance, love of eminence, wealth, and others.
3. The third comprehensive principle is to renounce wealth and the love of eminence and their means, because they are the causes of all fortunes of the soul.
4. The fourth comprehensive principle is to renounce knowledge, power, money, and eminence. All types of wealth can be reduced to money, and means for eminence can be reduced to knowledge and power. Eminence is having influence over hearts, and money means wealth.

These are four comprehensive principles. We will not be able to elaborate on all the things that should be renounced. God mentioned seven of them in one verse, "*Alluring to humankind is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hordes of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but with God is the best abode to return to.*" (2:14) In another verse, He mentioned five of them, "*Know that the life of the world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children;*" (57: 20) and

in yet a third verse He combined all in two, *“The life of this world is but play and amusement;”* (47: 36) and in a fourth verse they were reduced to one thing, *“But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, the Garden will be his abode.”* (79: 40-41) One should renounce lust because it combines all the worldly fortunes that the soul desires.

Asceticism is essentially to renounce all the fortunes that the soul desires. Once a person renounced all the fortunes that the soul desires, he will also renounce the desire to remain in this life. This is what differentiates between the hypocrites who said, *“Our Lord, why did You ordain fighting for us? If only You give us a respite for a while.”* (4: 77) They were keen on the enjoyment of the pleasures of this worldly life. On the other hand, the ascetics who loved God fought in the way of God as if they were one solid wall. They were anticipating one of the two good endings. When they were asked to fight, they would smell the scent of paradise; they would hasten to fighting as a thirsty person hastens towards cold water. They were fervent in supporting the religion of God and in dying as martyrs. Those of them who did not die in battle, were very sad that they missed this opportunity.

But the hypocrites fled the battle ground being afraid to die. It was said to them, *“The death from which you flee will certainly overtake you. Then you will be sent back to the One who knows the unseen and the seen; and He will tell you all the things that you did.”* (62: 8) They preferred staying alive over dying as martyrs. They bartered what is good for what is bad; they bartered guidance for going astray. Their deal was a losing deal and they lost their guidance. But, God bought from the sincere their lives and their wealth, and in return, awarded them paradise.

The theologians talked about different aspects of asceticism; each one of them addressed the aspect that he thought is most relevant. Bisher said, *“Renouncing the world amounts to renouncing people.”* He is alluding to renouncing the love of eminence. Al-Fudail said, *“Renouncing the world amounts to contentedness.”* Al-Thawri said, *“Asceticism is having no hope in life.”* This is a comprehensive statement that sums renouncing all desires. A person who has desires wants to live a long life to satisfy his desires. A person who has no hope in life is a person who renounced all desires. Auwais said, *“If an ascetic went seeking, he will no longer be ascetic.”* Some said, *“Asceticism is to seek what is lawful,”* but how you reconcile this with the statement, that asceticism is renouncing seeking. They must have meant, *“Asceticism is renouncing seeking in its entirety, even seeking what is lawful.”* Yousof ibn Asbat said, *“The essence of asceticism is to persevere when being maligned, to renounce all lusts, and to eat bread that you earned lawfully.”* Abu Suleiman recited, *“Except he, who comes to God with a sound heart.”* (26: 89) and commented that the sound heart is a heart which is completely devoted to God.

According to Ibrahim ibn Adham, asceticism can be divided with regard to its religious ruling to obligatory duty, supererogatory, and a safe precaution. The obligatory asceticism is to renounce the unlawful. The supererogatory asceticism is to renounce the lawful. The safe precaution is in renouncing the doubtful. We have mentioned the levels of piety in the Book of the Lawful and Unlawful.

The degrees of asceticism are endless, the least of it is to renounce all doubtful and prohibited things. Some people said, “*Asceticism is not only to renounce the doubtful and the unlawful, but to renounce the lawful as well.*”

You should know that renouncing the worldly life in favor of God means that you have to devote your heart completely to the remembrance of God and the reflection on God. This cannot be attained without maintaining your survival. Maintaining your body, so that you are able to worship God, does not constitute an act of turning away from God. Your physical strength should be like your ride when you go to perform pilgrimage: both of them are a means to help you worship God. You want to protect your ride so that you can reach your destination to perform pilgrimage. Similarly, you want to protect your body against destructive thirst, and hunger by eating and drinking; and against extreme heat and cold by dressing and having a shelter. Thus, you need to satisfy the essential needs of your body, not for the sake of enjoying carnal pleasures, but for the sake of maintaining the ability to be obedient to God. This does not contradict asceticism but it is a prerequisite for it. If you say, eating and drinking is pleasurable, then you should know that this does not harm you, as long as you are not seeking the pleasure. A thirsty person gets a pleasure when he quenches his thirst drinking cold water but the objective is to quench the pain of thirst. Drinking brings comfort but will not occupy the heart fully.

Asceticism Regarding the Necessities of Life

You should know that things that occupy people’s attention can be divided into necessities and luxuries. Owning branded horses is considered a luxury, while eating and drinking is a necessity. It is unfeasible to count the luxuries. We will focus on the necessities. A necessity could become luxury depending on its amount, its frequency, and its types.

The necessities are food, clothing, a dwelling place and furniture, marriage, money, and eminence which is sought for certain reasons. We have explained the meaning of eminence and the reasons that people love it and how to avoid it in the Book on Eminence and Showing off.

Food

A human being needs food to survive. Food has two dimensions: length (quantity) and width (quality). Asceticism regarding food involves the control of the length and the width. The dimension of length is a measure of the period of time for which a person should guarantee the availability of food. This cannot be controlled unless a person has no hope in living long. The highest level of asceticism is to eat one meal and not to worry about the availability of food for the second meal. The amount of food consumed in each meal should be barely enough to satisfy the hunger and to repel illness. The second level is to save enough food to last for a month or forty days. A third level is for people who save food to last for a full year. These are the weak ascetics.

It is impossible to call a person who saves food to last for more than a year an ascetic. A person who plans that far ahead is a person who has hope to live a long life.

As far as the amount to be consumed, there are levels. The lowest level of consumption is half a pound daily. The middle level of consume is one pound daily. The highest level of consumption

is a Mudd daily (Mudd is equivalent to one pound and a third of a pound); this is the amount that was described for feeding a poor person in way of expiation of a sin. Eating beyond this amount shows that the person has a big appetite and he is preoccupied by it. This person is not ascetic as far as food is concerned.

As far as the kind of foods an ascetic can eat, the least one can eat is what guarantees the survival of the person; for example, bread made from the dregs of wheat. A higher level is to eat bread made from barley and corn. Eating bread made from refined flour takes one out of the circle of asceticism. Food to be eaten with bread can be salt or vinegar, this is the lowest grade. A middle grade involves eating oil or some fat together with the bread. The highest grade would be eating meat and bread, once or twice a week. More than that takes the person out of the circle of asceticism.

As far as the frequency is concerned, one can eat once a day, when he is fasting.

One should consider the ascetic life that the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions used to live. ‘Ayisha (RA) said⁶⁵, “*We used to stay for forty days without lighting a fire or having a light in the house of the Messenger of God.*” They asked her, “*What would you eat?*” She said, “*The two black things: dates, and water.*” This means that they did not eat meat or gravy. The Prophet⁶⁶ (PBUH) used to ride a donkey, wears clothes made out of wool, puts on sandals, licks his fingers after he eats, and sits on the ground while eating.

Yahya ibn Moadh Al-Eazi said, “The true ascetic eats what he finds, puts on what covers his body, lives wherever he can reach, the world is his prison, the grave is his lying place, reflection is his idea, Quran is his talk, the Lord is his companion, remembrance of God is his close friend, asceticism is his twin brother, sadness is his state, shyness is his motto, hunger is his complementary food, wisdom is his words, dust is his bed, God consciousness is his sustenance, silence is his gain, perseverance is his support, trusting in God suffices him, intellect is his guide, worshipping God is his profession, and paradise is his aim.

Clothing

The minimum one can wear is that which covers the private parts and protects against heat and cold. The middle level consists of a shirt, a hat, and sandals. The highest is to add to the previously mentioned items, a pair of pants and a handkerchief; this is the limit for ascetics. The condition for asceticism is that the ascetic should not have a spare costume to wear when he washes his original costume. He just stays at home.

There are levels for the kinds of material to be used in making the costume. The lowest level is a costume made using rough material. The middle level is a costume made from rough wool and the highest is a costume made from thick cotton.

As far as for the durability, the highest is for a costume to last one year. The lowest is that for a costume to last for one day; some patched their costume with tree leaves. The Prophet (PBUH)

⁶⁵ Narrated by Ayisha (RA) and reported by Al-Hakim

⁶⁶ Narrated by Abu Musa (RA) and reported by Al-Hakim

said⁶⁷, “*God turns away from a person who wears a costume seeking to be known by it, until he takes it off.*”

Ali ibn Abi Taleb (RA) bought a costume for three Dirham, while he was a Caliph. He cut the sleeves short and said, “*Praise the Lord, He clothed me this from His bounty.*” He also said, “*God took the covenant from the leaders of guidance to be like the most common of people. They act as role models for the rich and they do not make the poor feel bad about his poverty.*” When people criticized the roughness of the costume that Ali (RA) wears, he said, “*This is nearer to modesty, and it provides a role model for the people.*” Al-Thawri said, “*Wear that which does not make you prominent among the scholars and does not make mean among the ignorant.*”

Dwelling Place

There are levels for the dwelling places for ascetics. The highest in asceticism would not seek a specific place for himself. He would rather live in one of the corners of a Mosque like the people of the Suffah. The middle level is to seek a place of his own, like a hut built out of the branches of a palm tree or similar material. The lowest is to live in a constructed room, either owned or rented. There are also levels as far as the material used to build the room., its area, and its height.

In summary, everything that is deemed necessary should not go beyond satisfying the necessity.

It was mentioned that the verse, “*That home of the Hereafter, We assign to those who do not desire exaltedness upon the earth or corruption;*” (28:83) refers to people who seek authority and who compete in building enormous buildings.

The Furniture

There are also levels for the kind of furniture that can be used. The moderate situation is to have enough furniture to satisfy the needs of the person. However, one should find multi uses for a single item. Some used to have one vessel, which he used for food, for drink, and for keeping his things.

One should reflect on the behavior of the Prophet (PBUH). ‘Ayisah (RA) said⁶⁸, “*The Messenger of God used to sleep on a mattress made out of the leather stuffed with palm leaves.*” ‘Umar (RA) went to visit the Messenger of God (PBUH). He found the Messenger of God (PBUH) lying down on a mattress covered by palm tree leaves; the leaves left a mark on the body of the Prophet (PBUH). ‘Umar (RA) wept. When the Prophet (PBUH) asked ‘Umar (RA) why did he weep, ‘Umar (RA) said, “*I remembered the state of the Shah (Persian king) and Caesar and what they enjoy, while you, the one who was chosen and loved by God, are sleeping on a bed covered by palm tree leaves.*” The Prophet (PBUH) said⁶⁹, “*‘Umar, does not satisfy you that they would enjoy this life, and we would enjoy the Hereafter?’*” ‘Umar (RA) said, “*Yes.*” The Prophet (PBUH) said, “*Then, it will be so.*”

A man visited Abu Dharr (RA), he looked around the house and found no furniture. He said, “*Where is your furniture?*” Abu Dharr (RA) said, “*We have a house that we put in it our*

⁶⁷ Narrated by Abu Dharr (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

⁶⁸ Narrated by Ayishah (RA) and reported by Abu Dawoud, Al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah.

⁶⁹ Narrated by ‘Umar (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

righteous furniture.” The man said, “*But you need furniture as long as you live here.*” Abu Dharr (RA) said, “*Then the owner of the house would not let us in.*”

When Umair ibn Saeed (RA) the Governor of Hums went to meet ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA), ‘Umar (RA) asked him, “*What property do you have?*” Umair (RA) said, “*I have my staff, which I use to walk and to kill a serpent in case I find one; I have a leather bag to store my food; I have a vessel which I use for my food, and to wash my head and clothes; I have a clean vessel in which I carry the water for my ritual cleaning and for my drinking. Anything else is unrequired.*” ‘Umar (RA) said, “*You told the truth. May God bestow His mercy on you*”

Al-Hassan said, “*I have met seventy righteous people, each had only one costume; when they sleep, they have no mattress to sleep on and they cover themselves with their garment.*”

Marriage

Some scholars said, that asceticism does not apply to marriage nor to how many wives one has. This is the view of Sahl ibn Abdullah. He said, “*Marriage has been recommended to the master of all ascetics, how could we renounce marriage?*” Ibn Ayynyah agreed with him. Ali ibn Abi Taleb (RA) was one of the most ascetic among the companions and he had four wives, and a number of female slaves.

The correct view is that of Abu Suleiman Al-Darni, who said, “*Anything that distracts you away from God, whether it is family, wealth, or offspring is a cause of a bad omen. A woman may distract you from God.*”

However, the truth is that leading a bachelor life may be beneficial in some cases, as we have mentioned in the Book of Marriage. Marriage is indeed an obligatory duty, when there is a need to satisfy the sexual desire, how can then not marrying be part of asceticism? If it is the same whether a person gets married or remains a bachelor, and there is a danger that marriage will make the heart incline to women and seek their companionship which will distract the person from the remembrance of God, then staying unmarried is part of asceticism.

If a person knows that his wife will not be a cause of distraction that takes him away from the remembrance of God, but he chooses not to marry as a sign of renouncing the sexual pleasure, then this is not asceticism. Copulation is a means to preserve the lineage and increasing the number of Muslims is one of the things that bring us close to God. The resulting pleasure is a necessity that does not harm the ascetic because it is not the intended aim. This is like a person who abandons eating bread and drinking water to avoid the pleasure of eating and drinking. This is not asceticism because it will lead to his demise, just like not marrying will cut his lineage short.

Wealth and Eminence

Wealth and eminence are the means to attain the five necessities mentioned above. What we mean by eminence is the ability to influence and control hearts, seeking a place in them, so that one can use the owners of the hearts to achieve one’s objectives. Anyone who needs help because he is unable to serve himself, needs to achieve eminence in the hearts of those who serve him, because without having eminence in the heart of the person who is serving him, that person

will not provide the service. Eminence enables the person to influence those whom he needs to serve him. One needs such influence to obtain benefit, to repel harm, or to rid oneself from wrongdoing. Seeking eminence is not recommended, since a little eminence may lead to a greater eminence. Its danger is more than the danger of alcohol. One then should avoid seeking eminence whether little or big.

Little money is necessary for the daily life of a person. If the person has a profession, then he should limit his professional activities to earn enough to cover his daily necessities. This is the condition for being ascetic. If a person worked and earned money which can cover his expenses for more than a year then, he is no longer an ascetic. However, a person should not force the members of his family to become ascetic. He can invite them but he should leave it to them to decide. The restrictions that are needed for the ascetics should be limited to them only. He should not force his children to adopt these restrictions.

The eminence and money that a person is forced to have are not forbidden; but extensive wealth and eminence that go beyond the bare necessity are deadly poison, while that which barely satisfies the necessity is a curing medicine. In between these two extremes there are different degrees. Although an amount of eminence and money which are not great, may not be a deadly poison, but it is harmful. Similarly, an amount of eminence and money that is more than what satisfies the bare necessities is not a useful medicine but its harm is little. It is forbidden to drink poison, while it is an obligatory duty to take medicine. In between these two cases there are a number of different degrees that are doubtful. One should be cautious, lest one goes beyond the limits. One should leave that which is doubtful to that which is certain.

One cannot describe a person who limits himself to the amount sufficient to satisfy his necessities, as a person who is seeking the worldly life. This amount of the worldly life is required by religion, because the core of the religion requires that one satisfy his bare necessities. This can be gleaned from a story narrated about Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was in need, so he went to a friend to ask for a loan, but his friend did not give him the loan he needed. He went home feeling sad. God sent him a revelation saying, *“Had you asked your Friend, He would have given you.”* Abraham (PBUH) said, *“My Lord, I was afraid to ask you something related to this worldly life, because I knew how much you hate it.”* God revealed to him, saying, *“Satisfying your essential needs is not considered seeking after the worldly life.”* Therefore, satisfying the essential needs is actually one of the principles of religion. However, seeking beyond what satisfies the essential needs is considered disastrous in this the Hereafter as well as in this life.

The example of he who seeks the pleasures of this worldly life is like a silkworm which weaves a net around itself. It locks itself inside the net it has woven around itself and ends up dying. A person who seeks the pleasures of this worldly life ties his heart with a chain that binds him and puts him under the control of his desires: money, love of eminence, offspring, gloating of enemies, hypocrisy of friends, and other worldly fortunes. When he realizes that he had made a mistake he will not be able to get out of it, even if he wanted to. He will not be able to free his heart from the chains that bind it.

This will be the first torment, he will face. Then he will suffer the regret of having missed the opportunity to be in the highest abode in the nearness of God. His attachment to the worldly life will shield him from enjoying the presence of God. Once he has been shielded, he will suffer the torment of Hellfire. Only those who are shielded from the presence of God will be subjected to the torment of Hellfire. God said, *“Verily, that Day they will be shielded from their Lord. Then they will burn in Hell.”* (83: 15-16) The verse states that burning in hell is a consequence of being shielded from God.

The Signs of Asceticism

You should know that, it may be thought that a person who renounces wealth is an ascetic. However, this is not true. Renouncing wealth and assuming an appearance of austerity are easy for one who loves to be praised for being ascetic. Many a monk ate just a little and committed themselves to a monastery, seeking to be praised by people for their asceticism. This is not a decisive sign for asceticism. True asceticism can only be achieved by renouncing both wealth and eminence. This leads to renouncing all the fortunes of the soul in life.

There are three internal signs for true asceticism. These are

1. He should neither exult for something he gets nor grieve for something he loses; as God said, *“In order that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you.”* (57: 23) On the contrary, he should feel sad when he gets money and feel happy when he loses it.
2. He should treat both the one who praises him and the one who disparages him equally.
3. He should find his best company with God. His heart should be full of the sweet taste of obedience. A human heart needs to feel the sweetness of love. Love may be for the worldly life and it may be for God. These loves are like water and air in a cup. If the cup is fully filled with water then, there will be no space for air in it. A person who finds his enjoyment in the company of God, has no interest in anything else.

The Gnostics say, *“A person whose faith is attached superficially to his heart, loves both this life and the Hereafter; and will seek both of them at the same time. A person whose faith is deeply embedded in his heart, loathes this worldly life; he will not look at it nor seek it. That is what Adam (PBUH) asked God to give him a faith that is deeply embedded in his heart.”*

Abu Suleiman said, *“Whoever busies himself with his own self, he will not busy himself with people. This is the station of the doers. He who busies himself with God, will forget to care about his own self. This is the station of the Gnostics. The ascetic should have one of these two stations.”* His first stations should be, to busy himself with his own self. At this station, both praise and disparagement will be the same for him. Similarly, it will be the same for him whether he exists or ceases to exist. Having a little money will not detract from his asceticism.

Therefore, the fundamental sign of asceticism is that being poor or rich; being honored or humiliated; and being praised or disparaged are all the same to him. This is because he drives his enjoyment from being in the company of God.

There are secondary signs that spring from the fundamental sign. Some of these are

1. To renounce the worldly life and not care about it.
2. To be generous with what one has.
3. To find comfort in losing ownership.
4. To not have a hope in a long life.
5. The ascetic is a stranger in this life and the knowledgeable scholar is a stranger in the Hereafter.

Al-Fudail said, *“God placed all evil in one house. The key to this house is the love for the worldly life. God placed all goodness in one house. The key to that house is renouncing this worldly life.”*

This is what we wanted to mention about the essence of asceticism and its rules. But asceticism is not complete without putting one’s trust in God. This is the topic for the next book.

Book 5: The Book of the Oneness of God and Putting One's Trust in Him

Putting one's trust in God is one of the stations of religion and one of the positions of those who have certitude. It is one of the highest grades of those who are brought closer to God. Its knowledge is ambiguous and its actual accomplishment is difficult. Its ambiguity stems from the fact that considering the means and causes and depending entirely on them amounts to associating partners with God. In the mean time, ignoring the means and causes entirely, amounts to slandering the Sunnah and disparaging the Islamic law. It is utter ignorance to rely on the means and causes while ignoring the fact that they are only means and causes. Understanding the true meaning of putting one's trust in God in a way that reconciles the requirements of the belief in the oneness of God, the transmitted traditions, and the tenets of Islamic law is extremely difficult. Only the experienced scholars on whom God bestowed a spiritual insight and made the facts clear to them are able to remove the cover. They are able to see the true meaning of putting one's trust in God.

We will start with an introduction about the virtue of putting one's trust in God, then we will discuss the belief in the oneness of God. This will constitute the first part of the book. The second part of the book will deal with the state of putting one's trust in God and its actions.

The Virtues of Putting One's Trust in God

The virtues of putting one's trust in God can be gleaned from Quranic verse. God said, *"and put your trust in God if you are true believers."* (5:23) God said, *"And in God let the believers put their trust."* (14: 12) He said, *"And whosoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him."* (65: 3) and, *"God loves those who put their trust (in Him)."* (3: 159). How great is the position of those who are loved by God? They have been promised that God will suffice them. A person in the position that God suffices him, God loves him, and God takes care of him, has indeed achieved a great victory. A person who is loved by God will not be tormented, will not be distanced from God, and will not be shielded from God.

God said, *"Whoso puts his trust in God, God is indeed Eminent, Wise."* (8: 49) Those who put their trust in God will never be humiliated or lost because God is Eminent. God has the ability to manage wisely the affairs of those who put their trust in Him, because He is Wise.

The Prophet (PBUH) said⁷⁰, *"I was shown my nation filling the horizon. I liked how they look and I liked their multitude. I was asked, 'Do you like that?' I said, 'Yes.' It was said, 'These in addition to seventy thousand others will be admitted to paradise.'" The companions asked the Prophet (PBUH), "Who are these?" He said, "Those who do not seek to be healed using fire, do not believe in bad omen, do not ask others to make "Ruqia" for them, and they put their trust in God."* A companion by the name of Ukasha (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) to pray God so that he would be one of them. The Prophet (PBUH) prayed for him. Another companion asked the Prophet (PBUH) the same, he said, *"Ukasha, got it before you."* The Prophet (PBUH) said⁷¹, *"If you truly put your trust in God, He would have made provision for you like He provides for the birds. They go forward in the morning hungry, and they come satiated."*

⁷⁰ Narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

⁷¹ Narrated by 'Umar (RA) and reported by Ahmed, Al-Tirmidhi, Al-Nassaie, and Ibn Majah

Al-Khawas recited the verse, *“And put your trust in the Living who never dies.”* (25: 58) He said, *“No servant should seek the help of anyone other than God.”* Some scholars said, *“Let not your concern about the provision that you will certainly get, distract you away from fulfilling the obligatory duty that you have to perform, lest you lose your reward in the Hereafter and you will not gain from this life except that which God has decreed for you.”* Ibn Adham asked a monk, *“Where do you get your sustenance?”* The monk said, *“This is a knowledge that I do not have. Ask my Lord, how he feeds me.”*

Some said, *“When I took God as my trustee, I find a way for every kind of goodness.”* We ask God to teach us good manners.

The Essence of the Belief in the Oneness of God which is the Cornerstone of Putting One’s Trust in God

You should know that putting one’s trust in God is a component of the faith. Every components of faith consists of knowledge, state, and action. Putting one’s trust in God consists of a knowledge which is the root, action which is the fruit, and a state which indicates putting one’s trust in God.

Let us start with the knowledge, which is the root. This is what we call faith. Faith is the belief in the truthfulness of something. The heart acquires knowledge when it believes in the truthfulness of something. If the knowledge grew stronger it becomes certitude. But the gates to certitude are many. We only need the gates that lead to putting our trust in God. This is the belief in the Oneness of God; which is expressed in the statement, *“I believe that there is no deity except God, He has no associates;”* the belief in His power, which is expressed by the statement, *“Only to Him belongs the kingdom;”* the belief in His generosity and wisdom, which is expressed by the statement, *“Praise be to Him.”* Thus, whoever says, *“I believe that there is no deity except God, He has no associates, only to Him belongs the kingdom, praise be to Him,”* attains faith, the cornerstone of putting one’s trust in God. This statement should become an inherent attribute that overpowers the heart.

The belief in the Oneness of God is the foundation. Much can be said about it. It is a divinely unveiled knowledge (Mukashafah). However, some of divinely unveiled knowledge is relevant to the actions through the states. The knowledge needed for the proper conduct of the daily transactions cannot be perfected without it. We will only deal with that which is relevant to the knowledge of the daily transactions.

The belief in the oneness of God has four levels: a core, the core of the core, the bark and the bark of the bark. An example which will make this categorization easy to understand for those who have weak understanding, is a walnut. It has two covers and it has a core and inside the core there is the oil which is the core of the core. The levels of the belief in the Oneness of God are

1. The first level of the belief in the Oneness of God is when a person utters the words, *“I believe there is no deity except God.”* He says with the tongue, but his heart is heedless of its meaning or he does not believe in its truth like the hypocrites.

2. The second level of the belief in the Oneness of God is to utter the statement with the tongue and to believe in its truth with the heart as most Muslims do. This is the way lay people believe.
3. The third level is to gain this knowledge through a divinely unveiling of the knowledge. This is the station of those who are brought closer to God. Such a person, sees many things but he knows that, even though they are many, they are emanating from the One, the Overpowering.
4. The fourth level is when he sees nothing in existence except the One. This is the observation of the sincere truthful. The Sufis call that “evanescence” in the belief in the Oneness of God; because, since he does not see anyone but One, he also does not see himself. He is so absorbed in the belief in the Oneness of God to the extent that he does not see himself. Thus, he becomes nonexistent in his own view. He is not aware of the existence of himself as well as the other people.

A person who belongs to the first level of the belief in the Oneness of God, utters the statement of the belief in the Oneness of God with his tongue. This gains him protection from being killed. A person who belongs to the second level, believes in the Oneness of God in the sense that his heart believes in the meaning of the statement he utters with his tongue. His heart is free of the denial of the truth of the statement. However, the statement becomes a knot over his heart which does not allow the heart to expand for more. This grants him protection from the torment in the Hereafter, provided the knot remains intact without being weakened by sins. A person who belongs to the third level, gained his understanding of the belief in the Oneness of God through a divinely unveiled knowledge. He only witnesses one doer, since the truth has been disclosed to him. A person who belongs to the fourth level, believes in the Oneness of God in the sense that, he only witnessed the One. He does not see the many except as a manifestation of the One. This is the ultimate goal of the belief of the Oneness of God.

The first level is like the external cover of the walnut, the second level is like the internal cover of the walnut, the third level is like the core, and the fourth level is like the oil that is extracted from the core.

The external cover of the walnut is useless; its taste is bitter; its inner surface is ugly; it cannot be used as firewood, and it takes space unnecessarily. Its only use is to cover the nut for a while, then it should be discarded. Similarly, uttering the statement of the belief in the Oneness of God with the tongue, without actually believing in its truth with the heart, is useless and harmful. It is disparaged externally and internally. But it is useful in protecting the inner cover till the time of death.

The internal cover is the heart and the body. When a hypocrite utters the statement of the belief in the Oneness of God, he gains protection from being killed by the conqueror. A conqueror is not asked to open up the hearts of people. The sword can only harm the body, which is the internal cover. However, its use remains only till the time of death. The inner cover is also useful because it protects the core from becoming rotten. It can also be used as firewood. Similarly, believing in the Oneness of God without receiving divinely unveiled knowledge has many benefits. It is better than the mere uttering of the statement but it is less valuable than receiving

divinely unveiled knowledge which causes the expansion of the breast and allows the light of the truth to shine on it. This is the expansion referred to in the verse, “*And whomsoever it is God’s will to guide, He expands his breast for Islam, and whomsoever He wills to leave straying, He makes his breast constricted and narrow as though he were ascending upwards in the sky;*” (6: 125) and, “*Is he whose heart God has opened for Islam, so that he follows a light from his Lord, (as he who disbelieves)?*” (39: 22) Although the core is the precious part of the nut and it is the part sought after, but it is not free from being tainted by juices and oils which can be extracted from it. Similarly, uniting (*focusing*) the action is the high aim of the travelers on the path of knowledge to God but it is not free from being tainted by being distracted by the observation of others and seeing the many instead of witnessing the One, the Truth.

If you ask, “*How can one witness only the One, while he observes the heaven, the earth, and the many other bodies? How can, the many become one?*” You should know that this is the ultimate goal of the science of the divinely unveiled knowledge. The secrets of this science should not be written in a book. In addition, it is not relevant to the science of the daily transactions. An example for this is the human being. The human body has many parts, so it can be considered as many, but from the point of view of humanity he is considered as a single human being. Similarly, everything in existence, the Creator and the created, can be considered and witnessed from many different points. One point of view considers them many while another point of view considers them one. The consideration in which only the One, the Truth, can sometimes last and sometimes passes like a lightning. The former is rare and the latter is the more common.

If you say, “This needs to be explained to show how is putting one’s trust on God is built on this?” I would say, as far as the fourth level is concerned, we should not try to explain it. In addition, putting one’s trust on God is not based on it. The state of putting one’s trust on God is achieved as a result of the third level. It is clear that the first level is hypocrisy.

As far as the second level, it is wide spread among Muslims in general. It should be bolstered using theology to uncover the tricks of those who introduce unsubstantiated innovations in the religion.

As far as the third level is concerned, this is the belief in the Oneness of God upon which putting one’s trust in God is established. The sum of it is that you realize that there is no doer except God; each and every thing that exists whether creatures, provision, bounty, deprivation, life, death, wealth, poverty, and all other things have been created solely by God. He has no partner. Once you realize this, you will turn to no one except Him; you fear Him, put your hope in Him, you place your confidence in Him, and you put your trust in Him. He is the sole doer; all others are controlled by Him, no one has the ability to move an atom in the kingdom of heavens and earth. If you receive the divinely unveiled knowledge, then this will be clearer to you than observing it with your own eyes.

Satan will endeavor to block your way, so that you do not reach this level of the belief in the Oneness of God. He will try to introduce into your heart, the tainted concept of associating partners with God. He will use two arguments. The first argument is based on the way the living beings make their choices. The second argument is based on the consideration of the non-living

things. Considering that rain is all what you need to grow plants, clouds are all what you need to get rain, cold is all what you need to form clouds, and wind is all you need to move a ship amounts to associating partners with God. This consideration displays ignorance of the real causes of things. This is why God said, *“And when they embark on a ship, they call on God, making their devotion sincerely (and exclusively) to Him; but when He has delivered them safely to land, behold, they associate others (with Him).”* (29:65) It was said in the interpretation of the verse that they attributed their safety to the action of the wind alone, this amounted to an act of associating partners with God.

Whoever discovers affairs of the world, will know that wind is air and air does not move unless something else causes it to move. The thing that moves air needs something else to cause it to move, and so on until we reach the One that does need something to move Him nor is He Movable Himself. Consider the case of a person that was condemned to death. The king issued a command to forgive him. Attributing the delivery of the ship to the wind is like attributing the delivery of the condemned to the pen that was used to write the king’s command. This is utter ignorance. Read if you will the verse, *“And you did not throw when you threw, but it was God who threw.”* (8: 17) Once you recognize that the wind and the pen are tools and that the controlling power that controls these tools and all other tools in the universe is God; then Satan will despair of you and will leave you alone. He will know that he failed to trick you using one argument. He will then try to trick you using another argument.

The second trick that Satan will use to make you swerve from the path of the belief in the Oneness of God is an argument about how do living beings make their choices regarding their voluntary acts. He will say, *“How do you claim that everything is from God, while that person gives you your provision, on his own accord? He could give it to you or he could withhold it from you. How can you not fear a person who is having a sword on your neck, if he wills he can cut your neck and if he wills he can let you go? How can you not ask for his forgiveness and you see that your life is in his hands, and you have no doubt about it?”* Many people fell for this argument except the sincere servants of God. Those are the servants who do not yield to the authority of Satan. They have seen by the light that was shown on their spiritual insight.

However, those whose breasts did not expand by the light of God to receive Islam, lack the spiritual insight which can recognize the power of the Compeller of the heavens and earth. On the other hand, God made every atom in the universe to sing His praise and He made His servants who have hearts that can observe and listen to their praise. These atoms speak eloquently without uttering a letter or a sound, bearing witness that they are helpless. Their speech cannot be heard by those who are shielded from hearing. This not the apparent hearing, which all living things including donkeys have, but it is the hearing that allows the person to hear the unspoken words. Words that are not written, nor they have a sound; words that are not spoken in Arabic nor in a foreign language.

If you say, *“How can you reconcile between the belief in the Oneness of God which attributes all deeds to God, and Islamic law which holds people accountable for their own deeds?”* If the servant is the doer, how can God be a doer? And if God is the doer, how can the servant be a doer? I say that this is confusing, if we attach one meaning to the word “doer,” but if it has two

different meanings then, there is no contradiction. An example of this is to say, “*The prince killed the man.*” And another would say, “*The executioner killed the man.*” The word “*killed*” in these two statements have different meanings. Similarly, the word doer takes a certain meaning when referred to God, and it takes a different meaning when referred to the servant of God. God is the doer in the sense that He is the Creator who causes things to exist. The servant of God is a doer in the sense that he is the place in whom the power was created, after the will has been created in it, after the knowledge has been created in it. The power became dependent on the will, and the action is dependent on the power. Thus, the decreed things are connected to the two wills. This is the reason that God sometimes refers the actions to the angels, sometimes to His servants, and sometimes to Himself. Take for example, the verses about death, “*The angel of death, put in charge of you, will take your souls,*” (32: 11) then He said, “*God takes the souls at the time of their death.*” (39: 42) God said, “*Have you seen that which you sow?*” (56: 63) In this verse, God attributed the act to us; then, He said, “*We pour water down in abundance, and We split the soil open, and produce therein grain, and grapes and green fodder, and olives and palm-trees, and thick gardens, and fruits and fodder, provision for you and your cattle.*” (80: 25-32)

This is what we have chosen from the topic of the belief of the Oneness of God. The belief in the Oneness of God leads to the state of putting one’s trust in Him. This does not become complete except through the belief in the Mercy and Wisdom of God. The belief in the Oneness of God leads to the recognition of the One who causes things to happen. The belief in the mercy and its greatness leads to the confidence in the One who causes things to happen. One does not put his trust in someone unless he is confident of the wisdom of the person in whom he is going to put his trust.

The Second Part of the Book: Putting One's Trust in God

The State of Putting One's Trust in God

We have stated before that the station of putting one's trust in God consists of knowledge, state, and action. We have already elaborated on the knowledge. Putting one's trust in God is a manifestation of the state; it is grounded in the knowledge and its fruit is the action.

The word, "Twakkal" in Arabic is derived from the word, "Wikalah," meaning authorization (or power of attorney). A person authorizes another to take care of his business. The person who is trusted or depended upon is called the agent. You only deputize or authorize a person to take care of your business, if you trust him and has confidence in his ability to perform his duties efficiently. Then you put your trust in him. This is "Twakkal."

When you reach with certainty that God is the sole doer, that He has the absolute knowledge and power to take care of His servants, that He uses His limitless mercy and kindness to take care of His servants, then you will definitely put your trust in Him. You will realize that no one has might or power except that provided by God. Might creates movement and power produces ability.

If you discover the meaning of putting your trust in God, and understand the meaning of the state which is called putting your trust in God, then you should know that this state has three degrees of strength.

1. The first degree entails that the person has to be confident of God and His care as he would be confident of an agent whom he authorized to conduct his business.
2. The second degree is stronger than the first. In this case, the relationship with God would be similar to the relationship between a baby and his mother. The baby does not know anyone except his mother; she is the one who comforts him when he needs comfort; and he relies on her completely. When he sees her he attaches himself to her, and her name would be the only name to utter when she leaves him. He trusts himself to her care, he knows that she suffices him, and he is comforted by her kindness. His trust is based on a natural disposition. A person who devotes himself to God, who looks to God for help, and who relies completely on God, just as a baby would do with his mother, is a person who has truly put his trust in God.

The difference between the first degree and the second degree, is that in the second degree, the person does not concern himself of what he will gain from putting his trust in God, his main concern is completely devoted to God alone. While the person in the first degree is forced to put his trust in God because of what he will gain. Sahl said, "*The lowest degree of putting your trust in God entails abandoning what you wish for. The second degree entails abandoning the ability to make choices.*" When he was asked about the highest degree of putting one's trust in God, he said, "*No one knows it except he who reached the second degree.*"

3. The third degree is the highest. A person who reaches this degree leaves himself to the power of God just like a dead person between the hands of the person who prepares him

for burial. The person sees himself fully controlled by the eternal power. This is a person who has a strong certitude that God is the cause of actions, power, will, knowledge, and all other attributes. He does not even ask God for anything because he has put his trust fully in God.

If you ask, “*Do these states exist?*” You should know that it is not impossible for these states to exist. The first one is the most common, the other two degrees are rare. If you ask, “*Can the servant still manage his affairs and can he consider the means and causes for things?*” You should know that people in the state of the third degree have abandoned managing their affairs completely. Those in the state of the second degree, abandoned managing their affairs except that they harken to God with their invocation and pleading. People in the state of the first degree, do not completely abandon managing their affairs and making choices.

If you contemplate this, you will get rid of all the problems and confusion regarding putting your trust in God. You will understand that abandoning the planning and managing of your affairs is not a prerequisite for putting your trust in God. This will be detailed further in the section on actions. The main thing is to understand that there is no might or power except that which is provided by God. One should believe in the truth and veracity of the saying, “*There is no might or power except that which is provided by God.*” Whoever witnessed this will earn the great reward that was promised those who say, “*There is no might or power except that which is provided by God.*” It may be thought that this is unrealistic. How can it be possible to gain the great reward promised in the traditions to those who say these few words, which are easy to say and easy to believe in. However, the reward is for being a witness, in the sense we mentioned under the topic of the belief in the Oneness of God. There is definitely a great reward for this statement as promised in the different traditions, similar to the great reward promised to those who say, “*I believe that there is no deity except God.*” However, the reward in one case is different from the other. The reward promised for each of these two statements is commensurate with the scope of the statement. The statement, “*There is no might or power except that which is provided by God,*” confirms that there are two things that belong to God: might and power. The statement, “*I believe that there is no deity except God,*” confirms that everything belongs to God. You should compare “*two things*” to “*everything*” to know the relationship between the rewards for the two statements.

We have mentioned before that the belief in the Oneness of God has two covers and two cores. Similarly, this statement has two covers and two cores. Most people focus on the covers and ignore the cores. The Prophet’s saying⁷², “*Whoever says, ‘I believe that there is no deity except God,’ sincerely from the bottom of his heart, he will be admitted to paradise,*” refers to the two cores.

⁷² Narrated by Zaid ibn Arqam (RA) and reported by Al-Tabarani

Some of the Scholar's Sayings Regarding the State of Putting One's Trust in God

We will now cite some of what different scholars have said on the topic to demonstrate that while each of them emphasizes some of these aspects, none of them contradicts what we have thus far discussed. Abu Musa Al-Daili said, *"I asked Abu Yazid, 'What is putting one's trust in God?' He asked me in return, 'What do you say about it?' I said, 'Our colleagues say, 'If you find that you have been surrounded by wild animals and serpents, your inner thoughts will not be affected (meaning you will not doubt that what is decreed for you will be what transpires.)'"* Abu Yazid said, *"This is close enough. However, if you make a distinction between the inhabitants of paradise, who would be enjoying the bliss of paradise; and the inhabitants of Hellfire, who would be suffering the torment of fire, then you will be out of the circle of those who put their trust in God."* Here Abu Musa refers to the highest states of putting one's trust in God, which is the state of those in the third degree of putting one's trust in God. But, Abu Yazid is referring to one of the rarest types of knowledge, which is one of the foundations of putting one's trust in God: the knowledge of the wisdom behind God's actions. What God does, should necessarily be done. Therefore, there is no distinction between the inhabitants of paradise and the inhabitants of Hellfire from the perspective of Wisdom and Justice. This is the most obscure type of knowledge, beyond which lies the mystery of fate.

It is not a prerequisite for those in the first degree of putting one's trust in God to ignore the serpents in the example given above, Abu Bakr (RA) was concerned that the serpents may attack them while he was with the Prophet (PBUH) in the cave. He blocked the holes through which serpents may enter the cave. One may say, that he used his foot to do so, but his inner thoughts were never affected; or it may be said that he did that because he was worried about the welfare of the Prophet (PBUH), not that he was worried about his own safety. Putting one's trust in God is only negated if the inner thoughts of the person are moved or changed. We will cite examples later that show that such actions do not contradict putting one's trust in God. Fear of the danger posed by the serpents is what changes the inner thoughts of the person, while the right thing is to fear the One who controls the serpents. The serpent does not have might or power except that which are provided by God. A person who puts his trust in God, can take measures to protect himself against the danger posed by the serpent, but he knows that his own measures will not save him. It is God, the Creator of might and power, and who manages the affairs, who will save him.

Dhu Al-Nun Al-Masri was asked about putting one's trust in God. He said, *"It is to abandon all lords (except God) and not to depend on any means."* Abandoning all lords refers to the belief in the Oneness of God; and ignoring all means refers to actions. In his statement there is no explicit mention of the state, however, there is an implicit reference to it. When he was asked to elaborate, he said, *"It is the complete devotion of the soul to serving God, and shedding all signs of lordship off it."* This is a reference to dissociating oneself from any self might or power.

Abu Abd Allah Al- Quarshi was asked about putting one's trust in God. He said, *"To attach oneself to God in all states."* The person who was asking, asked him to elaborate further. He said, *"Ignore any means that lead to other means, and leave it to God to do that."* The first half

of the statement is the common part of the three degrees. But the second half refers specifically to the third degree. This is similar to what Prophet Abraham (PBUH) said, when Gabriel (PBUH) asked him, “*Do you need help?*” Abraham (PBUH) answered, “*I don’t need anything from you.*” Abraham (PBUH) recognized that Gabriel’s (PBUH) question could be the means for his salvation, but he was also confident that if God wanted him to be saved at the hands of Gabriel, He would employ Gabriel (PBUH) to save him.

Abu Ali Al-Daqaq said, “*Putting your trust in God consists of three steps: putting your trust in God, then submission, then leaving it completely up to God.*” A person who puts his trust in God is confident of His promise; a person who submits to God finds his faith in God’s knowledge sufficient; and a person who leaves the matter completely to God is fully content with His decree. Knowledge is the foundation; promise follows; and judgment follows promise.

The Actions of those who Put Their Trust in God

You should know that knowledge produces the state, and action is the fruit of the state. One may entertain the idea that the essence of putting one’s trust in God is to abandon the use of physical work necessary to earn one’s living; to abandon the use of one’s intellect to plan and manage affairs; and to lie down on the ground like a neglected rag. This is the idea of the ignorant. This has been prohibited by the religious law. Religious law commended those who put their trust in God, how can it then, allow such commendable state to be reached through a prohibited means.

Let us uncover the truth and say that putting one’s trust in God becomes manifest in the manner in which a person pursues his goals in life. Every goal that a human being by his own choice utilizes his knowledge and ability to pursue may be reduced to one of four kinds: to obtain a benefit, preserve a benefit that has been already accrued, to repel a harm, or to alleviate a harm that has already happened. In each of these kinds of endeavors the manner in which the person strives reveals the extent of his putting his trust in God. Specifically, there are three kinds of means by which a person may strive to achieve a goal.

The first is the kind that God has ordained as an indispensable means to the ends. An example of this is when a hungry person sitting before a meal reaches his hand out to pick up the food, move it into his mouth, chew it, and swallow it. To think that putting one’s trust in God requires the refusal to employ these means and to wait patiently for God to satisfy his hunger without his doing any of these acts is simply insanity. God has ordained that these means lead to the particular end (in this example the satisfaction of hunger). Living according to the norms that God has set in the universe does not contradict trust in God. Rather the trust in God with regards to these means is purely a matter of knowledge and internal state that leave the person in no doubt that the One who provided him the food, the hand to reach for it, the mouth to ingest it, the teeth to chew it, and system to swallow and digest it is God and that had God willed he would have had none of that.

The second kind of means is the kind that God has ordained as usually but not necessarily leading to an end. An example of this is taking a job to earn income. With respect to these kinds of human efforts and material means putting trust in God *may sometimes* require that one refrain from these just as it may sometimes require that one engages in them. The distinction relates to

the purpose and extent for which a person employs such means as well as the consequences to his own state of attempting to abandon such means. Consider as an example a person who decides to abandon the “rat race” and embrace some form of ascetic life. The first question that arises is the person’s purpose in doing this. If it is to dedicate oneself to the worship of God and a personal spiritual journey to God then this may be acceptable. However, we should then ask the second question as to how the person expects to survive. If there are circumstances that make it possible that some people from time to time may gift this person with the bare necessities or if the person intends to break his seclusion from time to time to earn his bare necessities, then this is acceptable. If, however the person places himself in such a position, physically or socially, such that it is impossible within the norms that God has established in the universe for him to receive the bare necessities that allow him to survive, then this person has embraced the type of insanity that we referred to earlier and this course of action has nothing to do with the trust in God. Finally, even if the person has adopted this course of action with good purpose and has placed himself in such a situation that it is reasonably possible for him to receive his bare necessity, we must still enquire as to the internal state of this person. If the person who has chosen such a life of poverty is troubled by this life and longs for the means that he has given up then it is better for him and more in keeping with having trust in God that he should actively pursue his living rather than be in a state where his heart is looking to others while his outward behavior is designed to rely only on God, for the heart’s reliance on God is a truer and more important aspect of putting one’s trust in God than the abandoning of outward actions.

The third kind of means is the kind that God has ordained to be beyond the control of human beings either completely or within an ethical framework. Clearly, the investment of effort in the pursuit of such means to desired ends is entirely contradictory to putting one’s trust in God. Unethical things such as cheating or stealing are clear. Less clear are the things that most people fall into of trying to plan their pursuits down to the most minute details that are almost guaranteed to go awry as they are usually beyond the control of the human being.

This leads us to understand that putting one’s trust in God may entail an ascetic life dedicated to worship and service so long as the person’s heart is consistent with this purpose and so long as the person does not abandon the necessary means that God has ordained for survival. However, putting one’s trust in God may also entail being employed in the earning of one’s living so long as one’s knowledge and internal state leave no doubt in him that the One who provides his sustenance is God and that the means by which he pursues his ends only lead to these ends by God’s decree. In addition, this latter choice is the better choice if one’s pursuit of a living is with the purpose of being of benefit to others. The example of Abu Bakr (RA) proves that earning a living does not contradict the state of putting one’s trust in God, provided that one satisfies the proper conditions that we have explained. The day after he was chosen to be a Caliph, Abu Bakr took his merchandise and went to the market to do business. Muslims resented this, they asked him, *“How can you do this, after you have been chosen as a successor to the Prophet (PBUH)?”* He said, *“I need to support my family. How can you trust me, to take care of Muslims if I cannot even take care of my own family?”* The community decided to allot the Caliph a salary thereby

recognizing the administration of the State as a full time job. He accepted their offer because he decided that spending his time in taking care of the affairs of Muslims is more important. It is impossible to say that Abu Bakr (RA) was not in a state of putting his trust in God. Who would be more deserving than him in earning the state of putting his trust in God? He showed that he put his trust in God, not because he did not work for his living, but because instead of being concerned about his earnings and whether it will satisfy his needs or not, he knew that God is the One who controls the earnings, and manages the means and causes. He fulfilled the conditions of getting just enough to address his essential needs. He did not try to get more, show pride in his earnings, nor did he have savings.

It was narrated that a man used to wait for ‘Umar (RA) at the door of his house, to ask him for help. Someone said to him, *“Did you migrate for the sake of God or for the sake of ‘Umar? Go learn some Quran, this will be better for you than standing by ‘Umar’s (RA) door to ask him for help.”* The man left, and after a while, ‘Umar (RA) missed the man. ‘Umar (RA) looked for him. ‘Umar (RA) found out that the man went into seclusion and devoted himself for the worship of God. ‘Umar (RA) said to him, *“I missed you, what kept you busy?”* The man said, *“I recited the Quran, and I found that I don’t need your help anymore.”* ‘Umar (RA) asked, *“May God have mercy on you, how so?”* The man said, *“I recited the verse, ‘And in heaven is your provision and whatever you are promised.’ (51: 22) I said, ‘How can I seek my provision on earth, while it is in heaven?’”* ‘Umar (RA) wept and said, *“You have told the truth.”*

Trust in God in the Case of Caregivers

You should know that the situation of a person having dependents is different from the situation of a single person regarding putting one’s trust in God. For a single person to put his trust in God completely, he has to have the ability to do two things.

1. He should be able to stay hungry for a full week without craving food, or feeling bad for not having food.
2. He should fulfill certain characteristics that come under the topic of faith, which we have mentioned before. One of which is to accept death willingly in case he does not earn enough money to buy food. This willing acceptance of death is based on the knowledge that hunger and death are his provision. His provision may have been deficient in this life, but it will be an abundance in the Hereafter. Thus, he recognizes that it was decreed that he would get the better of the two provisions.

These two conditions cannot be applied to the family. One should not force his family to suffer hunger, nor should he force them to believe that dying out of hunger is something that they should be happy with. A person with a family who wants to put his trust in God should adopt the conditions for trusting in God by a person who needs to earn his living. This is similar to the way Abu Bakr (RA) put his trust in God when he tried to earn a living to support his family. Leaving one’s family and going into seclusion, or neglecting their affairs thinking that this is an expression for putting their trust in God, is forbidden. This may even lead to their destruction, which is something that he will be held accountable for.

If you understand this, you will understand that the station of putting one's trust in God is attainable for a person who can overpower himself. Those who deny the possibility of putting one's trust in God are ignorant. Do not combine the two bankruptcies: the loss of sense which leads to the denial of the presence of the station of putting one's trust in God, and the loss of knowledge which leads to the denial of the truth of putting one's trust in God.

It is therefore important, to content yourself with little provision which you will definitely get, even if you tried to escape from it. At this point, God will send you your provision from wherever you do not expect. If you remain conscious of God and put your trust in Him, you will experience firsthand, the truth of His words, *"God will find a way out for he who remains conscious of Him. And will provide for him from where he does not expect."* (65: 2-3)

A group of people went to see Al-Junaid. He asked, *"What do you want?"* They said, *"We seek provision."* He said, *"If you know where it is, then seek it there."* They said, *"We will ask God."* He said, *"If you think that God forgets you, then remind Him."* They said, *"We will stay home and put our trust in God, then we will see what will happen."* He said, *"If you put your trust in God on a trial basis, then you are doubtful of God."* They said, *"What should we do?"* He said, *"Do nothing."*

The state of putting one's trust in God is perfected when two things happen: full satisfaction on part of the servant and fulfilment of the assured provision on part of God. He who assured those, who put their trust in Him of their provision and managed the means from them to get it, is Truthful. Become satisfied and try, you will witness the fulfillment of the promise. The promise will be fulfilled and you will receive provision from wherever you never expected. However, when you put your trust in God, do not rely on the means but look at the One who creates the means.

If you contemplate how things run with the will of God, you will know that the amount of the provision is independent of the means to attain it. One of the Kings of Persia asked a wise man about the foolish who receives provision while a person with intellect has been deprived of provision. He said, *"The Creator wanted people to know that He is the Provider. If every person with intellect receives provision and every foolish person does not receive provision, people will think that intellect is the cause of provision."*

The Way those who Put their Trust in God Deal with the Means

The Reasons for Keeping savings

There are three scenarios for saving money that has been gained through inheritance or any other means.

1. A person may use a portion of the money to satisfy his immediate essential needs; like buying food, clothes, or a reasonable residence. He should not save the remaining money but he should spend it on the needy. He could save a little to give away later to someone who is in need. This is the case of the person who fulfills the conditions for putting one's trust in God. This is the highest degree.

2. The second scenario is the opposite to the first one. This is a scenario that takes the person out of the circle of those who put their trust in God. In this case the person would save money that should last for a year or more. Such person is not considered of those who put their trust in God. It was said that there are three living beings who save: the mouse, the ant, and the son of Adam.
3. The third scenario is for those who save enough money to satisfy their needs for a period of forty days or less. The question whether saving money to cover their needs for forty days would take them outside the circle of people who put their trust in God, arose. There are different views regarding this. Sahl is of the opinion that a person in this category should not be considered a person who puts his trust in God. Al-Khawas is of the opinion that a person who saves enough to satisfy his needs for forty days can be still considered a person who puts his trust in God, but if he saves for more than forty days, then this will take him out of the circle of people who put their trust in God. Abu Taleb Al-Mackki is of the opinion that even a person who saves enough money to satisfy his needs for more than forty days can still be considered a person who puts his trust in God.

People might think that keeping savings contradicts putting one's trust in God. The truth is, abstaining from keeping savings as a sign of putting one's trust in God is not complete unless it was an expression of not hoping for a long life. However, the purpose is to support the heart so that it will be devoted to the remembrance of God. So, a person who will not entertain any worries if he does not have savings, will not long to that which is in the hands of others, and his heart will only be interested in the True One in Whom he puts his trust. Such a person should not keep any savings. A person who worries about not having savings to the extent that his heart will be distracted away from the remembrance of God and performing acts of worship; it is better for such a person to keep savings.

The Prophet (PBUH) saved for his dependents enough food to last them one year. However, that did not take away from his trust in God, because he never relied on what he had saved. But The Prophet (PBUH) did save to give an example for the strong people in his nation. However, the strong among his people are weak in comparison to him. When the Prophet (PBUH) saved for his dependents enough food to last them one year; he did not do this for a weakness in his heart or the hearts of his dependents, but he did this to give an example for the weak people in his nation. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁷³, *“God likes people to avail themselves of the privileges which He allows for them, as He like people to undertake the tough assignments that He assigns them.”* He wanted to comfort the weak among his nation. Making it difficult for some people may end up causing them to leave the little good that they can do. This indicates that keeping savings may be harmful for some and may be beneficial for others. The final rule is that keeping savings does not violate the conditions for putting one's trust in God, unless the person does busy his heart with the business of savings.

Means for Avoidance of Harm

You should know that harm is the reason for fear of loss of life or money. In principle, using the means to avoid harm does not violate the conditions for putting one's trust in God. The means

⁷³ Narrated by Ibn 'Umar (RA) and reported by Ahmed

for avoidance of harm can be divided into three categories: unequivocal means, probable means, and improbable means. Unequivocal means are means created by God as an indispensable means to the ends. Probable means are means which will probably lead to the achievement of an end. Improbable means are means whose relationship with the end are not clear.

Not using the improbable means is a condition for putting one's trust in God. Not using the means that will certainly result in avoidance of harm, can be done sometimes. Examples of this is when the harm is caused by others. If a person has the choice to retaliate and be vindictive or to be patient in face of persecution, you should know that perseverance and patience are prerequisites for putting one's trust in God. God said, "*(He is) Lord of the east and the west; there is no god but He. Take Him therefore as your Guardian. And have patience with what they say, and ignore them graciously.*" (73: 9-10) "*We surely will endure the hurt you inflict on us. In God let the trusting put their trust.*" (14: 12) However, neglecting to employ the means to avoid the harm caused by wild animals is not a prerequisite for putting one's trust in God, because it is not beneficial. Locking the house door, to protect possessions, does not detract from putting one's trust in God. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded⁷⁴ the Bedouin, to tie his camel. God said, "*You who believe, be on your guard,*" (4:71) and said regarding the fear prayers, "*And let another party who have not prayed come forward and pray with you, taking all precaution and bearing arms.*" (4: 102) Bearing arms in prayer is considered a probable means for harm avoidance.

If you say, how can a person who armed himself for fear of the enemy, locked his door for fear of the thief, and tied his camel for fear of losing it be considered a person who puts his trust in God? I say, he puts his trust in God on the basis of knowledge and state. He should know that the locked door will not stop the thief from coming into the house, it is God only who is able to stop the thief to come into the house. Many locked doors were useless, and many tied camels died, and many armed men were overpowered. So, do not rely on the means but put your trust in the One who creates the means.

The state of a person who puts his trust in God makes him satisfied with whatever God has decreed. He would address God saying, "*My Lord, I am satisfied with your decree, even if you employ someone who would rob me of my possessions. If this happens I declare my possessions to be in your cause. I do not know whether you have given me these possessions as a gift that You will not take it back, or as a trust that You will take back. I do not know whether this is my provision, or it was destined to be the provision of another person. I am satisfied with whatever decision you have decreed. I did not lock my door to protect myself from Your decree, I was only using the means that You have created. I only trust You, the Creator of the means.*" Having this state, and the knowledge that we mentioned above do not violate the conditions for being one of those who put their trust in God.

If he went home, and found that his possessions have been returned back to him, he should consider that this is a new bounty from God. But if he did not find his possessions, then he should examine his heart. If he finds his heart joyful and content, having known that the

⁷⁴ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

provision that God took from him in this life will increase his provision in the Hereafter, then he should know that his station of putting his trust in God is sound. This shows that he is truthful in putting his trust in God. On the other hand, if he finds that his heart is aching even though he perseveres, then he should know that he was not truthful in claiming that he has put his trust in God. Because the station of putting one's trust in God is beyond the station of asceticism. Asceticism is not complete unless the person does not feel regret for losing anything, nor does he feel joyful for gaining something. This person may attain the station of the perseverant, if he does not complain about his loss and does not pursue the thief. If he complains openly and pursues the thief, then this theft would be a cause for another sin that he earns. This is because this shows that he failed to attain any of the stations that he claimed. He should strive and should not believe the claims that his self makes nor should he be deluded by it.

If you say, how could it be imagined that a person would not feel bad when he loses his necessary possession. Had he not cherished it, why did he then keep them? How cannot he feel bad about losing it, while he cherishes it? I say, he kept these possessions because he used them to help him perform his rituals. He thought that it was good for him to have these possessions because, had it not been good for him to have these possessions, God would not have made it easy for him to acquire them. These thoughts did amount to unequivocal knowledge. He may have been given these possessions to be tested when they are lost, so that he would work harder to achieve his objective; then his reward would be greater. The fact that God employed the thief to steal his possessions, will make him change his original thoughts; because in all circumstances he remains confident that his benefit will be realized in whatever God will decree for him. He would say, *"God knew it was good for me to have these possessions for a certain time, when this time was up and it became better for me not to have them, God employed the thief to take them."* This will relieve his sadness for losing his possessions. He will not find his joy in having the means but he will find his joy in the fact that the Creator of the means gave him the means. He who knows God, knows His actions, and knows His rules which manage the affairs of His servants, will never enjoy having the means, because he does not know which means are good for him and which are bad. 'Umar (RA) said, *"I do not care, whether I find myself in the morning rich or poor, because I do not know which state is better for me."*

The Etiquette of those who put their Trust in God when they Lose their Possessions

The person who puts his trust in God should follow a certain protocol to keep his possessions safe when he is not in his house.

1. He should lock the house's door. However, he should not be excessively protective.
2. He should not leave in his house any possessions that would tempt the thieves.
3. To have the intention that he is satisfied with whatever God has decreed regarding the fate of the possessions which he has in his house.
4. If upon returning to his house, he finds that his possessions were stolen, he should not feel sad, on the contrary he should feel happy, if he could. He should say, if it were good for me, it would not have been stolen. He should make the intention that he is giving it away in the sake of God. He would be saving it for his life in the Hereafter. If the possessions were returned back to him afterwards, he should not accept them. If he

accepted the stolen possessions back, then he is still in ownership, because ownership does not change on the basis of the intention. However, this is not acceptable to those who put their trust in God. He should give these possessions away to the needy.

5. He should not invoke God's wrath on the thief, otherwise he loses his station as a person who puts trust in God. A person was asked, "*Why do not you invoke God's wrath on the thief who stole your possessions?*" He said, "*I do not want to be Satan's aid against him.*"
6. He should feel sad for the thief, because he committed an act of disobedience. He should express his gratitude to God that he was the one who was wronged not the one who wronged others. A person once complained that he was a victim of a highway robbery, a scholar said to him, "*You should grieve more for the situations of the Muslims than for losing your money.*" A thief stole money from Ali ibn Al-Fudail while he was circling the Kaba. He started weeping. His father asked him, "*Are you grieving because you lost money?*" He said, "*No, I am grieving for the poor man who will be asked on the Day of Judgment, and will have no excuse.*" Someone was told, "*Invoke God's wrath on the person who wronged you.*" He said, "*I am engaged in grieving for him more than invoking God's wrath on him.*"

Removal of Harm: Taking Medication and Similar Acts

You should know that the means for remedying illnesses can be divided into unequivocal means, probable means, and improbable means. Water which is used to quench thirst, bread which is used to remove the harm of hunger are considered unequivocal means. Medicines that is used to treat constipation is considered a probable means. It is not a prerequisite of putting one's trust in God to abstain from using the equivocal means. On the contrary, not using an unequivocal means is forbidden, if it is feared that the patient will die if he did not take the medicine. However, it is a prerequisite for putting one's trust in God to avoid using the improbable means. The use of the probable means does not violate the conditions for putting one's trust in God, but not using it is not forbidden. It may be better to use it in some cases. The evidence that taking medicines to combat illnesses is not contradictory to putting one's trust in God, is the sayings and actions of the Prophet (PBUH). He said⁷⁵, "*Servants of God, seek healing through medicine because God has created the illness and the medicine.*"

Rebuttal of the Claim that Not Using Medicine is Better

The evidence that using medicine does not contradict putting one's trust in God is given by the story which is narrated about 'Umar (RA) and the companions when they were going to Syria. Upon their arrival near a town called Al-Jabiyah, they were told that the people of the town have been afflicted by the plague, and that the plague has spread all over the town. They were divided into two groups. The companions in the first group said, "*We should not go into the city. This amounts to self-destruction.*" The people in the other group said, "*We should put our trust in God, and go into the city. We will never be able to escape the fate that God has decreed for us.*" They cited the verse, "*Have you not considered those who left their homes in many thousands, fearing death? (2: 243)* Both groups went back to 'Umar (RA) to ask him for advice. 'Umar (RA), "*We should go back. We will not go into the plagued city.*" The people whose opinion was

⁷⁵ Narrated by Usama ibn Shariek (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

to go into the city said, *“Do we flee away from God’s fate?”* He said, *“Yes, we flee away from God’s fate to God’s fate.”* He explained the basis for his decision using an example. He said, *“If one of you took his sheep to graze in a valley. He found that the valley has two sides, on one side the land is fertile and on the other the land is infertile. If he let the sheep graze in the fertile land, would not that be according to God’s decree; and if he let the sheep graze in the infertile land, would not that be according to God’s decree.”* ‘Umar (RA) asked Abd El-Rahman ibn Auf (RA) upon his arrival about this. Abd El-Rahman ibn Auf (RA) said, *“I heard the Prophet (PBUH) say⁷⁶, ‘Do not enter a town that has been afflicted by the plague. If you are already in the town, you should not leave the town.’”* Upon hearing this, ‘Umar (RA) rejoiced and praised God.

Disclosing and Concealing Afflictions by those who put their trust in God

You should know that concealing illnesses, poverty, and other afflictions is part of the treasure of righteousness. This is one of the highest stations; because being content with God’s decree and exercising perseverance in enduring the affliction is part of the relationship between God and His servant. Hiding it is safer.

There is no harm in disclosing affliction provided the intention and the objective of disclosure are sound. There are three objectives for disclosure. These are

1. The objective may be to seek a remedy for his illness. This cannot be done except be disclosing the illness to the doctor. The narration should not be construed as a complaint but as an expression to the power of God displayed by the illness. Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal used to describe his illnesses saying, *“I only describe God’s power.”*
2. The objective may be to learn from a wise and knowledgeable man the best way for perseverance and showing gratitude, considering that the illness that he has been afflicted with is a blessing from God. Al-Hassan Al-Albasri said, *“It is not considered a complaint to describe one’s aches and pain after the person has expressed his gratitude to God.”*
3. The objective may be to express his helplessness and his need for God’s help. This is appropriate if it came from a strong man. People asked Ali (RA) when he was sick, *“How are you?”* He said, *“Bad.”* People disliked this answer and thought that he is complaining. Then he said, *“I am only expressing my helplessness and my need for God’s help.”*

These are the objectives that render disclosing afflictions permissible. When illness is disclosed for a different objective, it becomes a complaint and complaining against God is prohibited. Disclosure becomes a complaint that is associated with discontent and dislike of God’s deed. If the disclosure is free of discontent or a show of dislike for God’s deed, then it is permissible but concealment is better. Some servants of God choose to go into seclusion when they become ill for fear of falling in the trap of complaining.

⁷⁶ Narrated by Abd El-Rahman ibn Auf (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

Book 6: The Book of Love, Longing, Enjoying the Private Companionship, and Contentment

Loving God is the station of the ultimate objective and the highest degree. The station of loving God is preceded by introductory stations like repentance, perseverance, asceticism and others. The fruits of the station of loving God are longing, companionship, contentment, and its sisters. Although these stations can be rarely achieved. It is believed that their achievement is possible. However, many believe that reaching the station of loving God is extremely rare.

In the present book, we will mention evidence from the religious law in support of loving God, then describe the essence of loving God and the means for achieving it, explain that no one deserves our love except God, show that looking at God's countenance is the highest pleasure that we can enjoy, explain why looking at the countenance of God in the Hereafter is greater than knowing Him in this life, list the ways to strengthen our love for God, explain why people differ in the degree of loving God, explain why some people are unable to know God, explain the meaning of longing to God, explain how God loves His servants, explain the signs of loving God, explain the meaning of companionship with God, explain how one can enjoy the companionship of God, explain the meaning of contentment, its virtue, and its essence.

Evidence from Religious Law in Support of Loving God

You should know that there is a consensus among all Muslims that loving God and His Messenger (PBUH) is a compulsory duty for each Muslim. An evidence of this is given by the verses, *"He loves them, and they love Him."* (5: 54) *"But those who believe are stronger in their love of God."* (2: 165) The last verse shows that loving God varies from one person to another. In many traditions, the Prophet (PBUH) made loving God a prerequisite for faith. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁷⁷, *"A believer should have three attributes, in order that he would be able to taste the sweetness of faith: he should love God and His Messenger more than anything else."* The Prophet (PBUH) used to pray God, saying⁷⁸, *"O! God, bestow on me Your love, the love of those who love You, and what brings me near to Your love."* A Bedouin came to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him, *"When will the Hour be?"* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"What have prepared for it?"* The man answered, *"I did not pray or fast much, but I love God, and His Prophet."* The Prophet said⁷⁹, *"You will be with those whom you love."* Anas said, *"The believers never felt happier than when they heard this."* Abu Bakr said, *"Whoever experienced the pure love of God, will cease pursuing any of the pleasures of this life and will stay away from people."*

Al-Hassan said, *"Whoever knows his Lord, will love Him; and whoever knows the truth of this life, will renounce it. The believer will only pursue enjoyment when he is heedless, when he reflects he will feel sad."* Abu Suleiman Al-Darani said, *"God created people who would not be distracted away from God even by thinking about paradise and its bliss, do you think they would be distracted away from Him thinking about the worldly life."* Yahya ibn Moadh said, *"God's forgiveness overshadows all sins, what about His good pleasure? His good pleasure overshadows all hopes, what about His love? His love amazes the minds, what about his affection? His benevolence makes you forget anything but Him, what about His subtleness?"*

⁷⁷ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

⁷⁸ Reported by Al-Tirmidhi

⁷⁹ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

The Essence of Loving God and the Means for Achieving It

We need to establish some fundamental definitions first. These are

1. You should know that knowledge is a prerequisite for love. A human being cannot love anything that he does not know. Thus, love is an attribute of a living being who has intellect. Things which can be perceived are divided into things that is agreeable to the person, things which are disagreeable, and things which are neutral. A person loves things which are agreeable to him. A person hates something that he perceives to be painful. A thing that does not cause pleasure or pain cannot be described as liked or disliked. Everything that is perceived to be a provider of pleasure will be liked. Things which are liked are appealing to people. If the appeal grows stronger, it becomes infatuation. When a person finds something to be distasteful, he will consequently dislike it. If this feeling grew stronger, it will become abhorrent.
2. Since love depends on perception and knowledge, then it must also have categories similar to the categories of perceived things and the senses that perceive them. The pleasure of sight is perceived by the eye. One uses the eyes to see the beautiful pictures and sights. The pleasure of sound is perceived by the ears. One uses the ears to listen to harmonious tunes. These things which are perceived by the different senses are sources of pleasure, which make them appealing to the human being. These perceived things are liked because they provide pleasure, which makes them appealing to people who have sound initial natural disposition. That is why the Prophet (PBUH) said⁸⁰, “*Three things of your world were made lovable to me: perfume, women, and the comfort of my eyes has been made in prayer.*” The tradition describes perfume as being loved, while it can only be sensed by the nose. Women are loved but they can only be sensed by the eyes and the touch. It describes prayer as “*comfort of the eyes,*” and made it the most loved thing, although prayers cannot be sensed by any of the five senses. Prayers are sensed by a sixth sense, the sense of the heart. Thus, the pleasure of the prayer can only be perceived by a person who has a heart.
3. The pleasures perceived by the five senses are common to animals and human beings. What distinguishes human beings from animals is the sixth sense. This sixth sense is known as the intellect, the light, or the heart. Had love been limited to things which are perceived by the five senses only, then the human beings would have lost the sense that differentiates them from animals; and it would have been impossible to love God, since He cannot be perceived by any of the five senses. Therefore, the hidden spiritual insight is much stronger than the visible scenes. The heart is more perceptive than the eye. The beauty of the meanings perceived by the heart is greater than the beauty of the visible pictures seen by the eye. Therefore, the pleasure that the heart feels when it perceives honorable and divine matters, which are beyond the perception of the five sense, is more perfect and more profound. This makes them more appealing for he who has sound disposition and lucid mind. Thus, love is the person’s inclination to something which he perceives to be a provider of pleasure, as we will detail later. No one should then, deny the concept of loving God except those whose perception is limited to the five senses, as animals. It is undisputable that a human being loves himself, and he may love someone for his own sake. Can you imagine a person who loves someone else for the sake of that person not for the sake of his own self? It may be difficult for the weak to understand this. They may think that, it is impossible for a person to love someone else for the sake of the loved person, without a benefit to be gained by the lover other than his self perception. The truth is, this is possible. Let us explain the causes of love and its categories.

⁸⁰ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Nasaie

a) The first one which is loved by a person is his own self. A person loves himself because he has a natural inclination for staying alive, and he hates to perish. A loved thing is a thing that appeals to the lover. What is more appealing to a person than having a long life? And what is more disgusting to a person than things which cause his destruction? Therefore, a human being loves to live longer and hates to die or to be murdered; not only because what he fears after death or because he is concerned about the suffering during death. He will still hate death even if he does not suffer when he dies, or he would not be held accountable for what he has done during his life. Only a person whose life is very painful and full of suffering, may wish to die. He will only prefer death over life, if death brings him comfort by removing the suffering he endured in his life. Death and perishing are hated and long life is loved. This is a human instinct which God created in each human.

Therefore, the first one that a human being loves is himself. Then, he loves to have healthy organs. Then he loves his wealth, his offspring, his family, and his friends. He loves his organs to be healthy, because his life depends on the health of his organs. Wealth is loved because it is also a means for living a good and long life. Similarly, all the other means. A human being does not love these things for its own sake, but because they contribute to the perfection and length of his life. He loves his offspring and endures all hardships for their sake, even though they do not contribute to his fortune, because they succeed him, after he dies. He considers their lives an extension of his life. It is because he loves himself very much, and he knows that he cannot live for ever, that he loves the lives of those who stand in his stead. He considers them to be part of himself. He loves his family and his clan because they provide power and support which contribute to the perfection of his life. The clan, wealth, and the other external means represent the wing that completes the life of the human being. Indeed, a human being loves to live a long and perfect life. Thus, the first things that the human being loves are his own self, the perfection of himself, and the everlasting existence of all this. He hates anything that contradicts this. This is the first cause.

b) The second cause is benevolence. A human being feels obligated to those who are benevolent to him. Loving those who are benevolent to us has been instilled in our own natural disposition. Similarly, a human being dislikes those who treat him unkindly. This is the reason that a person may love someone who is completely unrelated to him. This is also related to the first cause. A person who is benevolent to us, will provide us with money, support, and other means for achieving long and perfect life. The difference is, one loves his organs to be healthy because healthy organs are the direct reason for having a perfect and long life. However, a benevolent person is not loved for his own sake but because he provides the means for a perfect and long life. The difference between these is similar to the difference between loving health and loving the physician who provides a means for attaining health. Health is loved for its own sake while a physician is loved for what he does. Similarly, loving knowledge and loving the teacher who provides knowledge; and loving food and loving the money with which one can buy food. The difference is related to the rank of the loved thing. However, all causes of love go back to the love of the human being for himself.

c) A person may love something for its own sake not because he will reap a benefit from it. This is the true love that is sure to last. Examples of this is beauty. A person who appreciate beauty loves beautiful things. Perception of beauty is a source of pleasure for the person who appreciates beauty. You should not think that beautiful pictures are only

loved for the sake of fulfillment of desire, because fulfillment of desire is in itself another desire for which the beautiful pictures may be loved. Appreciating beauty generates enjoyment. Therefore, beauty can be loved for its own sake. Thus, if it is proven that God is beautiful, then He should be loved by those who discover that He is beautiful. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁸¹, “*God is beautiful and loves beauty.*”

- d) The fourth cause deals with the meaning of beauty and prettiness. You should know that he who is imprisoned in a gulf of imaginary and perceptible things, may think that beauty is portrayed only by the harmony of the posture and form and the nice color of the skin, in addition to other measures which are used to describe physical beauty of human beings. The beauty that is most appreciated is the beauty that is perceived by sight. People think that a thing that cannot be seen or imagined; a thing that has no form or color cannot be beautiful. If we cannot imagine its beauty, then there will be no pleasure in perceiving it; consequently, it will not be loved. This is an apparent error. Beauty is not limited to things that can only be perceived by sight; nor to things which look harmonious and having nice colors. We say, this is a pretty handwriting, nice voice, beautiful mare, beautiful dress, or nice vessel. What do these statements mean, if beauty was only limited to visible things? It is known that the eye enjoys looking at a pretty handwriting and the ear enjoys listening to harmonious melodies. A perceptible thing can be either beautiful or ugly. What is the meaning of beauty that is common to all these things? We will say, that a thing is considered beautiful when all the possible elements of perfection appropriate to its kind are present. If all elements are present, then the thing is very beautiful, but if some of the elements are not present, then its beauty is measured by the number of elements which are present. A beautiful mare is a mare which has all the elements of beauty appropriate for a horse, e.g. form, shape, color, and ability to run and maneuver. A pretty handwriting is a handwriting that has all the elements of prettiness that are appropriate for handwritings e.g. conformity of the letters; its straightness, and nice arrangement. The perfection of each thing has elements unique and appropriate to that particular thing.

If you say, that although the beauty of some of these things is not visible, but they are still being perceived by the senses e.g. sounds and food. No one denies that a perceived thing can be beautiful. No one denies that perceiving these things generates pleasure. It is the beauty of things that cannot be perceived by the senses that is denied.

You should know that things which cannot be perceived by senses can be beautiful and pretty. One can say, this is good conduct, this is good knowledge, this is a good reputation, and these are beautiful manners. Beautiful manners are a mix of knowledge, intellect, chastity, courage, God consciousness, generosity, gallantry, and all other good qualities. Some of these qualities cannot be perceived with any of the five senses, they can only be perceived with the light of spiritual insight. All these beautiful qualities are loved and whoever has them is beloved by those who recognize that he has these qualities. A sign for the validity of this statements is the fact that people are disposed to love the Prophets (PBUT) and the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), even though they never saw them. People are even disposed to love of the scholars who started the different schools of jurisprudence, like Imam Abu Haneefa, Imam Malek, Imam Al-Shafie and others. A person may love a scholar so much, to the extent that he may spend his wealth

⁸¹ Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Muslim

to promote the school of jurisprudence of the scholar and to defend his views. He may even fight those who criticize the views of the scholar. I wonder why would a man love Imam Al-Sahfie so much, even though he never saw him nor did he see his picture? It may be that, if he saw his picture, he would not like it. The man's extensive love for Imam Al-Shafie is rooted in the love of his inner self not his physical image. His physical image has been turned into dust, but his inner self includes his religious stature, his God consciousness, his extensive knowledge, and his endeavors in promoting the science of jurisprudence for the benefit of Muslims. These are beautiful values that can only be perceived by the light of insight. Physical senses are unable to perceive these values. Similarly, those who love Abu Bakr (RA) or Ali (RA) and prefer them over other people. They love them because they admire their attributes of knowledge, religious valor, God consciousness, courage, and other qualities.

- e) The fifth cause is the hidden attraction caused by inner harmony between the lover and the beloved. It may be that two persons may love each other, because they are attracted to each other, irrespective of beauty or fortune. Such love is caused by the attraction between the two souls, as the Prophet (PBUH) said⁸², *“The souls are mobilized soldiers, souls which have similar attributes, they become attracted to each others; and those who do not have similar attributes, they repel each other.”*

In summary, the categories of love go back to five reasons. These are

1. The love of the human being for existence, perfection, and survival.
2. The love of those who are benevolent to him. Such benevolence contributes to his continuous existence and survival; and repels the dangers that he may be subjected to.
3. The love of those who are benevolent to people, even though they may not be benevolent to him.
4. The love of things that are beautiful in themselves, whether the beauty is an inner soul beauty or external physical beauty.
5. The love of those with whom there is a natural affinity.

If a single person enjoys all these attributes combined, then his love will certainly be magnified. Consider the case of a son whose physical appearance is beautiful, who has good manners, who is perfect in his knowledge, who has excellent intellectual ability, and who is benevolent to people as well as to his father. This son will be certainly loved. The degree of the love that he will enjoy is commensurate with the intensity of these attributes. We will show now that only God has the perfect form of these attributes combined. Thus, only God deserves to enjoy our true love.

Only God Deserves to be Loved

You should know that he who loves other than God, except for the sake of God, is ignorant and does not truly know God. Loving the Messenger of God (PBUH) is praiseworthy because it stems from loving God. Similarly, the love of the scholars and those who are conscious of God, because one should love those who love the person whom he loves. Thus, one should love the Messenger of the Loved One; and one should love those who love the Loved One. All love should go back to the love of God the Loved One. Those who have deep spiritual insight know that the only true love is the love of God, and only He deserves to be loved. To explain this, let

⁸² Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

us go to the five causes we mentioned above and show that all of them combined exist in their perfect form as attributes of God. Others may have one or two of these attributes, but only He can have all of them combined.

1. The first cause is the love of the human being for himself, his existence, and his perfection; and loathing to die, vanish, or become deficient. He who knows his Lord, will certainly realize that he has no independent existence; and that his existence, his survival, and his perfection are from God, to God and by God. God is the Creator who created him. God is the One who sustains him. God is the Creator of the attributes that contribute to his perfection, and the Creator of the means that enables him to attain these attributes. In summary, nothing in this universe can independently exist on its own, except the Omniscient, the Dominating; everything else is dependent on Him. Thus, if a person loves himself, he should then love God, because it is God who created him and sustains him.
2. The second cause is to love those who are benevolent to him; who helped him financially, treated him kindly, gave him provisions, supported him against his enemies, and defended him against evil people. This is exactly the reason that he should not love anyone except God. If he has true knowledge of God, he would know the only benevolent is God; the signs of His benevolence are countless, *“But if you count the favors of God, never will you be able to enumerate them.”* (14: 34) God is the true Benevolent, no human being can be considered benevolent except as a figure of speech, because it is God who employ people to become benevolent to others. A person who does you good, does it because he is compelled to do it. He is only delivering the good that God has decreed for you. You would be mistaken if you believe that the person who does you good is the real benevolent. You should thank him because he is the means that enabled the good to reach you, not because you think that he is the originator of the good. It is unimaginable that a human being would be benevolent except to himself. A human being gives charity for his own sake, either to gain reward in the Hereafter, or to gain praise in this life. The objective of a person who gives charity is to serve himself. He is looking for a compensation for the money he is giving away. He believes that this compensation is greater in value than the money he is giving away. Thus, a charitable person does not deserve to be thanked for two reasons. First, it is God who compels him to give the money away, so he has no choice in giving away his money in charity. Second, he receives a compensation for the money he is giving away. This compensation is greater in value than the money he gives away.
3. The third cause is your love of the benevolent for his own sake, even though his benevolence does not reach you. This is also a natural disposition that has been instilled in the human being. It is normal that a person should differentiate between a king who is pious and just, and who treats his people with kindness, gentleness, and modesty; and a king who is unjust, ruthless, arrogant, and transgressor. One would normally love the former and hates the latter even though both of them may be living in a far away land. You will not benefit from the kindness of the former, nor will you suffer as a result of the ruthlessness of the latter. You love the benevolent king for his benevolence not because you will benefit from his benevolence. This demonstrates not only that you should love

God, but also that you should love no one except God. God's benevolence is extended to every creature. The first act that shows His benevolence is that He created them. The second, is that He gave them the essential organs and means required for their lives to continue. The third, is that He bestowed upon them means which they might need to enable them to enjoy life. The fourth, is that He bestowed on them means which are neither essential nor are needed, but which will add beauty to their lives.

4. The fourth cause is loving beautiful things for their beauty, without anticipating a benefit that will accrue from that beauty. This is again something that has been instilled in the natural disposition of the human being. We mentioned that there are two kinds of beauty. The beauty that can be seen by the eyes and the beauty of the inner soul that can be perceived only by the heart's eye and the light of the spiritual insight. The beauty of the inner soul may also be perceived by people's acts or the legacy they leave behind. He who loves the Prophet (PBUH), Abu Bakr (RA), or Imam Al-Shafie, loves them because of their acts and the legacies which they left behind. Their acts reflect the beauty of their inner attributes. This beauty goes back to the knowledge and power. The most honorable knowledge is attained when the subject of knowledge is honored. Power of highest rank is attained when the subject of power is high ranking. Thus, the most honorable knowledge is knowing God.

The beauty of the attributes of the sincere devotees whom the hearts love goes back to three things. These are

- a. Their knowledge of God, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the religious laws that His Messengers brought.
- b. Their ability to improve themselves and improve people, providing judicious guidance.
- c. Their ability to refrain from committing abhorrent deeds and their ability to control their desire which could steer them away from goodness into evil paths.

These are the reasons that motivate people to love the prophets, the scholars, the Caliphs, and just kings.

Going back to the knowledge and power which are behind the beauty of the hidden attributes, God's knowledge is vast and encompassing to the extent that He is aware of even a minute atom in the heavens and earth. How would the knowledge of all human beings measure up to His knowledge? God said, "*And you have not been given of knowledge except a little.*" (17: 85) If the beauty and honor of knowledge are loved, and if knowledge provides perfection and adornment to the knowledgeable. Then only God deserves to be loved for His knowledge.

Power is perfection, while powerlessness is imperfection. Perfection, grandeur, and glory are loved and their attainment is pleasurable. A person enjoys listening to the stories describing the courage and glory of 'Umar (RA) and Ali (RA). These stories motivate people to love them, because courage and glory are kinds of perfection. How would this kind of power measure up to God's power? God's power is limitless, and all human power is granted by God. There is no more powerful nor more able than Him. If we love those who are powerful for their perfection, then it is only God who deserves to be loved for His perfect power.

The ability to refrain from abominations and sins; to rise above all deficiencies and flaws, is a strong reason for love. This ability is a reflection of beauty of the inner attributes. The absolute perfection can only be attributed to God alone, the One, the Truth, the Holy, and the Owner of Majesty and Generosity.

Therefore, that which is beautiful is loved. The absolute beautiful is the One who has no equal. The One who has no rival, the Sanctuary who has no adversary, the Independent who has no need, the Potent who does whatever He wills, the Omniscient whose knowledge encompasses everything, and the Vanquisher who controls everything. Love for this reason is more powerful than love for benevolence, because benevolence increases and decreases.

5. The fifth cause for love is affinity and resemblance, because similar things are attracted to each other. That is why you find kids are attracted to each other; adults are attracted to each other; birds are attracted to similar birds, while they have aversion to different ones. Affinity may be found in a visible trait, like the affinity of young people to each other because of their youth; or it could be hidden as the one referred to in the Prophet (PBUH) saying⁸³, *“The souls are mobilized soldiers, souls which have similar attributes, they become attracted to each others; and those who do not have similar attributes, they repel each other.”* This indicates that one should love God, because of the hidden affinity that is not caused by similarity in the form or shape. There are hidden meanings which explains the hidden affinity, some can be mentioned in books and others that should not be mentioned. What can be mentioned are the attributes of God, which He commanded us to emulate and which bring us close to Him. It was said, emulate God in His attributes, such as the attributes of knowledge, benevolence, kindness, mercy, counselling people and guiding them to the truth and keeping them away from falsehood, and all other good traits commanded by the religious law. These are the traits which bring us close to God, not in the terms of space, but in the sense of qualities and attributes. What should not be mentioned in the books are things which are alluded to in the verse, *“They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say, ‘The Spirit is of the affair of my Lord.’”* (17: 85) This is a divine matter that is beyond human understanding. And, *“when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate.”* (38: 72)

Knowing God and Looking at His Countenance are the Highest and Most Noble Pleasures

You should know that pleasures are consequences of perceptions. A human being has a number of powers and instincts. Each instinct has its own pleasure. The pleasure is attained when the instinct has been used to fulfill the purpose of its creation. These instincts were not created in vain but were created so that each one of them motivates the human being to achieve a specific objective. The instinct of anger was created to motivate the person to exact retribution and revenge. The pleasure of this instinct is attained when the person is able to exact retribution and

⁸³ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

gain revenge. The instinct for craving food was created to motivate the person to eat; human beings need food for their survival. The pleasure of this instinct is attained when a person eats. Similarly, the pleasures for the instincts of hearing, seeing, and smelling are attained when the person hears, sees, and smells. These instincts produce feelings of pleasure and pain as a result of the process of perception. Similarly, there is an instinct which is attached to the heart. One can call it the instinct of the divine light. This instinct is referred to in the verse, *“Is he whose heart God has opened for Islam, so that he follows a light from his Lord, (as he who disbelieves)?”* (39: 22) This instinct may also be called the intellect, the inner spiritual insight, or the light of faith and certitude. However, let us not waste our time discussing the possible names, because the essence of a concept gives the name its significance, not the other way around.

The heart is distinctly different from any other body organ. It has a unique characteristic which enables it to perceive things that cannot be sensed nor can be imagined using the other senses. An example of this, is the perception of the creation of the universe and that this creation required an eternal and wise Creator who has divine attributes. We will call this instinct an intellect, provided that it is understood that what we mean by an intellect is something different from what people use in their argumentation and debate. The word intellect has been disparaged for that reason. The intellect is what sets a human being apart from animals and it is the characteristic which enables a human being to know God; it should be regarded as the noblest characteristic and should not be disparaged. This instinct has been created to motivate the human being to seek knowledge. Its pleasure is attained when the human being becomes knowledgeable. A person rejoices when others praise him for his intelligence and deep knowledge.

However, the pleasure attained from gaining the knowledge of farming and sewing does not compare with the pleasure of gaining the knowledge required for running the affairs of the state or managing the affairs of people. The pleasure attained from gaining the knowledge of language or poetry does not compare to the pleasure attained from gaining the knowledge about God, His attributes, His angels, and the kingdom of heaven and earth. The pleasure that one gets from gaining knowledge depends on the type of knowledge gained. The knowledge one gains about a noble thing is noble, such knowledge produces great pleasure. Do you know anything in existence that is more noble, more grand, more glorious, and more perfect, than the Creator, who created all things, perfected them, adorned them, initiated them, repeated them, managed them and arranged them?

If you have no doubt about that, then you should not have any doubt that the highest and most noble type of knowledge is the knowledge which explain the divine secrets, and the divine arrangements of things in existence. This knowledge is not only the noblest but it also produces the highest pleasure for those who seek it.

This shows that gaining knowledge produces pleasure, and the highest pleasure is attained from gaining knowledge about God, His attributes, His actions, and the way He runs His kingdom. Abu Sulieman Al-Darani said, *“Do you think that a person who is not distracted, by the fear of Hellfire nor the hope in paradise, from the remembrance of God, can such a person be distracted from God by the enjoyment of this life.”*

Explaining why Seeing the Countenance of God in the Hereafter is more Pleasurable than the Knowing God in the Worldly Life

You should know that perceptible things can be either imaginable or unimaginable. Pictures, forms, and shapes of humans, animals, and plants can be imagined. Things which have no shape or form, like the essence of God, knowledge, power, and will cannot be imagined. A person can close his eyes and bring to his imagination the picture of someone whom he just saw. When he opens his eyes and compares the picture that he imagined and the real picture he will notice a difference. This difference is not in details of the picture, but it is in the degree of clarity of the picture. Imagination is the first stage of perception, seeing complements the perception and makes the seen picture clearer. This is the epitome of detection; it is called vision. This is not because it is related to the eye. God could have attached complete detection to another human organ, it would have still been deserved to be called vision.

If you understand this in connection with the things that can be imagined, you should know that there are two degrees for the information that cannot be imagined. The first one is preliminary and the second one complements the first. There is a range for the degrees of detection and clarity between the two degrees: the imaginable and the visible. The second is also called observation, meeting, or vision. These descriptions reflect the truth because vision gets its name from the fact that it is the epitome of detection.

Closing one's eyes obstructs visibility and consequently does not allow detection. The eyelids form a barrier between the eye and the thing that needs to be seen. For visibility to occur the barrier must be lifted. If the barrier is not lifted, then perception will be formed only by imagination. Similarly, the physical body, the need to fulfill the desires, and the limitations posed by human nature form a barrier that does not allow the soul to observe and meet the information that cannot be imagined. Indeed, this life is a barrier that bars the soul just like the eyelids constitute a barrier for the eyesight. This is why God said to Moses (PBUH), "You will not see Me." (7: 143) and God said, "*No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all visions.*" (6: 103) This barrier will only be lifted after death. However, the soul may still be polluted by the sins of the worldly life, some soul more than others. The souls of some will be completely covered by rust, those are the ones who will forever, be veiled and cannot see their Lord. Some souls will be in a lesser grave situation. These soul will be amenable to purification by fire. When the souls have been purified, it will be allowed to observe the Truth. This observation is called vision.

Thus, anyone who does not know God in this life will not be able to see Him in the Hereafter. Anyone who did not attain the pleasure of knowing God in this life, will not be able to attain the pleasure of seeing Him in the Hereafter. Everyone will only harvest what he has sown. A person will be resurrected in the state on which he had died. Everyone will die in the state on which he had lived. The knowledge of God in this life will be transformed into vision in the Hereafter, after the veil has been lifted. The pleasure will be multifold. In paradise, everyone gets which he wishes for. Those whose only wish is to see God, will only get their pleasure from seeing God.

The bliss of paradise which one will get is commensurate with his love of God. The strength of the love of God depends on how much one knows Him. Thus, the foundation of happiness lies in knowing God, which is called faith.

You should know that only those who have no knowledge despise the pleasure of knowledge. How can he, who has little knowledge and whose heart is overwhelmed with the attachment to this life, be able to taste the pleasure of knowledge. The Gnostics would not trade the pleasure of paradise if it was offered to them in this life for the remembrance of God and their private talk with Him.

The Means Which Strengthen Loving God

You should know that the happiest people in the Hereafter are those whose love to God was strongest in this life. The Hereafter is where we approach God and attain the happiness of meeting Him. How great is the bliss that a lover enjoys when he meets his beloved after a long time? And how great is the bliss he will be blessed with when he knows that he will enjoy the eternal sight of his beloved, without interruption? The bliss that the lover enjoys is commensurate with the strength of his love. The pleasures will increase as the strength of love increases. The servant of God gains the love of God in this life. Each believer experiences a basic form of the love of God, because loving God is a part of knowing God. However, the strong love that overwhelms the servant to the degree that it becomes an attachment, can only be experienced by a few for two reasons. These are

1. Severing the attachment to the world and emptying the heart of the love for anything other than God. The heart is like a vessel that cannot be filled with vinegar unless it was emptied of the water that fills it, *“God has not made for any man two hearts within him.”* (33: 4)

The perfect love is achieved by loving God alone. If a person turns his attention to something else other than God, then this means that there is something else that fills a part of his heart. As the heart gets filled with something else, his love for God decreases by the same amount. This concept of exclusivity has been referred to in the verses, *“Say, ‘God;’ then leave them to plunge in their vain discourses.”* (6: 91) and *“Those who say, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and continue on the straight path.”* (41: 30) This is the essence of saying, *“I believe that there is no deity but God.”* It means that there is no deity but Him and there is no beloved but Him.

Thus, one of the reasons that weakens our love for God is the love of the worldly life. The love of the worldly life encompasses the love for family, wealth, offspring, property and other things.

2. The second factor that strengthens our love for God is the extent of our knowledge of Him. An extensive knowledge of God that overpowers the heart enhances our love for God. However, the heart has to be cleansed of the attachments to the worldly life, just like planting a land, one has to clear the weeds before the seeds can be sown. The seeds will produce the tree of love and knowledge. This is the good word which has been referred to in the verse, *“Have you not seen how God sets forth examples? A good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens;*

yielding its fruits at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So God sets forth examples for people, in order that they may be mindful." (14: 24-25) It has been also referred to in the verse, *"To Him good words ascend, and the good deed lifts them up."* (35: 10) The good words refer to the knowledge of God, and the good deeds is the carrier that carries this knowledge. The purpose of the good deeds is to cleanse the heart from the love of the worldly life and keep it purified. The only purpose for the good deeds is to know God. One also needs the science of the practical daily transactions which is the basis for good deeds. The purpose of the proper fulfilment of the practical daily transactions is to cleanse and purify the heart. The light of the truth will then shine on the clean and purified heart and will adorn it with gnosis, this is the science of revelation. Once this knowledge has been obtained, the love of God will definitely follow. This stage is only reached by pure reflection and continuous remembrance of God, after the attachment of the heart to the worldly life has been severed.

Those who reach this stage can be divided into two categories.

- a) The strong who start by knowing God: They know everything else through their knowledge of God. These are referred to in the verses, *"Is it not enough that your Lord does witness all things?"* (41: 53) and *"God bears witness that there is no deity but He, and (so do) the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge; maintaining His creation with justice; there is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise."* (3: 18) One of them was asked, *"How did you know your Lord?"* He said, *"I have known my Lord, if it were not for my Lord, I would not have known Him."*
- b) The weak who start from the deeds: They move on to the Doer behind the deeds. These are referred to in the verses, *"We will show them our signs in the horizons, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;"* (41: 53) *"Do they not consider the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and what things God has created;"* (7: 185) *"Say, "Consider all that is in the heavens and on earth"; but neither signs nor warnings avail those who do not believe;"* (10: 101) *"He who created the seven heavens one above another. You will not see a flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates. So look again, can you see any rifts? Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you weak and exhausted."* (67: 3- 4) This is the easiest path for most people. It is a wide path for those who travel on the way to God. Quran invites people to follow this road when it commands them, in many verses, to reflect, contemplate, and consider the signs of God.

Why People Love God in Different Ways?

You should know that all believers share the basic love for God; but they differ because the degree of their knowledge of God and the extent to which they love this worldly life vary. Most people all they know about God is His attributes and names, they heard them and memorized them. They may have imagined meanings for the attributes and names that are inappropriate. Some may have not known their essence, but they did not attach inappropriate meanings to them. They believed in them by way of submission and trust. They busied themselves in performing good deeds and did not search further. These are the people who chose safety and they are from

the companions of the right hand. Those who imagined corrupt meanings to the attributes of God are the lost. Those who know the truth (the gnostic) are the ones who will be brought closer to God. The three types were mentioned in the verse, *“and you shall be sorted out into three kinds: those on the right, what of those on the right? and those on the left, what of those on the left? And the foremost in the race, the foremost in the race, those are they who will be brought close (to God).”* (56: 7 – 11)

The Reasons that People’s Understandings Fall Short of Knowing God

You should know that the most apparent and most conspicuous in existence is God. This should indicate that knowing Him should be the first type of knowledge that one should have. Such knowledge should be the first and the easiest knowledge for the human intellect to grasp. However, one observes that it is the opposite that is more prevalent. This must have reasons.

Let us consider an example. If we see a person writing or sewing, we conclude that his existence is apparent and conspicuous. His knowledge and ability to write or sew are more obvious to us than his other physical and hidden attributes. We do not know anything about his desires, his anger, his character, and his state of health. Some of his apparent characteristics are also doubtful. We may not know his exact height or the color of his skin. The only evidence that shows that he is alive is his movement and sewing.

To be sure the evidence for the existence of God, His power, His knowledge, and all His other attributes is the things we see around us, the plants, the trees, the animals, the heavens, the earth, the stars, the seas, the fire, and the air. Indeed, the first evidence for God’s existence is our own existence. All things in existence bear witness to the existence of the Creator. Each atom tells us that it could not have existed on its own and that it needed a Creator to bring it to existence.

There are two reasons why do our minds fall short in understanding something. These are

1. Its hidden essence and obscurity.
2. Its extreme clarity.

A bat can see things in the night but cannot see the same things during the day. It does not see during the day, not because it is dark but because its light is glaring. The glaring light of the sun overwhelms the bat’s weak sight and blocks its vision. Similarly, our minds are weak and the beauty of the Divine presence is extremely glaring, overwhelming, and encompassing. Thus, extreme clarity became the cause of its obscurity. Glory be to Him, who has veiled Himself by His rising light, and became invisible by the emergence of His presence.

This should not be a cause for astonishment. Things become visible when they are placed against their opposites. Thus, it is difficult to discern that whose existence is prevalent and perfect to the extent that He has no opposite. God Almighty is the most obvious and conspicuous matter; He is the cause that everything became visible. If you imagine that God does not exist or His presence ceased for a moment, then heavens and earth will be destroyed and the dominion of heavens and earth will cease to function. In this case, one can discern the difference. This is the reason for the shortcomings of our minds.

But, he who has a strong spiritual insight is in a state of spiritual balance; he does not see anything but God; and he does not know anyone but God. He knows that there is nothing in existence except God. God's actions are indicators of God's power; they are attached to Him; they do not have real existence independent of Him. He who has reached this stage, does not see the action but sees the actor.

The Meaning of Longing for God

You should know that whoever denies the reality of loving God, will certainly deny the reality of longing to God. It cannot be imagined that there is longing unless it is a longing to a beloved. We affirm that longing to God exists and is real. Reflection, seeing with the light of the spiritual insight, traditions, and narrations, compels the Gnostic to yearn to God.

As for reflection as evidence for the reality of yearning to God, one can refer to what we stated in regard to the reality of the existence of the love for God. One yearns for his beloved which is absent, but does not yearn to one who is present.

Longing for God has two reasons. These are

1. The Divine matters which are seen by a Gnostic appear as if they were veiled by a thin veil. This makes them unclear and sometimes they are mixed with the impurities of imagination. The Gnostic yearns to seeing these matters in a crystal clear form. This will only happen in the Hereafter. This is one of the reasons for longing for God: to get a clear vision of things which are partially clear. This will end in the Hereafter through what is known as the vision, the meeting, and the observation. This cannot happen in the worldly life.

Ibrahim ibn Adham was one of those longing for God. One day, he prayed saying, *“My Lord, if you have given one of the people who love you something to comfort their hearts until they meet you, then give me a similar thing, because worrying is bothering me.”* Ibrahim had a dream, that he was standing in front of God. God said to him, *“Ibrahim, do you not feel ashamed to ask me for something to comfort your heart, before meeting Me? Can a heart find comfort before it meets its lover?”* Ibrahim said to God, in the dream, *“My Lord, I was lost in your love, I did not know what to say, so forgive me and tell me what to say.”* God said, *“Say, ‘My Lord, make me content with what you have decreed, help me to persevere when faced with adversity, and make me grateful when You bless me with Your bounty.’”*

2. The second reason, is that Divine matters are unlimited. Some of them may be revealed to the Gnostics. But, he knows that there are others which have not been revealed. The Gnostic knows that they exist and that God knows them. He also knows that what he knows is far less than what he does not know. He will yearn to knowing what he does not know.

This kind of longing has no end, whether in this life or in the Hereafter. It ends when the person is able to realize the majesty of God, His attributes, His wisdom, and His actions, which are known to God alone. This is impossible because God's majesty, His attributes, His wisdom, and His actions are limitless.

How and What does it Mean for God to Love His Servant?

You should know that there is clear evidence from the Quran, that God loves His servants. This evidence can be gleaned from the verses, *“They love Him and, He loves them;”* (5: 54) *“God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure;”* (61: 4) *“Truly God loves those who turn to Him, and loves those who purify themselves.”* (2: 222) God responded to those who claimed that they are God’s beloved, saying, *“Why then, He punishes you for your sins?”* (5: 18)

God promised to forgive the sins of those whom He loves, *“Say, ‘If you do love God, follow me, God will love you and will forgive you your sins. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’”* (3: 31) The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁸⁴, *“God gives the world to those whom He loves and those whom He does not love; but gives faith to those He loves only.”* The Prophet (PBUH) also said⁸⁵, *“Whoever humbled himself to God, God will dignify him; and whoever behaved arrogantly, God will debase him. Whoever, remembered God often, God will love him.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said⁸⁶, *“God said, ‘A servant will endeavor to come closer to Me through the performance of supererogatory rituals until I love him. When I love him, I will be his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees.’”*

We have stated the reality of the servant’s love for God and that it is not metaphoric. Loving someone is the inclination of the soul to him. Passion is the extreme inclination to someone. We have shown that righteousness and beauty are among the things that the soul would incline to. Beauty and righteousness can be perceived by sight as well as by spiritual insight. Love follows both, so it is perceived by both sight and spiritual insight.

However, God’s love of a servant has a fundamentally different meaning. All attributes would assume different meanings when used to describe God than the meanings they assume when they are used to describe humans. Even the word “existence” has two different meanings when it is used in relation to God and when it is used in relation to a human being. Everything in existence derives its existence from God. The existence of everything is dependent on the existence of God. Dependent existence is not like independent existence. The difference is more pronounced in the case of attributes like knowledge, power, and will. The meanings of these are extremely different when they are applied to the Creator and the created. The language was originally tailored to address the needs of humans, when these attributes are used to describe God, they are used in a metaphorical sense.

Therefore, when God loves a servant, He brings him close to Him by steering him away from sins and things that form an attachment between the servant and the world. God purifies the heart of the servant and removes the veil off his heart, until the servant sees God with his heart.

The servant’s love for God expresses his inclination to achieve perfection which he lacks. Such a description does not befit God.

⁸⁴ Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Al-Hakem

⁸⁵ Narrated by Abi saeed (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

⁸⁶ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

If you say that, it is still not clear how does God love a servant. How can a servant know that God loves him? I say, one knows that God loves him by the signs. These signs are referred to in the Prophet's saying⁸⁷, *"When God loves a servant, He will put him to trials. And if God's love became tremendous, God chooses the person."* The Prophet (PBUH) was asked about the meaning of "chooses," he said, *"Did not leave him any wealth or family."*

The ultimate sign for the love of God is when God takes care of all of his affairs. God will be his counsel and his guide; God will embellish his character, control his senses, guide him to do the right thing; and God will make him hate the worldly life; and He will make him seek God's company.

The Signs of the Servant's Love for God

You should know that everyone can claim that he loves God. Claims are easy to make, but contents are difficult to verify. A person should not be deceived by the claims of Satan and the deception of the self when it asserts that it loves God. One should ask the self to prove its assertions and should look for the signs which verify such claims.

Loving God is like a good tree, firmly rooted in the ground, and its branches strike high in the sky. It yields its fruits on the heart, the tongue, and the senses. These fruits are signs of the love just like smoke is the sign for fire. These signs are numerous. Among these signs are

1. To love meeting the beloved by way of revelation and observation in the abode of peace. The heart enjoys the sight of whom it loves. If the heart knew that the only way to meet the beloved is to leave this world by dying, then it should love death; and it would not flee from death. Death is the key to the meeting and the door through which observation will take place. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁸⁸, *"Whoever loves God, loves to meet Him."* Some of the earlier generations said, *"There is nothing better, after loving God, than frequent prostrations."* Thus, they attached to loving God a higher status than prostration. God made martyrdom a test for testing the truth of the claim of loving God; He said, *"God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure;"* (61: 4) and He said, *"Indeed, God has purchased from the believers their persons and their wealth in return for paradise. They fight in God's cause, and shall slay and be slain."* (9: 111) Abu Bakr (RA) said to 'Umar (RA) in his last will, *"The truth is difficult, but it is blissful; falsehood is easy, but it is detrimental. If you fulfil my counsel, nothing would be more loved by you other than death, and in any case, it will eventually claim you. If you do not fulfil my will, nothing will be more hateful to you other than death, and you will not be able to escape it."*
If you ask, *"Can a person who hates death love God?"* I say, one may hate death because he loves the worldly life and does not like to part away from his family, his wealth, and his offspring. This contradicts the perfect love for God; because perfect love consumes the heart completely. It not unimaginable that the perfect love of God would be tainted

⁸⁷ Narrated by Abi Uotbah Al-Kholani (RA) and reported by Al-Tabarani

⁸⁸ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

with a slight blemish of the love of family, and offspring. People have different degrees of love.

The second reason for hating death is that the servant may have just started on the path of loving God; he does not hate death, but hates to die before he had time to prepare for the meeting with God. This is not an indication that his love for God is weak. His example is the example of a lover who was told that his beloved has arrived; he wanted to delay meeting him for an hour until he had arranged the house and made the necessary preparations to meet him.

2. A second sign, is to prefer the things that God loves over the things he loves. He engages in hard work, avoids following his whims, turns away from being lazy, endeavors to perform acts of obedience to God, seeks to come closer to God by performing supererogatory rituals.

If you ask, does disobedience contradict loving in principle? I say, disobedience does not contradict loving God in principle, but it contradicts its perfection. A sick person who loves himself and loves to be healthy, may eat something harmful to his health, knowing that the food will harm him. This is not an indication that he does not love himself. But the knowledge of God may become weak and the desire may grow stronger. This leads to disobedience. A man cursed a companion by the name of Al-Nuaiman (RA) because he was punished repeatedly by the Prophet (PBUH) for sins he committed. The Prophet (PBUH) said to the man, *“Do not curse him because he loves God and His Messenger.”* This means that acts of disobedience did not contradict his love for God, but it diminished that love.

3. A third sign is to persist in the remembering God. His tongue should be continuously singing the praise of God and his heart should be continuously full of Him. One always talks about the things that he loves and anything that is related to the things he loves. Thus, a sign of the love of God is to remember Him; to love the Quran, the word of God; and to love His Messenger (PBUH) and those who are related to him. This does not constitute associating others in the love of God, but one should love the Prophet (PBUH) because he is the Messenger of God; and one should love the Quran because it is the word of God. Loving the Messenger and the Quran are signs of the perfect love for God. Ibn Masoud (RA) said, *“If you want to know whether you love God or not, then ask yourself; if you love the Quran, then know that you love God, but if you do not love the Quran, then you do not love God.”*
4. A fourth sign, is to enjoy solitude, talking privately to God, and reciting His book. He should persist in praying by night. What kind of love for God one has if he enjoys sleeping by night or talking to people more than he enjoys a private talk with God? One of the signs of loving God is to enjoy His company and talking privately with Him.
5. The fifth sign of love for God is not to regret any thing that he missed. He should feel regretful for each hour that passes without engaging in the remembrance of God. He should return back to God whenever he becomes heedless, asking Him for forgiveness and repentance.

6. The sixth sign is to enjoy performing acts of obedience. He should find it easy to perform acts of obedience. Al-Gunaid said, *“The signs of a lover are to be always active and energetic; his body becomes tired but his heart is always alert.”*
7. The seventh sign is to treat all people mercifully and kindly, but be firm and strong against the enemies of God, *“Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and those who are with him are strong against the disbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other.”* (48: 29) Nothing should stop him from expressing his anger when he sees the limits of God being transgressed.
8. The eighth sign of love is to show his fear and belittle himself showing veneration to God. It may be thought that fear contradicts love, but this is not true, because being aware of the majesty of God generates fear in the heart. The special lovers of God have three levels of fear: the fear that God may turn away from them, the fear that God may place a veil between them and Him, and the fear that God may distance them from Him. The last level of fear is the fear that is referred to in the verse, *“Away with Midian as was Thamud removed.”* (11: 95)

These are the signs that can be used as evidence that a person loves God. A person who has all the aforementioned attributes can claim that his love for God is perfect. He will have a clear and sweet drink in the Hereafter. Those whose love for God is mixed with the love of other things, will receive a proportionate enjoyment in the Hereafter. Their drink will contain a portion from the drink of those who have been brought closer to God, *“Truly the righteous will be in Bliss; on couches, gazing. You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss. They will be given to drink pure wine, sealed, whose seal is musk - this is what the competitors should compete for. And mixed with water of Tasnim, a fountain from which those drawn near (to God) drink.”* (83: 25 – 28) He who loved God in his life hoping for the bliss of paradise in the Hereafter, will receive what he hoped for. However, he whose objective was the Lord of the abode, the King of the kingdom; and who loved God with sincerity and truthfulness, will be given *“the seat of honor in the presence of the All-Determiner Sovereign.”* (54: 55)

The Meaning of the Enjoyment of God’s Private Company

We have mentioned that enjoying the company of God, fear, passion are signs of loving God. If the person rejoices for feeling closer to God, is content with what he receives of gnosis, is only concerned with the apparent beauty, and is not concerned with what he is unaware of; then the heart will be happy with what he sees. This happiness is the enjoyment of the company of God. Enjoyment of the company of God is finding happiness in observing the apparent beauty, it can overcome the heart to the extent that, one would be unaware of what he is unaware of. Someone was asked, *“Do you long for God?”* He said, *“No, you only long to that which is absent.”*

He, who is extremely absorbed by the happiness which he finds in the company of God, desires only to be in solitude. Ibrahim ibn Adham came down from his solitude on top of a mountain; he was asked, *“From where did you come?”* He said, *“I came from enjoying a private company with God.”* Enjoying the private company of God leads to distancing oneself from others. One hates anything that obstructs the person from having his private time with God.

If you ask, what is the sign that a person enjoys his private company with God? I say, that one should feel annoyed if he has to mingle with people. He should persist in the remembrance of God. He should feel that he is a stranger if he has to mingle with people, remembering God in himself.

Explaining the Meaning of Intimacy and Indulgence Which Result from Enjoying the Private Companionship of God

You should know that when the enjoyment of the private companionship of God lasts, prevails, becomes entrenched, and is not spoiled neither by the anguish of longing nor by the fear of being veiled, then a state of intimacy is produced. This state encompasses speech, deeds, and private conversation with God.

God accepts intimacy and indulgence from some people but does not accept it from others. An example of the intimacy that was bestowed on Moses (PBUH) is how he was allowed to address God, *“My Lord, if it had been Your will, You could have destroyed both them and me, long before. Will You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? This is no more than Your trial; by it, You send whom You will astray, and You lead whom You will to the right path.”* (7: 155) And when God asked him to take the message to Pharaoh, he responded, *“My Lord, I do fear that they will call me a liar, and that my breast will tighten and my tongue will not be fluent, so send Aaron too. And they have a charge of crime against me; and I fear they may slay me.”* (26: 12 -14)

The Meaning of being Content with God's Decrees, its Essence and Its Virtues

You should know that contentment is one of the fruits of loving God. This is one of the highest stations of the stations of those who are brought closer to God. Its essence is obscure for most people. Only he whom God taught the interpretation and gave him deep understanding of the religion is able to sort out the confusion surrounding it. There are some who denied the possibility of being content with what contradicts the desire. They say, *"If it was possible to be content with everything because everything happens according to God's will, then, one should be content with acts of disobedience and disbelief."* Some were tricked with this logic, they accepted transgression and wickedness and refused to object and disapprove of these acts, because this shows the acceptance of God's will and decree. If the secrets of such matters were to be revealed to those whose understanding is limited to the appearances, then the Prophet (PBUH) would not have prayed God for Ibn Abbas (RA) saying⁸⁹, *"Lord, bestow on him a deep understanding of religion and teach him how the interpretation."*

The Virtue of Contentment

The verses that state the virtues of contentment include, *"God is well pleased with them, and they with God;"* (5: 119) *"Is there any reward for goodness but goodness."* (55: 60) The ultimate in goodness for a servant of God is for God to be pleased with him, this is the reward for the servant who is pleased with God. God said, *"God promised the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God. That is the supreme felicity."* (9: 72). God made contentment higher in stature over the Garden of Eden.

Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *"The first group of people to be admitted to paradise on the Day of Resurrection are those who praise God in all their states."* Maymun ibn Mahran said, *"Only chronically stupid people are displeased with God's decrees."* Abdel Aziz ibn abi Dawoud said, *"Stature is not attained by eating barely bread and vinegar, nor in being dressed in wool and hair, but stature is attained by being pleased with God's decrees."* Abd Allah ibn Masoud (RA) said, *"Licking a burning piece of coal is better for me than wishing that something happened would not have happened."* Abu Al-Dardaa said, *"The apex of faith is to persevere when judgment falls and to be content with fate."* Umar (RA) said, *"I don't care what state I am in, whether rich or poor."* Al-Fudail said, *"The sign that a servant is pleased with God is when it is the same for him whether he was given or prevented."*

The Essence of Contentment

You should know that some said, *"It is unimaginable that one should be content when something against what to be desired happens, in this case one can only persevere."* People who say this also deny the validity of loving God. If the love for God has been affirmed and the servant is completely absorbed in this love, then love will produce contentment. A lover loves the actions of his beloved in two ways. These are

⁸⁹ Narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

He ceases to feel pain even when subjected to a painful situation or he was wounded. An example of this, is the fighter when he is angry or afraid, he becomes so obsessed with fighting to the extent that he may become unaware that he has been wounded until he sees the blood gushing from his wounds. This is because the heart is fully engaged with a thought, such that the person will forget everything else. Similarly, the lover who has been consumed with his love; he would not suffer when he is afflicted with bodily harm, because he will not be aware of it. This is the situation when the affliction is produced by someone other than his lover, would he then, feel pain if the affliction was produced by his lover?

The second way is when he feels the pain but he is content with pain; his mind may even desire the pain, even though it may be hurting. This is like a person who seeks Arabic Cupping for the purpose of getting cured. He knows how painful the process is but he is pleased to undergo it, he even desires to have it because of the end result. Similarly, a person who travels seeking to make a profit; he knows the hardships that he has to suffer during his travel, but he is willing to endure the hardships because he loves the fruits of his travel. Whenever he is tested by an affliction from God, and he is certain that the reward saved for him outweighs what he lost, then he will be pleased with the affliction, he will desire it, will love it, and will show his gratitude to God.

Love may overwhelm the lover to the extent that he would seek the pleasure of his beloved for its own sake, not for anything else.

Al-Junaid said, *“I asked Al-Saqtī, ‘Does the lover feel the pain of trials?’ He said, ‘No,’ I said, ‘Even if he is to be struck by a sword?’ He said, ‘Even if he is to be struck by a sword, seventy times.’”* Saad ibn Abi Waqqas (RA) came to Mecca, while he was blind. People knew that his prayer are accepted by God, so they came to meet him, asking him to pray God for them, and he would pray for them. Abd Allah ibn Al-Saiib (RA) said, *“I went to him to greet him. He recognized me and said, ‘You are the reciter of the people of Mecca?’ I said, ‘yes.’ I then asked him why he does not pray God to remove his blindness. He said, ‘My son, accepting God’s decree is dearer to me than getting my sight back.’”*

If you reflect on these stories, you will surely know that being please with what you do not like is not impossible. It is not only impossible, but it is even a high station of the stations of the religious people. If we can do this for the people because we love them, we can surely do it for the sake of God whom we love, for two reasons

1. We can endure the pain because we know that the reward in the Hereafter outweighs the loss in this life.
2. We can endure the pain, not because we are expecting a reward, but because we love God and we seek His pleasure.

Expounding the Fact that Supplication does not Contradict Contentment

Supplication and contentment are not contradictory, nor does supplication drive one outside the station of contentment. Similarly, hating acts of disobedience, their perpetrators, and their causes and endeavoring to remove them are not contradictory to being in a state of contentment.

Enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil do not form an act contradictory to being in a state of contentment. Some bad people claimed that sins, transgression, and disbelief are destined by God, therefore, one should accept them and be content with them. This is certainly, total ignorance of the interpretation, and heedlessness of the secrets of religious law.

Supplications are acts of worship. The large volume of the Prophet (PBUH) and the other prophets' supplications proves that supplications are acts of worship. We have shown that in the Book of Supplications. The Messenger of God (PBUH) was in the highest station of the stations of contentment. God praised His servants who supplicate Him, "*They cried to Us in longing and in fear.*" (21: 90) God disparaged those who do not disapprove of the commitment of acts of disobedience, "*Certainly, those who do not expect to meet with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of this world, and those who are heedless of Our signs, their abode is the Fire, because of the (evil) they earned;*" (10: 7) and "*They preferred to be with those who remain behind (at home). A seal was set on their hearts so they understand not.*" (9: 87)

This shows that asking God for forgiveness, asking God for protection from committing sins, and asking God to grant the servant the means to help him stay on the right path do not contradict the acceptance of God's decrees. God made supplications acts of worship because supplications help purify the human soul for the remembrance of God and they breed the humility and softness of the heart. This cleanse the heart and prepare it to receive God's disclosures. Indeed, carrying a cup and drinking water does not contradict God's will in thirst. Drinking water as a means for quenching thirst is a means that God has created. Also, supplications are a means that has been created by God and He commanded us to perform. We have mentioned that seeking and using the means and causes in compliance with God's law do not violate putting one's trust in God. We have explained that extensively in the Book of Putting One's Trust in God. Contentment and putting one's trust in God have similar requirements.

Also, complaining openly about the afflictions that befall the person and rejecting it in one's heart contradict contentment. However, disclosing the afflictions that one suffers for the purposing of disclosing God's power does not contradict contentment. Some of the earlier generations said, one should not complain about a hot day in the summer. However, describing a day in the winter as a "hot day," shows the person's gratitude to God. Similarly, criticizing food is contradictory to contentment, because criticizing the manufactured goods is a criticism for the manufacturer.

Fleeing or Disparaging Countries in Which Acts of Obedience Are Committed is nor Contradictory to Contentment

You should know that the weak-minded may think that the Prophet's (PBUH) command not to flee a country in which the Plague breaks out applies to countries in which acts of disobedience has spread; thinking that both cases involve trying to escape God's decreed fate. This is not correct. The rationale behind the Prophet's (PBUH) command is to prevent healthy people from leaving the country leaving the sick with no one to care for them. This would certainly result in the death of the sick. Were it to be considered an escape from the God's decreed fate, he would not have given permission to those who did not enter the country to stay out. We have explained this in the Book of Putting One's Trust in God.

If the correct meaning of the command is understood, then fleeing the countries in which acts of disobedience prevail is not considered an escape from God's decreed fate. On the contrary, fleeing these countries is a compliance with God's decreed fate. Similarly, disparaging the places

which invite people to commit acts of disobedience; because driving the people away from sin is not blameworthy. The members of the earlier generation used to do that. A group of them agreed to disparage Baghdad. Ibn Al-Mubarak said, *“I travelled east and west, I did not see worse city than Baghdad.”* He was asked why is this? The replied, *“It is a city wherein the blessings of God are despised and acts of disobeying God are belittled.”* When he arrived at Khorasan, they asked him about Baghdad. He said, *“One only sees an angry policeman, a covetous merchant, or a perplexed reciter.”* You should not think that this is backbiting, because he never named names. His intention was to warn people.

Imam Ibn Hanbal used to say, *“I would have chosen to leave this city, if it were not for these disciples who are attached to us.”* They asked him, where he would rather live, he said, *“In the out ports.”*

These stories indicate that one has no excuse to continue living in a city in which sinning prevails, and that if he was afflicted by living in such a city, he should endeavor to depart this city to another place, *“When the angels take the souls of those who wronged themselves, they shall say, ‘In what state were you?’ They shall say, ‘We were weak and oppressed in the land.’ The angels will say, ‘Was not God’s earth spacious, so that you should have migrated therein?’ Such people will find their abode in Hell. What an evil refuge.”* (4: 97) If he was not able to leave because of his dependents or his attachments, he should not feel content about his situation, but he should always be concerned, always saying, *“Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Your grace a patron and a helper.”* (4: 75) This is because when wrongdoing prevails, afflictions will befall everyone, both those who are obedient and those who are disobedient. God said, *“And fear a trial, which affects not in particular (only) those of you who do wrong, and know that God is severe in punishment.”* (8: 25)

The scholars differed about who is better: a person who loves to die, because he yearns to meet God; a person who desires to live longer to serve his Lord; or a person who says, *“I do not choose one way or the other, I am content with what God chooses for me.”* One of the Gnostics said, *“The best of them is the man who is content with whatever God chooses for him, because he is the least ambitious among the three.”*

The Conclusion of the Book: Useful Quotes about Loving God

Sufian said, *“Loving God is in following the Messenger of God (PBUH).”* Others said, *“Loving of God is in the continuous remembrance of God.”* Others said, *“Loving God is in hating to live longer.”* These are quotes which deal with the fruits of loving God. However, no one discussed the essence of loving God. Others said, *“Loving God is an understanding that overwhelms the heart; the heart is barely aware of it and the tongue cannot describe it.”*

Book 7: The Book of Intention, Sincerity, and Truthfulness

Chapter 1: Intention

The Virtues of Intention

God said, *“And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His favor;”* (6: 52) It is said, that the word, “desire,” in this verse refers to the intention. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁹⁰, *“Deeds are contingent on the intention, each person is rewarded according to his intention. A person who emigrates for the sake of God and His Messenger, will get the reward of a person who emigrates for the sake of God and His Messenger; but a person who emigrates for the sake of gaining a worldly benefit or for the sake of marrying a specific woman, will be rewarded according to his intention.”*

God said, *“If they both desire amendment, God will bring about reconciliation between them, certainly God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.”* (4: 35) He made the reconciliation contingent on the intention. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁹¹, *“God does not look at your figures and property, but looks at your hearts and deeds.”* The hearts are the places where the intention resides. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁹², *“The angels will bring the recorded deeds of a person to God. God will tell them to throw away the deeds that were not intended for His sake and will ask the angels to add deeds which the person never did. When the angels ask, God will answer that these are deeds which the person has intended to do, but never got around to actually doing them.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said⁹³, *“People are one of four types: a person on whom God bestowed knowledge and wealth, he spends his wealth according to his knowledge; a person, who will look at the first person and say, ‘I wish God would bestow on me similar knowledge and wealth so I spend the same way he spends,’ these two people get the same reward; a third person on whom God bestowed wealth but did not give him knowledge, his ignorance drives him to spend his wealth aimlessly; and a fourth person who will look at the third person and say, ‘I wish that God bestows on me similar wealth to spend like him,’ these two people are equal in sin.”* The intention of the second and fourth person earned them the same reward and punishment as the first and third ones, respectively. On the way to the battle of Tabouk, the Prophet (PBUH) said⁹⁴, *“We left people behind in Medina, they will share the reward that we will get for the trouble we suffered in crossing a valley, in trotting a place which would enrage the disbelievers, in spending money in the sake of God, or in being hungry.”* The companions asked, *“How can this be while they did not do any of these deeds?”* The Prophet (PBUH) said⁹⁵, *“They had the intention to join us, but they were kept back for a reason beyond their control.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Whoever intends to do a good deed but never came around to actually do it, God will record it as if he had done it.”*

‘Umar (RA) said, *“The best of deeds is to perform the obligatory duties, to abstain from doing the things which God prohibited, and to have sincere intention regarding what God has.”* Salem ibn Abd Allah (RA) wrote ‘Umar ibn Abdel Aziz (RA) saying, *“You should know that God’s help and support to one of His servants is proportionate to the servant’s intention. God will*

⁹⁰ Narrated by ‘Umar (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁹¹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

⁹² Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Darqatni

⁹³ Narrated by Abi Kabshah (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah

⁹⁴ Narrated by Anas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

⁹⁵ Narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

provide full help to whosoever has a full intention.” Al-Thawri said, “*The earlier generation used to learn how to perfect their intention as you would learn how to perfect your deeds.*” One of the scholars said, “*Seek the intention before you embark on the deed. You will be in a good state as long as you have good intention.*”

The Essence of the Intention

You should know that the words, “*intention,*” “*objective,*” and “*will*” mean the same thing. It is a state of the heart that consists of two parts: knowledge and action. Knowledge comes first, because it is the origin; and action follows because it is its fruit. Each action cannot be completed unless three things are accomplished: knowledge, will, and power. No one wills what he does not know. Thus, will must be preceded by the knowledge. No one does what he does without a will to do it. Thus, the will has to precede the action. The will motivates the heart to that which is agreeable to the objective whether at the present time or in the future. The human being has been created so that some things are agreeable to him and some are not. The human being needs to obtain what is useful to him and to avoid what is harmful. Therefore, he needs to know which things are useful and which things are harmful. A person who is unable to see and know food, will not be able to eat it. Similarly, a person who does not see fire cannot escape it. God created guidance and knowledge and created their means; the means are the physical senses. However, this is not our subject.

It is not sufficient that a person is able to see the food and to know that it is good for him, but he has to have the inclination and the desire to eat it. A sick person may see the food and know that it is good for him but does not eat because he has no appetite for it. It is for this reason that God created the appetite. The appetite is an inner inclination which moves his heart towards the thing. This is not sufficient, because a person may see the food that he desires; he wants to eat the food but is unable to obtain the food because he is helpless. He needs power to move the organs that can obtain the food. Organs need power to move, power needs the impulse, the impulse needs the knowledge, perception, belief, or assumption. The knowledge, perception, belief or assumption confirm that the food is good for him. If the knowledge is confirmed then the will be formed; this will give rise to the will and the inclination, consequently the power to move the organs is produced. Power is the servant of the will. Will follows once knowledge has been confirmed. Intention is the middle state between the formation of the will and the emergence of the impulse.

Details of the Actions Related to the Intention

You should know that actions can be divided into three categories: acts of disobedience, acts of obedience, permissible acts.

Acts of Disobedience

These acts do not change their nature with the change in the intention. An ignorant person should not wrongly understand the Prophet’s (PBUH) saying, “*Deeds are contingent on the intention,*” to mean that an act of disobedience can be transformed into an act of obedience by merely changing the intention behind it. Examples of this are to backbite a person to console another person, to feed a poor person using stolen money, or to build a mosque or a school using money earned using prohibited means. Even if the intentions behind these deeds are good, the deeds are

still considered impermissible. It is ignorance to think otherwise. The intention to do something good using evil means, against the religious rules, is an evil deed. A person who recognizes this and continues to do these deeds is a person who is adamant in defying the religious laws. A person who is ignorant of this, has committed a sin caused by his ignorance. Seeking knowledge is an obligatory duty for each Muslim. Religious laws define what is good and what is evil.

Sahl said, *“No act of disobedience is more grave than being ignorant.”* He was asked, *“Do you know something that is even more grave than ignorance?”* He said, *“Yes, to be ignorant that you are ignorant.”* This is true, because a person’s ignorance that he is ignorant, seals completely the door of learning for him. How can a person who thinks that his knowledge is complete, seek knowledge?

Similarly, knowledge is the best way to become obedient to God. The utmost knowledge is knowing that one is knowledgeable, just like the utmost ignorance is the ignorance that one is ignorant. The person who cannot differentiate between the good knowledge and the bad knowledge will waste his time trying to learn these flowery sciences which people use to seek as means to this worldly life. This is the subject of ignorance and the source of corruption in this world.

In summary, there is no excuse for a person to use an impermissible means to do a good deed, thinking that this is right because he is ignorant, *“Ask the followers of the message (former Scriptures) if you do not know.”* (16: 43) This can be an excuse, only for those who have accepted Islam recently and did not have time to get the proper knowledge.

Therefore, the tradition, *“Deeds are contingent on the intention,”* refers to deeds which constitute acts of obedience or are permissible, but does not apply to acts of disobedience. An act of obedience can be transformed into an act of disobedience if it is combined with a bad intention. Similarly, a permissible act can become a sin if the intention was bad. However, a good intention cannot transform a sin into a good deed.

Acts of Obedience

The validity of the acts of obedience and their reward are contingent in principle on sound intention. It is a fundamental principle that the act of obedience is intended to be an act of worship for God alone. If the intention is to show off, then the act is transformed into a sin. The reward for the act can be multiplied by making more than one valid intention. One can have several good intentions for each act of worship, each intention will gain a reward. Each one earns a reward and then God multiplies this tenfold.

An example of this is staying at the Mosque. Staying in the Mosque for a while is an act of worship. One can have several intentions for staying at the mosque.

1. Since the Mosque is God’s house, he could make the intention that by staying at Mosque he is visiting his Lord.
2. He could stay at the Mosque for one prayer after another so that he could make the intention that he wants to be one of those who strengthen each other, *“You who believe persevere in patience and constancy, vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and remain conscious of God that you may succeed.”* (3: 200)

3. To seek seclusion by preventing the hearing, the sight, and the organs from moving and oscillating. This is a kind of *Itikaf*. *Itikaf* means cessation.
4. Dedicating one's attention fully to God, reflecting on thinking about the Hereafter. Using seclusion at the Mosque to distance oneself from distracting things.
5. Devoting oneself fully to the remembrance of God.
6. To have the intention to benefit others with his knowledge by practicing enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.
7. To get to know a brother in faith. This is a real gain for the Hereafter.
8. To abstain from sin acting demurely in the presence of God.

This is an example for how to increase the number of intentions, thereby increasing the rewards.

Permissible Acts

An intention can be attached to every permissible act, the proper intention makes the act an act of obedience that draws the person closer to God and it earns him great rewards. It is a great loss to lose such opportunity. One should not belittle any thought, deed, or moment. One will be held accountable for all these on the Day of Judgment. He will be asked; why did you do this? And what was your intention? This will be for each permissible act that is not tainted with doubts.

Some of the knowledgeable scholars of the early generation said, "*I like to have an intention in each deed; even when I eat, drink, sleep, or go to the washroom.*" This applies to any act that can be used to bring the person closer to God. Every act that preserves the body and allows the heart to be free from worrying about satisfying the physical needs of the body helps the person to perform his religious duties. Eating and having intimate sexual relationship with the spouse can be acts of obedience if they were preceded with the appropriate intention and were meant to be acts to draw the person closer to God.

It is better for a person who lost money to make the intention that the money is for the sake of God. It is also better for a person not to respond, when he is told that others are committing backbiting against him. His silence should be dedicated to God. He should feel good when he realizes that the person who committed backbiting against him will take some of his sins.

If you were one of those who have firm resolve, then you should examine your deeds and be meticulous in holding yourself accountable for your deeds, before this is done to you. Observe your conditions, do not stay standing still and do not move until you have considered; why are you doing this? What will be your gain from this life? What will you miss in the Hereafter? And how you compare the gain and loss in this life and the Hereafter? If you become certain that what you want to do is solely motivated by religion, then you should go ahead and do what you intend to do.

Intention is Beyond Choice

You should know that the ignorant would listen to our recommendation to make the appropriate intention and make it often, then when he studies, he does business, or he eats; he says, "*My intention is that I study, I do business, and I eat for the sake of God,*" thinking that this is the proper way of making the intention. This is merely a self-talk, an utterance by the tongue, or a thought. Intention is something different than all of these. An intention is a motivation for the

self which makes it inclined to do what has been proven to be a way to achieve what it wants, either sooner or later.

An inclination cannot be generated by the mere will to have it. An example of this is when a person who is satiated says, "*I intend to have an appetite for food.*" The only way to generate an inclination in the heart towards something is to acquire the means for it, which a person may or may not be able to do. The self can be only motivated to do the things that are agreeable to it. A person will not attempt an action unless he realizes that this action will enable him to achieve his objectives. He may not be able to achieve this at all times. Even if he realizes that a certain action will lead to the fulfillment of his objective, the heart may not be inclined to attempt this action, if the heart is engaged in another distracting activity. There are many causes for the distractions; and they differ from one person to another, and depending on the states and the actions. If a person desires to engage in a sexual act, however, he does not have a belief in a sound objective that can be achieved by having offspring, whether the objective is related to this life or the Hereafter, then, he cannot have a sexual act with the intention of having offspring. The intention he could have in this situation, is to satisfy his sexual urge. Intention is a response for the motivation and the motivation here is to satisfy the sexual urge.

He could gain the sound intention by strengthening his faith using religious rules and by reminding himself of the great reward that he could gain by increasing the population of Muslims. He should then repel away all the reasons which drive him away from having offspring, like the difficulty in providing for the children and the hard work involved in raising them.

That is why a number of the members of the earlier generation abstained from performing some acts of obedience. They would say, we do not have the intention to do this for the sake of God, then we should not do it. Ibn Sirin did not attend the funeral of Hasan Al-Basri. He said, I do not have the intention.

It is easy for a person, whose heart is always engaged in religious matters, to have the appropriate intention most of the time; because, in principle, his heart is inclined to do good deeds. It would be easy for him to make the sound intention appropriate to the situation. On the other hand, it is difficult for a person whose heart inclines to this life and whose heart is overcome with this life to have the appropriate intention at all times. It may be even difficult for him to have a sound intention when he does the obligatory religious rituals. Such a person, should remind himself of Hellfire and warns himself of its torment; he should also remind himself of paradise and its bliss. This may motivate him somewhat and he would be rewarded according to his motivation. However, he will not be able to achieve the intention of revering God as the most deserving of obedience and submission. This is the dearest and highest intention a man can have; it is difficult for many of those walking on the surface of the earth to understand such intention, let alone adopting it.

The intentions that people adopt when they perform the religious rituals are different. Some act as a result of being motivated by fear; they try to avoid Hellfire. Some, act as a result of being motivated by hope; they seek paradise. These intentions are legitimate and sound intentions,

because they are motivated by promises of things to happen in the Hereafter. However, they are lower in rank than the intention to perform the rituals for the sole purpose of obeying God and glorifying Him, for His own sake and not for anything else.

In summary, the intentions have different ranks. Some may adopt intentions that belong to a certain rank, and it difficult for him to move from one category to another. We say that, if a person is about to perform an act that has different aspects, one of them permissible and another which is higher in virtue, then it is preferable to have the intention for doing the permissible act, if he cannot have the two intentions. An example of this is forgiveness and retribution.

Retribution is permissible while forgiveness is higher in virtue. A person who gets tired as a result of continuously performing acts of worship, and he knows that if he took a break, he can then resume the active performance of the rituals; then it is better in such case to take a break instead of trying to persist in performing the rituals while he is tired.

Chapter 2: Sincerity

The Virtue of Sincerity

God said, *“And they have been commanded only to worship God, devoting their faith to Him alone, to establish regular prayer; and to give alms;”* (98: 5) *“Unquestionably for God is the pure religion;”* (39: 3) *“Except those who repent, amend, hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to God, these are with the believers; and God will grant the believers an immense reward;”* (4: 146) and He said, *“And whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him do good deeds, and do not associate partners with his Lord.”* (18: 110) This last verse is referring to people who do deeds for the sake of God, but they like to be praised for their deeds.

The Prophet (PBUH) said⁹⁶, *“The first person to be called for account a person on whom God bestowed knowledge, a person who owned great wealth, and a person who was killed in the sake of God. God will ask the first one, ‘Did I not bestow My blessings on you?’ The man will reply, ‘Yes.’ God will ask him, ‘What have you done with it?’ The man will say, ‘I used to recite the Quran day and night for the sake of God.’ God and the angels will say, ‘You lied. You only wanted people to praise your ability to recite the Quran. They did.’ God will ask the second man, ‘Did I not bestow on you great wealth, so that you were in no need?’ The man will say, ‘Yes. I helped my kinfolks financially, and I gave out charity.’ God and the angels will say, ‘You lied. You only wanted people to praise your generosity. They did.’ God will ask the third man, ‘How did you die?’ The man will say, ‘I was commanded to fight in Your sake, I fought and I was killed.’ God and the angels will say, ‘You lied, you only fought so that people would praise your courage. They did.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“These are three who will enter Hellfire first.”*

‘Umar ibn Al-Khatib (RA) wrote Abi Musa Al-Ashaari saying, *“God will suffice the person who sincerely dedicates his efforts to God.”* One of the knowledgeable scholars said, *“It is sufficient to perform very little good deeds, if you have the sincere intention of dedicating them, to God.”* Ayyoub Al-Sikhtiyani said, *“It is more difficult for the workers to have sincere intentions rather than to do the work.”*

The Essence of Sincerity

You should know that everything could be tainted by other things. Something that has not been tainted with other things is called pure (*khalis*). The purity of the act is called, “sincerity” (*Ikhlas*). *“We give you drink, from what is in their bellies between excretions and blood - pure milk, agreeable to those who drink it.”* (16: 66) The milk has not been tainted by the excretions, the blood, or any other impurity, therefore, it remained pure. Sincerity is the opposite to association. Whoever is sincere does not associate anything with God. However, associating partners with God has degrees. Associating partners with God as a deity is the opposite to the sincerity in the belief of the Oneness of God. Associating partners with God is two types: conspicuous and hidden. Similarly, sincerity can be conspicuous or hidden. Sincerity and its opposite are traits of the heart, thus, their place is in the heart. They are reflected on the objectives and intentions. We have described the essence of the intention and how it is formed

⁹⁶ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

as response to motivations. When the intention is produced by a single motivation, then it is a sincere intention for what it was meant for. A person who gives charity for the sole purpose of showing off is sincere in his endeavor. Whoever gives charity seeking solely to become closer to God is sincere in his endeavor. However, sincerity is usually used to describe endeavors which are intended exclusively to bring the servant closer to God. Similarly, the Arabic word for atheism means swerving away, but it is usually used exclusively to mean swerving away from the truth.

We will now talk about actions which are motivated by the intention to come closer to God; but this motivation may be tainted by showing off or by other worldly gain. An example of this is a person whose objective from fasting is dual: to benefit from the fasting diet and to become closer to God. Another example is a person who performs pilgrimage to enjoy the trip, to avoid harm that might befalls him in his home country, to flee an enemy waiting for him in his home, or to get away from his family or his work for a few days. The deeds of these people can no longer be described as sincere. These actions are not exclusively dedicated to God and they have been tainted. God said⁹⁷, *“I am most independent from having partners.”*

In summary, if the endeavor which was originally intended for the sake of God is tainted by another objective which seeks a worldly gain or benefit, then it can no longer be considered a sincere endeavor; no matter how large or small this benefit is. The sincere endeavor is the endeavor which is only motivated by the desire to become closer to God.

These impurities which taint the endeavor originally dedicated to God, may be either compatible to, associated with, or supporting the main intention. They can also be equal in strength, stronger or weaker than the religious impulse. Each one has its own ruling, as we will mention later. Sincerity is to completely cleanse the deeds from all these impurities; until the intention to draw closer to God becomes the sole motivation for the deed. This can only happen for a person who loves God and his sole concern is the Hereafter. Such a person does not have a place in his heart for the love of this life. He may even lose interest in eating and drinking. He would regard food as a necessity for survival and as a means to obtain the strength needed for performing the acts of worship. He wishes to be relieved from the feeling of hunger, so that he would not need to eat. This way, his heart would be completely free from the desire to have more food than what is absolutely necessary for survival. Such a person, if he eats, drinks, and relieves himself, has a sound intention in all his movements. If he sleeps having the intention that sleep is necessary to give him the strength to perform the rituals of worship, then, his sleep becomes a ritual of worship and he would gain the rank of the sincere.

Those who do not belong to this rank, have no way to attain sincerity, except in rare circumstances. The deeds of a person, whose most important concern is to enjoy life, gain prominence, and majesty or any other concern other than God, are tainted by this concern. The rituals of worship performed by such a person will not be pure, except rarely. The recipe for attaining sincerity is to completely destroy the interest in the worldly fortunes, relinquish any feeling of desire in the joys of this life, and to dedicate oneself exclusively to the Hereafter.

⁹⁷ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

When this recipe prevails over the heart, one attains the rank of sincerity. A person may work hard in performing deeds, thinking that they were sincerely dedicated to God, while they were not. He does not see the evil that tainted his deeds. These evils are obscure and it is rarely that the deed would be free of them. Only those who have been guided by God can discover them. The heedless will realize in the Hereafter that all their good deeds were actually sins. These are referred to in the verse, *“And there will appear to them, from God, that which they never reckoned. And the evils that they earned will appear to them, and that whereat they used to scoff will surround them.”* (39: 47- 48) The people most vulnerable to this trial are the scholars. The control of the hearts of people, the joy of having many followers, and the love of being praised are the factors that motivate most scholars to spread knowledge. Satan confuses and deceives them by saying, “Your objective is to spread the religion of God and to defend the religious law which have been delineated by the Messenger of God (PBUH).” Many of the scholars remind people of the favor they bestow upon them by teaching them, they love giving counsel to people in authority, and rejoice in the acceptance of people of their speeches. They claim that they are only happy because they have been able to contribute to the support of the religion of God. However, if his followers left him to another scholar whom they think is better, he becomes angry. If he was really motivated by a religious impulse, he would have been grateful to God. He would thank God, that someone else has relieved him of his chores.

Satan will continue to work on him. Satan will say, *“You are not sad because people left you and followed the other scholar, you are only sad because you did not want to miss the reward that you would have gained if these people benefited from your instructions. This is a praiseworthy feeling.”* The poor man does not realize that submitting to the truth is better for him and more rewarding with God.

Statements of the Righteous Scholars about Sincerity

Al-Susi said, *“Sincerity is to be blind to sincerity. Whoever, recognizes his own sincerity in an endeavor, then his sincerity needs sincerity.”* This statement refers to purifying the endeavors from being an object of conceit. If one recognizes the sincerity in what he does, then this would be a source of conceit. Conceit is one of the evils and sincerity requires that the deed would be purified of all evils. Sahl said, *“Sincerity is when each movement or non- movement that the servant attempts are done in the sake of God.”* This is a comprehensive statement. In the same vein, Ibrahim ibn Adham said, *“Sincerity is to dedicate the intention solely to God.”* Sahl was asked, *“What deed is more difficult?”* He said, *“Sincerity, because the person has no lot in it.”*

The Degrees of Impurities and Evils Which May Taint Sincerity

You should know that some of the evils which taint sincerity are obvious and some are hidden. The obvious ones may be weak while the hidden ones may be strong. One can understand these differences only using an example. The most obvious of the impurities is showing off. Let us give an example of this impurity.

Satan tries to taint the sincerity of a person who is praying, no matter how sincere he is. When a group of people see him pray, Satan will say, “Embellish your prayer, so that these people would respect you, consider you one of the righteous, do not look down at you, and do not backbite

you.” The person would then, show humility in prayer and tries to embellish it. This is obvious showing off. It is easy for the new seekers of knowledge to detect such evil.

When Satan finds out that the seeker of knowledge had discovered the trick explained in the previous example, and does not fall for it; Satan will approach the seeker from another angle. This is the second degree of evils that taint sincerity. Satan will say, *“You are a leader, people follow you and look up to you, and they emulate what you do. If you embellish your prayer you will get the reward they earn for improving their prayer, however, if you do not embellish your prayer and they follow you, you will earn a sin. You should then embellish your prayer, when you pray in front of others so they may follow you and emulate your good performance.”* This is more obscure than the first one. Those who may be able to avoid falling for the first, may fall for this one. This is also showing off and it invalidates sincerity. If he believes that performing prayer in a good way and showing humility during prayer are good features to be emulated by others, why then, he does not do this when he prays alone? Others are not dearer to him than himself. This is one of Satan’s tricks. Those who emulate his good performance will be rewarded for their good performance, but his performance is nothing but showing off.

The third degree is even more subtle than the first two. This is a case of a person who is able to avoid Satan’s first two tricks but he embellishes his prayer when praying alone with the intention that his prayers among people would be also embellished. This is a subtle showing off because his intention was to embellish his prayer when he prays in front of people. He did not want his prayer to be different whether he prays in seclusion or prays in an assembly; that is why he improves his prayer when he prays alone. To remedy this, one should not concern himself with who is present when he prays whether human or non-human.

The fourth degree is much more hidden and subtle than the previous degrees. It is the case of a person who is able to avoid the first three trick of Satan. Satan will come to him during his prayer and say, *“Reflect on the majesty and glory of God, in front of Him you stand. Be ashamed that God sees that your heart is heedless of Him while you pray.”* The person would then humble himself in his prayer, thinking that this is the utmost in sincerity, while it is actually scheming and cunning. Had his humility been to the majesty of God, that thought would have occurred to him when praying in seclusion not because there are people watching him pray. The presence of others, whether human or animal, should not be a reason for him to show humility in prayer. If he prays differently in the presence of humans and animals, then his sincerity has been tainted by subtle showing off.

This kind of showing off is subtler, in the heart of a person, than the steps of a black ant on a solid rock in a dark night. Only prudent people whom God has blessed with His guidance and success are able to avoid Satan’s tricks. Satan is always trying to tempt those who are active in worship. He is continuously trying to seduce them to show off in each and every movement they take; even in cutting the moustache, and using perfume and wearing the proper clothes on Friday. These are among the traditions that people adopted from the Prophet (PBUH) to be used in special occasions. No one is free from the subtle enjoyment produced by the practice of these traditions, because we find comfort in practicing them and they can be a subject of the admiration of people. If these traditions are done in response to this subtle desire, then sincerity

is tainted. Even making Itikaf in a well-built clean Mosque may be a source for impurity that taints sincerity of worship. A person may prefer one mosque over another because the mosque is cleaner and has a more beautiful inside; this may be one of the susurrations of Satan which taints the sincerity of the worship of a person.

Tainted Deeds and Their Rewards

You should know that the scholars differed whether a tainted deed, which is not purely dedicated to God alone, deserves a reward, a punishment, or nothing. Indeed, a deed that has been motivated solely by showing off is a sin; it is a cause for God's displeasure and punishment. On the other hand, a deed which is sincerely dedicated to God alone deserves a reward. The question relates to deeds which have been tainted. It seems from the traditions that tainted deeds do not deserve rewards. However, there are opposite opinions. Our opinion, God knows best, that if the religious motivation is equal to the worldly motivation, then they cancel each other and the deed becomes neutral, neither reward nor punishment are earned. If the motivation of showing off is stronger than the religious motivation, then the deed is rendered useless, in addition, it becomes a cause for punishment. The punishment in this case would be less severe than the punishment in case the motivation was solely for showing off. If the religious motivation is stronger than the showing off motivation, then the deed deserves a reward proportionate to the amount by which the religious motivation exceeds the worldly motivation.

Chapter 3: Truthfulness

The Virtue of Truthfulness

God said, *“Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God.”* (33: 23) The Prophet (PBUH) said⁹⁸, *“Indeed, truthfulness guides to righteousness and righteousness leads to paradise. A person tells the truth and continues to tell the truth until it is written in his record with God that he is a truthful person. Indeed, lying guides to transgression, and transgression leads to Hellfire. A person lies and continues to tell lies until it is written in his record with God that he is a liar.”* It is a sign of the virtuousness of truthfulness that the Arabic word for a saint is (*Siddiq*). God used this word to describe the prophets, *“And mention in the Book (the story of) Abraham. He was a man of truth (siddiq), a prophet;”* (19: 41) *“And mention in the Book Ishmael. He was a keeper of his promise, and he was a messenger (of God), a prophet. He enjoined on his people prayers and almsgiving. He was most acceptable in the sight of his Lord. And mention in the Book Idris. He was a man of truth, (and) a prophet.”* (19: 54 – 56)

Ibn Abbas said, *“A person succeeds if he has four qualities: truthfulness, shame, good manners, and gratitude.”* Abu Soliman said, *“Take truthfulness as your ride, take the truth as your sword, take God as your final and utmost objective.”* A man said to a wise man, *“I have never seen a truthful person.”* The wise man said, *“Had you been a truthful person, you would have known the truthful people.”* Muhammad ibn Ali Al-Katani said, *“We found the religion of God founded on three principles: truth, truthfulness, and justice. Truth is for the physical organs, justice is for the hearts, and truthfulness is for the minds.”* Al-Thawri commented on the verse, *“On the Day of Resurrection you will see the faces of those who told lies against God darkened.”* (39: 60) He said, *“This refers to those who claim they love God but they are not truthful.”* The scholars agreed that salvation of the person lies in three traits: Pure submission to God which is free from innovation and whim, truthfulness in all deeds dedicated to God, and surviving on lawful sustenance. The three traits should be enjoyed together.

The Essence of Truthfulness, its Meaning and Ranks

You should know that the word truthfulness is used to indicate six meanings: truthfulness in words, truthfulness in intention and will, truthfulness in resolve, truthfulness in the fulfillment of what one resolved to do, truthfulness in action, and truthfulness in affirming all the basic principles of religion. Whoever achieved all these meanings attains the rank of truthfulness (*Siddiq*). This is the highest level of truthfulness. There are ranks for each meaning, one would become truthful in a meaning as much as he is able to achieve of that meaning.

The Truthfulness of the Tongue

This pertains to what one says, whether in the past or the future. It includes fulfilling or breaking promises. It is incumbent on everyone to watch his own words, so that he would not tell a lie. This is the most common and apparent type of truthfulness. Whoever keeps his tongue not to tell a lie is considered truthful. There are two ways to perfect this type of truthfulness. The first is avoiding equivocation. It has been said that equivocation is an alternative for a lie. The bad thing about a lie is that it gives a false understanding. Sometimes it is necessary to use an allusion for a

⁹⁸ Narrated by Ibn Masoud (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

good purpose: in teaching, in avoiding injustice, or in dealing with the enemy. If one was forced in a situation like this, then his truthfulness is to make what he says for the sake of God according to the commands of God and the requirements of the religion. In a situation like this, even if his allusion was misunderstood, then he is still truthful, because truthfulness is intended to convey the truth. One should consider not just the form but its meaning. Indeed, one should avoid allusions as much as he can. The Prophet (PBUH) used⁹⁹ to make allusions about his destination when he travels to engage the enemy; he wanted to surprise the enemy. This is not considered a lie. The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰⁰, “*He is not a liar who says good things to mend the affairs between two people.*” The Prophet (PBUH) gave permission to say what serves the interest of people in three cases: mending the affairs between two people, a person who has two wives, and in war. The truthfulness here is entrusted to the intention. In these situations, one should be careful about the truthfulness of the intention and the sincere pursuance of good. He who has sound objective, sincere intention, and pure will for what is good is considered truthful.

Thus, the first means of perfection for the truthfulness of the tongue is to avoid telling a lie or uttering an equivocal speech except when it is absolutely necessary.

The second means for perfection for the truthfulness of the tongue is to be scrupulous in choosing the words he uses to speak to God privately. A person would be lying if he says, “*I have directed my face towards the Creator of the heavens and earth,*” while his heart is distracted away from God, thinking of the fortunes of this life. If that person is asked on the Day of Judgment to say truthfully that he is the servant of God, he would not be able to say it; because if he is not sincere in assuming the characteristics of a servant of God, he would be lying.

Truthfulness in Intention and Will

This goes back to sincerity. A person who is truthful in his intentions is a person who is motivated in all his movements and non-movements only by God. Truthfulness is invalidated in this case if the motivation is tainted with an interest in some of the fortunes of the self. The person in such case can be considered a liar, as we narrated before regarding the virtue of sincerity in the tradition about the first three people to be taken to account by God on the Day of Judgement. God asked the scholar what has he done with the knowledge that God bestowed on him, he said, I did such and such. God said, “*You are a liar, you only did this so that people would praise your knowledge.*” His lie is not a lie of the tongue but is a lie in the intention. One of the righteous said, “*Truthfulness is to observe the Oneness of God in your purpose.*” God said, “*When the hypocrites come to you, they say, ‘We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of God.’ God knows that you are indeed His Messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.*” (63: 1) The hypocrites said to the Prophet (PBUH), “*you are indeed the Messenger of God.*” This was not a lie by the tongue, but it was a lie about their intention. The lie about their intention extended to the statement they uttered. Thus, they lied about what they believe in their hearts. Thus, one of the meanings of truthfulness is the sincerity of intention, this is what we call sincerity. Thus, a truthful person must be sincere.

⁹⁹ Narrated by Kaab ibn Malek (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

¹⁰⁰ Narrated by Um Kulthum bint Uqbah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

Truthfulness in Resolve

A person may resolve to perform an action first before he actually embarks on the action. He may say to himself, *“If God gave me money, I will give it away or a part of it, in charity.”* He may say, *“If I faced an enemy for the sake of God, I will continue fighting even, if I die.”* He may say, *“If God puts me in an office of authority, I will endeavor to be just and I will not commit any injustice against people.”* This resolve may be firm and true resolve or it may be tainted by hesitation or weakness. This impurity that taints the resolve is opposite to the truthfulness in resolve. Thus, truthfulness in resolve is to have a perfect and firm resolve. The truthful person is a person whose resolve to do good deed is extremely firm and is not tainted by an impurity of hesitation or weakness. ‘Umar (RA) said, “I would not accept to be the person in authority (Emir) over a people who have among them Abu Bakr (RA).” ‘Umar (RA) had the firm resolve and the sincere love for Abu Bakr (RA) to the extent that he would not assume a position of authority over him, even if it meant he would be killed.

Truthfulness in the Fulfillment of what one Resolved to do

Sometimes, a person may find it easy to pledge to do something, but when all the facts are known and the desires become loose, fulfilment of the resolve becomes difficult. This is against the truthfulness in the fulfillment of the resolve. God said, *“Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God.”* (33: 23) Anas (RA) narrated that his uncle Anas ibn Al-Nadr (RA) was feeling sad that he did not participate in the Battle of Badr with the Prophet (PBUH). He said, *“How can I miss this battle with the Prophet (PBUH)? If God enabled me to participate in another battle with the Prophet (PBUH), then God will see how I will perform.”* The following year, Ibn Al-Nadr had the opportunity to participate in the battle of Uhud. On his way to the battle, he met Saad ibn Moadh, who said, *“Aba Amr, where are you going?”* He said, *“I can smell the scent of paradise, I can smell its scent behind Uhud.”* He fought and was killed. He had eighty something wounds on his body. His sister said, *“I only recognized him by the clothes he was wearing.”* The verse, *“Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God,”* (33: 23) was then revealed. The Prophet (PBUH) recited the verse, *“Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God. Of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme), and some are still waiting’ and they have never changed (their determination) in the least,”* (33: 23) when he saw Musaab ibn Umair (RA) lying on the ground dead in the battle of Uhud.

Mejahed said, *“Two men saw a group of people sitting, they said, ‘If God bestowed wealth on us, we will surely give some of it in charity.’ But when God gave them wealth, they became stingy and did not give any of their wealth away in charity. Then, God revealed the verse, “And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying), “If He gives us of His bounty we will certainly spend in charity and become of the righteous.” But when He bestowed of His bounty on them, they became niggardly, and turned back (from their covenant), averse. He penalized them with hypocrisy in their hearts, (to last) till the Day whereon they shall meet Him - because they broke their covenant with God, and because they lied (again and again).”* (9: 75-77) God considered the resolve to be a covenant and labelled those who reneged on their resolve liars.

Truthfulness in Action

This means that a person should endeavor not to assume an appearance that may reflect inner traits that the person does not have. Not that he should not do good things, but he should improve his inner self to become compatible with his appearance. This is different from showing off, because the deliberate intention of a person who is bent on showing off is for his appearance to be different from his inner self. A person may show humility in prayers, his intention is that people would observe his humble prayer. However, his heart is totally distracted away from the prayer. You look at him, you think that you are looking to a person who is standing before God, while his mind is actually wandering around in the market enjoying one of his desires. These actions constitute a false reflection of his inner self. He is required to be truthful in his actions. A person who walks around in a respectable manner, while his inner self cannot be described as respectable. This is a person who is not truthful in his actions, even though he is not doing this as a matter of showing off. The remedy for this is to have an inner self which is as good as his appearance or better.

Showing off is when a person intentionally decides to have an appearance which is not compatible with his inner self. This invalidates sincerity. If the incompatibility between the appearance and the inner self is not intentional, then truthfulness is invalidated.

Truthfulness in Affirming all the Basic Principles of Religion

This is the highest and most honored type of truthfulness. Examples of this are being truthful in fear, hope, glorifying God, asceticism, contentment, putting one's trust in God and similar concepts. These traits have signs which give meanings to their names. They have objectives and truths. The confirmed truthful is the ones who earned their truths. If one of the traits prevails in a person, that person is called truthful in regard to this trait. It may be said, "*such and such is truthful in his fight,*" this is "*truthful fear,*" or this is "*truthful desire.*"

God said, "*The (true) believers are only those who believe in God and His messenger and do not entertain any doubt, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of God. Those are the truthful ones.*" (49: 15) "*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards east or west; but the truly righteous are those who believe in God and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; those who give away some of their wealth, however much they may cherish it, to their kin, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarer, to those who ask, and to ransom slaves; those who are steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; who fulfill the contracts which they have made; and who are firm and patient, in times of tribulation and adversity, and in time of peril. Such are the people of truth, the God conscious.* (2:177)

Let us give an example for the case of fear. Everyone who believes in God and the Day of Judgment, would fear God. Although we call this fear, but it may not be a true fear. Consider his situation when he fears a person in authority or a highway robber. You would see his countenance becomes yellow and his limbs tremble. He will feel stressed; he will not be able to think clearly. On the other hand, he fears Hellfire, but none of the above symptoms would appear on him. He commits a sin and nothing would show on his face.

To attain the final objectives of these attributes is very difficult, because they are limitless. However, every person has a share in them. A person who has a large share may be called truthful. Only few people can attain the final objectives of all these attributes. The ranks of the truthfulness are limitless. The person may be truthful in some and untruthful in others. Those who are truthful in all of them are the sincere truthful (Siddiq).

Saad ibn Moadh (RA) said, *“I have three strong attributes, but, I am weak in all others. Since I embraced Islam, I have never been distracted by my thoughts during a prayer; during a funeral prayer, I would be only engaged in words and deeds that are relevant to the funeral, and I always believed that whatever the Prophet (PBUH) says is the truth.”* Ibn Al-Mussaib said, *“I never thought that these attributes would be attained by anyone other than the Prophet (PBUH).”* This is truthfulness in these attributes. Many companions of the Prophets (PBUH) did not attain such a station.

These are the ranks of truthfulness and its meanings. The statements made by some of the scholars may deal with one or two of these aspects. However, Abu Bakr Al-Warraq said, *“There are three types of truthfulness: the truthfulness of the belief in the oneness of God, the truthfulness in obeying God, and the truthfulness in knowledge. The truthfulness of the belief in the oneness of God is for common Muslims, God said, ‘And those who believe in God and His messengers, they are the supporters of the truth.’ (57: 19) The truthfulness in obeying God is for the scholars and the righteous. The truthfulness in knowledge is for the people on whom God bestowed His alliance. They are The Pillars of the Earth.”*

Book 8: The Book of Watchfulness and Accountability

God said, *"And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in the least. And even if there was the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And We suffice as reckoners;"* (21: 47) *"And the record will be placed, and you will see the guilty fearful of that which is therein, and they will say, "What kind of record is this that does leave out neither a small thing nor a great thing but counted it." And they will find all that they did present (before them), and your Lord wrongs no one;"* (18: 49) *"On the day that God will raise them all up and inform them of what they did. God has kept account of it while they forgot it. And God is Witness over all things;"* (58: 6) *"On that Day people will emerge in scattered groups to be shown their deeds. And whoever does the weight of an atom of good will see it; and whoever does the weight of an atom of evil will see it;"* (99: 6 – 8) *"And fear the Day when you shall be brought back to God. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly."* (2: 281) *"On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done and all the evil it has done. It will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you to beware of Him. And God is All-Pitying towards all those who serve Him."* (3: 30) Those who are endowed with spiritual insight from among the servants of God, know that God is ever watching what they do, and that they will be held accountable for what they do, even if their deeds were as tiny as an atom. Their only salvation is in being continuously watchful over their own deeds, and holding themselves accountable for what they do. He who holds himself accountable, will have an easy reckoning on the Day of Judgment. He will be able to answer for what he did and will end in a good abode. He who does not hold himself accountable in this life, will be regretful on the Day of Judgment. He will have a severe reckoning and will end up in an evil abode. When the facts became clear to them, they realized that their only salvation is in being obedient to God. He commanded them to persevere and to remain steadfast in their perseverance, *"You who believe persevere in patience and constancy, vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and remain conscious of God that you may succeed."* (3: 200) The road to the achievement of the status of those who are steadfast in perseverance has six stations. These are setting the conditions, watchfulness, holding the self-accountable, punishment, struggle against the self, and rebuke.

The First station: Setting the Conditions

You should know that the objective of business people is to gain profit. A business person may employ a partner to conduct certain transaction. When the transaction is completed, the partners settle the account. The mind is the business person on the road to the Hereafter. Its profit is to purify the self because that is where the self's success lies, *"He is indeed successful who purifies it, and he is indeed a failure who corrupts it."* (91: 9-10) The success of the self is attained by performing righteous deeds. The mind employs the self in conducting these business transactions; the mind employs the self as a business person employs an assistant. Business partners divide the profit among themselves. Thus, a business person needs to set conditions for the distribution of the profit, keep watching over the assistant as he performs the transactions, hold him accountable, and punish or rebuke him when necessary. Similarly, the mind needs to force the self to fulfill the conditions. This starts by outlining the duties for the self, setting the conditions which the self has to fulfill, guide it to the road of success, force the self to follow the

road which has been charted for it, and continue keeping watch over it. If the mind becomes heedless of the actions of the self, even for a moment, it will go astray and will fall prey to treachery. Thus, losing the capital. Exactly, as would be expected to happen when the business person employs an assistant who is a traitor and neglects to keep a close eye on him.

It is thus obligatory for any person with resolve and who believes in God and the Day of Judgment to keep a watchful eye on his self. The self should be held accountable for its deeds. He should maintain tight control over each and every movement, thought, and desire which his self has. Each breath one breathes is a valuable jewel, that cannot be replaced. This jewel can be used to buy a treasure whose bliss lasts forever. Spending the breath on things that will bring nothing but ruin is a great loss. This is a feat that is unacceptable to any sane human being.

Each morning, after the person has completed his morning prayer, he should devote one hour for the task of setting conditions for his self. He should say to the self, *“My life is my trade. If I lose it, then I lose my capital and I have no hope in conducting any business. Today is a new day that God blessed me with, had God put me to death, I would have wished to come back for a single day to do good deeds. Imagine, that you have died then brought back to life for one day, I warn you to lose this extra day you got. Each breath is a valuable jewel. My self, you should know that on the Day of Judgement, each person will be given daily, twenty-four boxes. Each box emanates a light commensurate with the number of the good deeds which he performed in that hour. This light brings joy to the heart of the person. On the other hand, his sins will be contained in a black box that smells awful, which will bring grief and dismay to the person. My self, work hard so that your stores of good deeds will be full on the Day of Judgment. Do not relax or become lazy and let the high ranks elude you.”*

Someone asked, *“Suppose a sinner was pardoned, would not be he saddened by the fact that he missed the reward of the righteous?”* This sadness has been referred to in the verse, *“The day when He shall gather you to the Day of Gathering; that will be a day of loss and gain.”* (64: 9)

He should then, advise the self in matters concerning his seven organs: the eye, the ear, the tongue, the stomach, the sexual organ, the hand, and the leg. These seven organs assist the self in conducting its business. Hellfire has seven doors; each door is assigned to a group of people according to the sins they earned using these seven organs. His advice to his self is to protect these organs against committing sins. The eye should not only be prevented to look at unlawful scenes or to look down on another Muslim, but it should be prevented from looking at anything that is not beneficial to look at. The self should use the eye in fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. Looking at the miracles of God for the purpose of reflection; looking at those who perform good deeds for the purpose of emulating them; and looking into the Book of God, the Sunnah of His messenger (PBUH), and the books of wisdom for the purpose of learning.

He should continue to advise the self about the other organs, in particular the tongue and the stomach. The tongue because words flow easily from it. Its sins, like backbiting, lying, and promoting oneself, are grave. The tongue was created for the remembrance of God, reminding people, teaching, and guiding people to the straight path. He should set the condition on himself not to move the tongue the whole day, unless it moves with the remembrance of God. The advice

regarding the stomach is to abstain from gluttony. He should reduce the amount he eats which have been obtained through permissible means, and only eat which is necessary.

The next advice is regarding performing the deeds of obedience which should be done daily, and increasing the supererogatory duties which he is able to perform. These conditions are needed on a daily basis, however, when the person gets used to doing them for a number of days, then it will be easy for him to do it without a reminder. If he forgets to do some, then he needs to renew setting the conditions.

You should know that each day something new may happen, in this case one should set a condition on the self. The condition is that it should fulfill these new obligations in a straight forward manner and observe the right way of conducting them.

This is the first station of the stations of being steadfast in perseverance. The station of holding oneself accountable before embarking on the action. Reckoning can be done before or after the action has been committed. Reckoning before performing the act is for the purpose of warning. This is referred to in the verse, *“And continue to remind, for surely the reminder benefits the believers.”* (51: 55) Reckoning after the act is referred to in the verses, *“You who believe, when you go to war in God's way, be careful to discriminate,”* (4: 94) and *“Believers, if a transgressing person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest you harm people unwittingly, and you would become regretful for what you have done.”* (49: 6) ‘Umar (RA) said, *“Hold yourself accountable before you are called to account on the Day of Judgment, weigh them before you are weighed, and prepare yourselves for the day of great display.”* The Prophet said¹⁰¹, *“The wise person holds himself accountable (in this life) and worked hard for the Hereafter; but the foolish person follows his own whims and entertains the wishful thinking that God will forgive him.”* This refers to reckoning in the future, because he said, *“Whoever held himself accountable works for the Hereafter;”* which means that one should consider the actions carefully and should reflect on their consequences before embarking on them.

The Second station: Watchfulness

Having set the conditions for the self, it remains to keep a watchful eye during the performance of the deeds. The self will become a tyrant when left without being watched.

Virtues of Watchfulness

Gabriel (PBUH) asked the Prophet (PBUH) about Excellence (*Ihsan*). The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰², *“To worship God as if you see Him because if you do not see Him, He, definitely, sees you.”* God said, *“Is He who is a sustainer of every soul, (knowing) what it has earned?”* (13: 33) *“Does not he know that God sees?”* (96: 14) *“God is ever watching over you;”* (4: 1) *“And those who faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants.”* (23: 8) Ibn Al-Mubarak said, *“Be observant of God all the time.”* When he was asked how can this be done, he said, *“Live as if you see God.”*

¹⁰¹ Narrated by Shaddad ibn Aws (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

¹⁰² Narrated by ‘Umar (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The Essence of Watchfulness and its Degrees

You should know that watchfulness is in essence observing The Watchful without being concerned about anyone else. Watchfulness is a state of the heart which is the fruit of a certain type of knowledge. The state produces actions to be carried out by the senses and the heart. The state consists of devoting the heart to the observance of The Watchful. The specific knowledge which produces this state is knowing that God is privy to the consciences, He knows the inner most secrets of the human being, and He is always watching His servants. The secrets of the hearts are disclosed to God exactly as the skin of the faces of people are exposed. When the person becomes certain of the truth of this knowledge, and ascertains its truth without a shred of a doubt, then the knowledge will overwhelm the heart and will force it to be completely absorbed in observing The Watchful. Those who attain this state are those who are brought close to God. They are divided into two categories: those who are brought closer to God, and the companions of the right hand. Their watchfulness has two degrees.

The Watchfulness of the Ones Brought Closer to God

This is the watchfulness which is motivated by observing God's Glory and Majesty. The heart becomes immersed in observing God's Glory and feels humble in the presence of God's Majesty. This immersion leaves no room for any other interest other than observing God. We will not expand on the details of this degree because it is restricted to the heart. The senses and organs lose the interest in the permissible, let alone the prohibited things. Acts of obedience will come naturally to the organs and senses without a need for direction or control.

This is the case for the person who has only one concern, all other concerns have been taken care of by God. Such a person becomes oblivious to what is happening around him. He does not see, while his eyes are wide open, nor does he hear, while he has perfectly healthy hearing. This state is not farfetched. You can see similar situations happening to those whose hearts are obsessed by the glorification of earthly kings. The servants of a king will be extremely absorbed in performing their duties in the king's court, to the extent that they will be completely oblivious to what is taking place in the court.

The Watchfulness of the Companions of the Right

These are people who believe with certainty that God is not only aware of what they do but He also knows their inner thoughts and secrets. However, these people are not captured by the Majesty of God to the exclusion of all else. Rather, they remain in a state of ordinary attentiveness to other states and deeds without neglect of the desired watchfulness. They feel shy in front of God, they are cautious in their actions, and they pay careful considerations to the consequences of their actions before they embark on them. They refrain from doing anything that would disgrace them on the Day of Judgment. They believe that God observes them while they are alive in this worldly life, so they are not waiting for the Day of Judgment for reckoning.

He who is in this state should keep watch over each and every action, lack of action, and thought. Generally, he has to watch all his choices. He has to consider each act critically, before and during the act.

1. Before Embarking on the Act. One should consider the impulses behind the act. Is he motivated to do this act by his desire to please God? Or is he motivated by his whims and

the temptation of Satan? If he finds that he is doing this for the sake of God, he should do it. If the not, then he should feel shy in front of God and he should refrain from doing the act. He should, also rebuke his self for attempting to do such an act. It is God's rule, that every servant should keep a watchful eye on his self whenever he intends to perform an act. He should wait until the true motivation behind the act has been exposed by the light of knowledge. Indeed, unless the first step on the path of falsehood (the passing thought) is driven away, it will produce desire, desire produces interest, interest produces decisive intention, intention produces action, and action leads to aversion and destruction. Thus, evil should be eliminated at the source, which is the passing thought.

2. During the Act. One should inspect the way the act is being performed, to make sure that all God's injunctions are being followed. One should have the intention to do the work as best as he can. One should follow this rule in all his actions or non-actions. If he does this, he will be able to conduct his rituals using the proper intention, the best performance, and the best etiquette.

The actions of a person are divided into three categories: acts of obedience, acts of disobedience, permissible acts. Performing watchfulness in these three deeds is as follow:

- a. He should make sure that his acts of obedience are performed with sincerity, perfection, and observing the proper etiquette.
- b. If he commits and act of disobedience, then he should repent, cease committing sins, and engage in reflection.
- c. He should make sure that he is following the proper etiquette in performing the permissible acts, he should recognize the blessing, and he should show his gratitude.

The Third Station: Holding the Self Accountable After Actions

Virtue of Accountability

God said, "*Believers, be conscious of God and let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow.*" (59: 18) This is a reference to holding the self, accountable for what it has done. That is why 'Umar (RA) said, "*Hold yourselves accountable before you are held accountable on the Day of Judgment.*" God said, "*And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed,*" (24: 31) turning to God is a result of regretting the act after it has been committed. The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰³, "*I pray God for forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times, every day.*" God said, "*Those who are conscious of God, when a thought of evil from Satan assails them, remember God and they suddenly see.*" (7: 201) 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) used to strike his feet every day, saying, "What have you done today?" Aishah (RA) said, "*When Abu Bakr (RA) was on the death bed, he said to her, 'I love no one more than 'Umar.'*" He then asked her, "*What did I just say?*" She told him, he then said, "*There is no one dearer to me than 'Umar.*" Consider how he reflected on his first statement then changed it to be more accurate. Remember Talha's (RA) story when he was distracted by a bird while he was praying. He reflected upon what happened, regretted the fact that he was distracted while praying, and decided to give away his garden in charity as a penance. Al-Hassan commented on the verse, "*I swear by the self-reproaching soul.*" (75: 2) He said that the reference is made to the believer

¹⁰³ Narrated by Abu Huriarah (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

who is always blaming himself saying, “*What did I mean with my word? What did I intend with my food? What did I intend with my drink? The transgressor never blames himself for anything.*”

Holding the Self Accountable After the Deed

You should know that just as you dedicate a time for setting the conditions at the beginning of the day, you should dedicate a time at the end of the day for holding the self, accountable. This is the same way a merchant settles his account with his partners at the end of the year, month, or day. The merchant does this for fear of missing a material benefit in this life. It is more appropriate for a wise person to settle the account with his self, knowing that this account deals with his eternal happiness or sadness. Laziness in doing so is a result of heedlessness and lack of success, we seek refuge with God from being one of those.

The way to settle the account with the partner is to review the account to determine the capital, the profits, and the losses; and to determine the increase or decrease in the capital. If he finds that the business made a profit, he will receive it and will thank his partner for it; but if he finds that the business has lost, he will request a surety from the partner and request him to make it up in the future. Similarly, the obligatory duties represent the religious capital of a person, supererogatory and extra duties represent the profit, and sins represent the loss. The hours of the day represent the trading season and his partner is the self that commands evil. One should hold his self, accountable at the end of the season. He should start with the obligatory duties first. If they have been fulfilled satisfactorily, he then should express his gratitude to God, and exhort his self to do more. If the some of the duties were not fulfilled, then he should command his self to make up for the missed duties. If they were not performed satisfactorily, then he should command the self to do supererogatory duties to make up for the imperfect performance. If he finds that he committed a sin, then he should punish his self, torment it, and rebuke it for the purpose of assuring that it will make up for the sin in the future.

One should consider his self a debtor who should repay back his debt. Some debts should be paid back with penalty and surety. Some debts should be paid in full. Some debts are repaid by punishment. This cannot happen unless the account has been settled and the debt has been determined. Once the account has been settled, one can start asking for repayment of the debt. One should hold his self, accountable his entire life, day after day and hour after.

The Fourth Station: Punishment of the Self

It is rarely that a person puts his self through reckoning and does not find that it had committed a sin or that his deeds fell short of the fulfillment of God’s commands. One should not neglect to put his self through reckoning, otherwise it will be easy for it to commit sins. If the self gets used to sin, then it will be difficult to wean it from the sin and it will be doomed. One should punish the self for its sins and shortcomings. If he eats a morsel of food whose source is doubtful with penchant, then he should punish his stomach by hunger. If he looked at a forbidden scene, then he should punish the eye by preventing it from looking entirely. Similarly, he should punish his organs by preventing them from what they desire. This was the way which was adopted by those who are on the path to the Hereafter. Hudhayfah ibn Qatadah said, “*A man was asked, ‘what do*

you do with yourself regarding what it desires?’ He answered, ‘There is nothing I hate more than myself, how can I give it what it desires.’”

The Fifth Station: Struggle Against the Self

Struggling against oneself involves punishing the self when it commits a sin, as was explained earlier. He should discipline the self when it becomes lazy in performing the good deeds and the supererogatory duties. He should then force it to do more of these supererogatory duties to make up for its shortcomings. This was the tactics of those working for the sake of God. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) punished himself by giving away an expensive piece of land when he missed praying Asr in congregation. Whenever Ibn ‘Umar (RA) missed a prayer in congregation, he would spend the whole night praying. Ibn Abi Rabiee freed a slave because he missed Fajr prayer in congregation.

If you ask, *“My Self resists these struggle tactics and does not persevere in performing the supererogatory duties, how can I deal with it?”* My answer is that you should recite to it the reported narrations about those who are well known for their struggle against themselves. One of the best ways to remedy the self in this case, is to seek the companionship of a person who is excellent in performing the rituals so that it may follow his example. However, this may be difficult to achieve in the present, since it is difficult to find these good examples. The second best thing is then to listen to their stories.

We will narrate some of the stories of those who were successful in their struggle against themselves.

Al-Hassan said, “I have met people and accompanied some of them who never felt happy for achieving a worldly gain, nor felt sad about missing a worldly gain. They considered the worldly gains to be less valuable than the dust that people tread on. One of them would live his whole life having one garment, never asking his spouse to make him a dish of fancy food, nor did he sleep on a mattress. I found them behaving according to the Quran and the Sunnah. They pray by night, crying and asking God to free their necks from Hellfire. They rejoice when they are able to do a good deed, they express their gratitude to God, and they ask God to accept it. They grieve when they commit an evil act and they ask God to forgive them. This was their whole life. However, they were not free from sin. Their salvation was achieved only by God’s forgiveness.”

Abu Al-Dardaa said, “I only love to live because of three things: being thirsty in the sake of God when it is hot, prostrating myself to God during the night, having the company of people who used to select the good speech as you would select the best fruit.”

It has been narrated that Habeebah Al-Aadawiyah would pray by night on top of her house, fully dressed. She would say, *“God, the stars are set, the eyes are asleep, the kings locked their doors, and each lover is in seclusion with his beloved, this is where I stand in front of you.”* At dawn she would say, *“God, the night has gone, the day light is upon us, I wonder whether I should rejoice because you accepted my night prayer, or should I grieve because you did not accept it? By your Majesty, this will be my daily act as long as You keep me alive. Even if You expel me away from Your door, I will never leave being certain of Your presence and Your generosity.”*

The Sixth Station: Rebuking the Self

You should know that your greatest enemy is your own self. This self has been created to command evil. It inclines to doing evil and it is unwilling to do good. You have been commanded to purify it, straighten it, and drag it by force to worship its Lord and Creator. You have been commanded to force it to refrain from satisfying its lusts and to wean it from its desires. If you neglect it, it will break away, it will become a tyrant, and you will never be able to get it back. If you continuously blame it, rebuke it, and reproach it, then it will become self-reproaching. This is the self that God took oath by. You will then have hope that it will move into the category of the reassured self which has been invited to join the group of God's servants in a state of being content and pleased. You should not stop reminding and blaming it, even for an hour. Admonish yourself first before you admonish others. God said, "*And continue to remind, for surely the reminder benefits the believers.*" (51: 55)

You should explain to it, how foolish and ignorant it is. It will become indignant and will claim that it acquired wisdom and guidance. You should then address it saying, "*My Self, how enormous is your ignorance? You claim that you have acquired wisdom and intelligence while you are most stupid and foolish. Do you not know that there is paradise and Hellfire in front of you? You will surely end in one or the other. How can you be jubilant and merry knowing that you are facing this destiny? You may die today or tomorrow. You may think that death is faraway, while God sees it soon. Do you not know that anything in the future will soon take place? Only that which will not happen can be considered faraway. Do you not know that death may happen anytime? It does not give an advance notice, nor does it come at a specific time. It can happen in the summer or the winter and during the day or by night. It can happen to the old as well as the young.*"

My Self, if a servant or a friend of yours confronted you with something that you hate, how much will you hate him? How dare you risk the anger and punishment of God? Do you think that you can endure His punishment? Try to touch the fire with your hand, so that you know the limits of your endurance. Do you delude yourself with the generosity of God? Why then you do not take advantage of God's generosity during your lifetime?

My Self, it is as if you do not believe in the Day of Judgment. You think that once you die, you will be free. But that will never happen. Do you think you will be left aimless? Were you not a drop of a sperm emitted? Then you became a leech-like clot; then God fashioned you in due proportion. Is not He able to give life to the dead? If this is what you think, then you should know that you are ungrateful and ignorant. Do you not think how God created you? Do you not know that He created you, and then fashioned you in due proportions; then He made the path easy for you; then He will put you to death, and will burry you? Do you deny that He will bring you back to life after death? If you do not understand these clear matters and procrastinate, how can you claim that you have acquired wisdom?

My Self, you may claim that you are eager to enjoy your desires and that you do not have a stamina to endure pain, and this is what keeps you away from the straight path. This is utter stupidity. If you are truthful in this claim, then you should seek the endless enjoyment of the pure pleasures forever. This can only happen in paradise. You should not be deluded by the worldly

life, and you should not let your delusions drive you away from God. You should be serious in considering your affairs, because no one else will, so do not waste your time. Your life is only few breaths long. Take advantage of being healthy before you become sick; take advantage of the time you have before you become busy; take advantage of the wealth you have before you become poor; take advantage of your youth before you grow old; and take advantage of being alive before you die. Prepare yourself for the Hereafter knowing that you live in it forever.

This is the way people used to speak to their Lord privately and how they used to rebuke their selves. Their objective in talking privately with God is to seek His pleasure; and their objective from rebuking their selves is to warn the selves and to take care of them. A person who neglects the private talk with God and does not rebuke his self is a person who does not care for himself. God may be displeased with him.

Book 9: The Book of Contemplation

Urging people to meditate, ponder, reflect, and contemplate is a prevalent theme in the Quran. It should be obvious that contemplation is the key to light and the first step towards gaining insight. Contemplation is the net of the sciences and the home to knowledge and understanding. Most people realize its virtues, however, they are ignorant of its essence, its fruits, its source, and its path. They do not know how to contemplate, what is the subject of contemplation, and why they have to contemplate. Is contemplation required for its own sake or is it needed because of the fruits that it produces? If contemplation produces a fruit, then what is this fruit?

The Virtue of Contemplation

God commanded people to reflect and contemplate in many places in His Book. God praised those who contemplate, saying, *“Those who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say, “Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain.”* (3: 191)

Al-Hassan said, *“One hour spent in contemplation is better than praying the whole night.”* ‘Umar ibn Abdel Aziz (RA) said, *“Contemplating the blessings of God is one of the best acts of worship.”* Bisher said, *“Had the people contemplated the Majesty of God, they would not have sinned, ever.”* Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“Praying two rakaa with complete devotion is better than praying all night without paying attention.”* He also said, *“Contemplating the good leads to doing it, regretting evil deeds leads to abstaining from doing it.”* Imam Al-Shafie said, *“Seek help for your speech in silence; and seek help for your deduction in contemplation.”* He also said, *“Reconsidering the affairs before embarking on them saves you the danger of conceit; being firm in your resolve saves you the danger of excesses and regret; deep thought and pondering are signs of resolve and intelligence; consulting the wise is a sign of steadfastness and deep insight. Thus, you should think before you start, contemplate before you attack, and consult before you embark.”*

The Essence of Contemplation

You should know that contemplation involves acquiring two types of knowledge in the heart in order to reach a third type of knowledge. To explain this, let us consider the example of a person who inclines to the worldly life and prefers it over the Hereafter. If he wants to reach the conclusion that the Hereafter is better than the worldly life, then he can do one of two things. The first, is to listen to someone who would tell him that the Hereafter is better than the worldly life; then he believes in what has been said and works for the Hereafter on the basis of this belief. This is called imitation and it is not knowledge. The second is to reach the conclusion that the everlasting life is better than the transient life and to realize that the Hereafter is the everlasting life. Using these two conclusions he can reach the third conclusion that the Hereafter is more deserving of his attention than the worldly life. It is impossible to reach this last conclusion without having known the first two.

The fruits of contemplation are knowledge, states, and actions. However, its special fruit is knowledge. It is true that when the heart acquires knowledge its state will change, and when the state of the heart changes the actions of the organs will change.

The Fields of Contemplation

You should know that the subject of contemplation could be religious or secular. However, our main interest is contemplating religious matters. We used the term “religious matters” to refer to the relationship between the person and his Creator. There are two subjects about which one may contemplate: to contemplate one’s own situation and one’s own attributes; or to contemplate God’s attributes and His actions. A person may contemplate his situation with the objective of finding out what pleases God and what displeases Him.

To explain this let us consider the situation of those who are traveling on the path to God. They yearn for the meeting with God. Their situation is the situation of a lover, who may contemplate about himself or his beloved. If he thinks about his beloved, then he may think about his beauty in order to enjoy the presence of his beloved in his imagination; or he may think about his good deeds which describe his good manners. If he thought about himself, he would think of his attributes which displease his beloved in order that he would get rid of them; or the attributes which please his beloved in order that he would acquire them.

One should not think of anything other than that because, anything else is not considered love. Perfect love should consume the person and overwhelm the heart and does not leave any space for other feelings. This is the path that a person who loves God should follow.

The First Division

This division deals with the contemplation of his own attributes and actions to discern the good from the bad. This is the subject of the science of the daily transactions which is the subject of this book.

Things which please or displease God are divided into apparent things like the acts of obedience and the sins; or hidden things like the annihilating and delivering attributes which reside in the heart. These were discussed in the Quarters of Annihilators and Deliverers.

Sins are divided into those which are ascribed to one of the organs and those which are ascribed to the whole body. Examples of the latter are fleeing the battleground, being unkind to one’s parents, and living in an unlawful place. The contemplation about these things should involve three aspects

1. One should contemplate whether it displeases God or not. Sometimes, it appears on the surface that something may please God, but after deep reconsideration it becomes apparent that it displeases God.
2. One should contemplate the ways to avoid it, if it turned out to be an act which displeases God.
3. One should find out if he possesses this attribute or not. In case he has it, then he should abandon it immediately. If he does not have it at present but there is a danger that he may acquire it in the future, then he should contemplate ways to avoid it.

Similarly, the contemplation about the desirable attributes has the three aspects mentioned above. If we add the aspects for each attribute together they will be more than a hundred. The person should contemplate all these aspects or at least most of them. The discussion of all these will be extensive. Therefore, we will focus on examples of the four categories: acts of obedience, acts of disobedience, annihilating attributes, and delivering attributes.

Acts of Disobedience

Each morning, one should review the state of all his organs and his whole body to determine if they had committed a sin, they are in the state of committing a sin, or they are in the danger of committing a sin in the future. If it is the first, he then should be remorseful and ask for forgiveness. If it is the second, then he should cease immediately and abandon any act of disobedience. If it is the third, then he should prepare himself to avoid it.

Acts of Obedience

He should first review the performance of the obligatory duties. He should contemplate ways to improve his performance to preserve the integrity of these duties. If he discovers a shortcoming, then he should increase the supererogatory duties to make up for the shortcoming. He should contemplate the purpose of creation of each organ and how it can be used to perform and act in a way to please God. For example, he can consider his eye. He would say, *“The purpose of the creation of the eye is for the eye to see the kingdom of heavens and earth, to be used in performing acts of obedience, and to look into the Quran and the Sunnah of the Messenger (PBUH). I can engage the eye in reciting the Quran and reading the Sunnah, why do not I do this? I can look at a person who does good deeds and make him feel happy, and look down on a person who is transgressing and make him feel bad about his sin, why do not I do this?”*

The Annihilating Attributes

These are the attributes which reside in the heart. They include being overwhelmed by lust, anger, stinginess, arrogance, showing off, envy, heedlessness, conceit, and others. He should inspect his heart, if he thinks that his heart is not afflicted by one of them, then he should think of a way to test his heart. The Self usually promises to be good but it very often reneges on its promise. If the self claims that it is modest and is free of arrogance, then it should be tested by carrying a bundle of firewood to the market. This is the way the people of the earlier generations used to test their selves.

The Delivering Attributes

These include repentance, regretting sins, persevering when afflicted, expressing gratitude when blessed, fear, hope, sincerity, truthfulness, loving God and other attributes. One should contemplate the state of his heart to determine which one of these attributes is lacking. He should know that these attributes are states which are produced by knowledge, and knowledge is the product of contemplation.

These are the ways knowledge is pursued. This knowledge produces the desirable states and eliminates the disparaged attributes. We have discussed each one in a book by itself that should be consulted for the details of contemplation. In general, the best contemplation can be achieved by reciting the Quran and contemplating its meanings. It sums up all stations and states. There is

a healing in it for people. It has the motivations for fear, hope, perseverance, gratitude, love, yearning and all the other states. It has the motivations to refrain from all the other disparaged attributes. One should read it and repeat the verses that he would like to reflect upon, even if he has to do this hundred times.

If you understand the fields of contemplation in the science of the relationship between a person and his God, then you should establish the habit day and night and never neglect the review of the attributes that brings you closer to God and those which drive you away from Him. Each learner should have a diary to record the annihilating attributes, the delivering attributes, the acts of obedience and the acts of disobedience on a daily basis. It is enough for him to consider ten of the annihilating attributes. If he is free of these then he will be free of all others. These attributes are stinginess, arrogance, egotism, showing off, envy, extreme anger, gluttony, excessive sexual desire, love for wealth, and love of eminence. The ten delivering attributes are regretting the sin, perseverance, contentment with God's decree, expressing gratitude for blessings, the balance between fear and hope, asceticism, sincerity, good manners, loving God and submission to Him. These twenty attributes, ten are praised and ten are disparaged. When he is saved of one of the disparaged attributes, he should mark in his diary, quit thinking about it, and express his gratitude to God for saving him from such an attribute. He should know that he was able to achieve this only by the help and guidance of God. He should then proceed to deal with the remaining disparaged attributes. Similarly, he should deal with the praised attributes.

The Second Division

This deals with the contemplation of God's Majesty and Grandeur. This contains two stations

The Supreme Station

This is the contemplation of God's essence, attributes, and the meanings of His names. We have been prevented from such contemplation. It was said, "Contemplate what God has created but do not contemplate the essence of God." Such contemplation is beyond the capacity of the human mind.

The Second Station

This involves the contemplation of God's actions, His decrees, and His miraculous creation. These demonstrate His Grandeur, Majesty, and Holiness; and they show His perfect knowledge and wisdom.

The Way to Contemplate the Creation of God

You should know that every thing that exists, except God, has been created by God. Each of the miracles that exist in each atom show the wisdom and power of God. We say that all the things that have been created can be divided into two categories

1. Those whose origin is unknown; we cannot think about these. There are many things that exist which we do not know. God says, "*And He creates that which you do not know.*" (16: 8) "*Glory be to Him who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things of which they have no knowledge.*" (36: 36) "*In order that We may bring in your place the likes of you and make you grow into what you do not know.*" (56: 61)

2. Those whose origin is known and they are known in a general sense but their details are unknown. These we contemplate about. These are divided into two categories: those which are visible to the eye and those which are invisible to the eye.

It is difficult to contemplate things which are invisible to the eye like the angels, jinn, the devils, the Throne, and similar things.

We will then focus on the things that are visible to the eye, like the heavens, the earth, and what is in between them. One can see the stars, the sun, the moon, and their movements. Also, one can see the mountains, the rivers, the seas, the animals and the plants. One can also see the atmosphere between heavens and earth. One can see the clouds, the rain, the thunder, and the wind.

The Quran urged us to contemplate and reflect on these signs, *“In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding.”* (3: 190) The Quran also refers to God’s miracles. Each one of the miracles are preceded by, *“Of His signs.”*

One of His miracles is the human being which was created from a sperm-drop. The closest thing to you is yourself, in which you can see the miracles of the creation. God commanded us to contemplate about ourselves, *“As also in your own selves; will you not then see.”* (51: 21)

**Book 10: The Book of the Remembrance of Death
And what is after Death**

Chapter 1: Remembrance of Death

You should know that the one who is consumed with this life, engaged fully in its deceitful attractions, and indulgent in its pleasures is heedless of the remembrance of death. He does not remember death and does not like to remember death. These are the people referred to in the verse, “Say, *‘The death from which you flee will certainly overtake you. Then you will be sent back to the One who knows the unseen and the seen; and He will tell you all the things that you did.’*” (62: 7-8)

You should know that some people are those who are consumed with the love of this life and absorbed by its pleasures. People are either, consumed by the worldly affairs, beginners in repentance, or achieved knowledgeable. The one consumed by the worldly affairs does not remember death. He only remembers death when he feels sorry for having a short life. He disparages death and this distances him from God. The repentant remembers death often to stimulate the feelings of fear and humility in his heart. This perfects his repentance. He may hate death fearing it might come before his repentance has been fully completed. He has an excuse for hating death for this reason. He is not considered one of those who hate meeting God. The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰⁴, “*He who hates meeting God, God hates him.*” He does not hate death and the meeting of God but he is afraid to lose the opportunity of meeting God as a result of his shortcomings. He is like a person who takes time to prepare himself for meeting his beloved. Such person is continuously preparing himself for death. The knowledgeable always remembers death because it is the time when he meets his Beloved. A lover never forgets the time to meet his Beloved. He usually feels that death is too slow in coming, he wants to hasten it to exit the home of the sinner and move into the nearness of the Lord of the worlds. It has been narrated that Hudhayfah (RA) said while on his death bed. “*A beloved has come while I am in a state of destitution. He who has regrets will not succeed. If you know that, for me, destitution is better than being rich, sickness is better than health, and death is better than life, then make death easy for me so that I come to your meeting.*”

Thus, the repentant and the knowledgeable each has an excuse in hating death. However, the person who put his trust in God and did not chose for himself whether to live or to die has a higher rank than both, because he loves most what God choses for him. His extreme love and loyalty for God brought him to the station of submission and contentment. This is the utmost goal.

Generally, remembrance of death is a good deed that deserves a reward from God. Even the one consumed by the pleasures of this life may abandon the pleasures of life when he remembers death, because it reduces his enjoyment of the pleasures. Anything that reduces the enjoyment of the pleasures and desires constitutes a way to salvation.

The Virtues of the Remembrance of Death

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰⁵, “*Remember the destroyer of the pleasures often.*” Remembrance of death reduces the enjoyment of pleasures; this may cause you to abandon the enjoyment of

¹⁰⁴ Narrated by Aysha (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

¹⁰⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi and Al-Nassaie

pleasures. This life is like a prison for the believer. The believer continues to toil as long as he is alive. He tries to control his desires and resist his devil. Death frees him from this struggle. Ibn 'Umar (RA) narrated that a man from Al-Ansar asked the Prophet (PBUH), *"Who is the wisest and most generous of people?"* The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰⁶, *"The one who remembers death most and the one who is most prepared to die. Those are the people who are wise and who depart with honor from this life and will be dignified in the Hereafter."*

Al-Hassan said, *"Death has betrayed the worldly life, no wise person can enjoy it anymore."* Al-Rabie ibn Khuthaim said, *"Death is the best thing for the believer to wait for."* A wise person advised his friend saying, *"Beware of death in this life before you go to an abode in which you will wish you would die but you will never die."* 'Umar ibn Abd El-Aziz (RA) used to gather the scholars every night to remember death, the Hereafter and they weep as if they were in a funeral. Kaab said, *"He who realizes the truth about death, will find the afflictions in this life trivial."* Safiyah (RA) said, *"A woman complained to 'Aiysha (RA) of the toughness of her heart. 'Aiysha (RA) said to her, 'Remember death often, your heart will be softened.' She followed 'Aiysha's advice and she found that her heart was softened. She came back to thank 'Aiysha."*

'Umar ibn Abd El-Aziz (RA) asked one of the scholars to admonish him. The scholar said, *"You are not the first Caliph to die."* 'Umar, said, *"Tell me more."* He said, *"Each one of your ancestors going back to Adam died. Now, your turn has come."* 'Umar (RA) wept. Al-Rabie ibn Khuthaim dug a grave in his house. He used to sleep in this grave every day for a few hours to remind himself of death. He used to say, *"My heart will be corrupted if it neglected to remember death for one hour."* Mutraf ibn Abd Allah ibn Al-Shukhair, *"Death has spoiled the enjoyment of the worldly pleasures, so seek a bliss which cannot be spoiled by death."* 'Umar ibn Abd El-Aziz (RA) said to Anbasah, *"Remember death often. This will tighten your provision if it is large, and would increase your provision if it is tight."* Abu Suleiman Al-Darani asked Um Haroun, *"Do you love death?"* She said, *"No."* He asked her further, *"Why?"* She said, *"I hate to meet a person whom I disobeyed; how could I love meeting Him, when I have disobeyed Him."*

The Way to Remember Death

You should know that death is an enormous event. It is a dangerous event because people are heedless of it; people rarely remember death. When they remember death, they remember it while they are completely absorbed in the pleasures of this worldly life. The way to remember death is to detach the heart from all worldly pleasures and to devote one's heart to the remembrance of death. This is like a person who is planning a trip across a dangerous territory or going on a voyage on a ship. This person will be completely devoted to planning such a trip. He will think of nothing else. When the heart engages in remembering death, the heart will be touched by such remembrance. The heart will be broken and the enjoyment of the pleasures of life will be spoiled.

The most successful way is to remember his companions and friends who passed away before him. He should remember how they died and were buried under the ground. He should remind himself of how they looked when they were alive conducting their businesses and enjoying their

¹⁰⁶ Narrated by Ibn 'Umar (RA) and reported by Ibn Majah and Ibn Abu Al-Dunia

positions of authority. He should remember how this all changed by death. Their bodies became disintegrated, their wives became widows, their children became orphans, and they lost all their property. They no longer sat in the company of others, nor do they go to their Mosques. They have gone. As he remembers them, one by one, he should remember how active they were and how much they had hoped to live a long life. He should remember how was his friend deluded by his youth and strength, how heedless of death he was, and how much he laughed and enjoyed the pleasures of life. Can he now walk, speak, or laugh? He should remember how did his friend make plans for the future while death was only one month away. He was heedless of what will happen until death came upon him unexpectedly. He saw the angel of death, and he heard the decision regarding his destiny: paradise or hellfire. He will then realize that he is heedless like them and his end will be the same as their end. Abu Al-Dardaa said, *“When you remember the dead, count yourself among them.”* Ibn Masoud (RA) said, *“The person who takes a lesson from the experience of others is a happy person.”*

Chapter 2: Concerning Having Hope to Live Long and the Virtues of Having Hope to Live a Short Life

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰⁷ to Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar (RA), *“When you wake up in the morning do not entertain the hope that you will live till the evening and in the evening, do not entertain the hope that you will live to the next day. Use your life to prepare for death, and use your health to prepare you when you become sick. Abd Allah, you never know what will be your name tomorrow.”* One day the Prophet (PBUH) had three sticks in his hand. He placed one stick in front of him, he placed the second stick beside it, and he placed the third stick at distance from it. He asked the companions, *“Do you know what is this?”* They said, *“No.”* He said¹⁰⁸, *“The first stick represents the human being, the second stick represents the end of his life, and the third stick is the hope that the human being has for a long life. He will try to reach it, but death will stop him.”* Anas (RA) said, *“The human being grows old, but he never loses two attributes: greed, and the hope in a long life.”*

Ibn Muttraf ibn Abd Allah said, *“If I was told the time of my death, I would be afraid to lose my mind. God blessed people by being heedless of death. If it were not for this heedlessness, no one would have enjoyed life and no one would have conducted a business transaction.”* Al-Hassan said, *“Forgetfulness and the hope to live a long life are two of the blessings that God bestowed on the human beings. If it were not for these blessings, no one would have entered a market.”* Salman Al-Farisi (RA) said, *“Three things made me laugh: a person who has a hope in a long life, while death is waiting for him around the corner; a person who is heedless of himself but people are not heedless of him; and a person who is laughing loudly while he does not know whether God is pleased with him or not. Three things made me cry: being separated from the people I love, Muhammad (PBUH) and his party; the horror on the Day of Judgment; and standing in front of God not knowing whether I will be in paradise or Hellfire.”* Al-Thawri said, *“Wearing rough clothes does not make you ascetic, it is having the hope of a short life that makes you ascetic.”* A man wrote to his brother saying, *“The life of this world is a dream, the*

¹⁰⁷ Narrated by Ibn ‘Umar (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

¹⁰⁸ Narrated by Abi Saeed El-Khudry (RA) and reported by Imam Ahmed

Hereafter is the time for being awake, death is between the two.” ‘Umar ibn Abd El-Aziz addressed the people saying, “People, you were not created in vain and you will not be left neglected. There is an appointed day on which you will be gathered to meet your Lord who will judge among you. He who was expelled from the mercy of God, which encompasses everything, is truly wretched. Security tomorrow will be for those who feared and were conscious of God, who sold a little for much, who sold a transient for a permanent, and who sold wretchedness for happiness. Do you not see that you will follow those who perished, and others will follow you later? Do you not see that every day you bid a person, who was walking like you then death overtook him, farewell? He died and lost his hope, then you bury him in a rough ground. He left his beloved and is facing God, the Reckoner? By God, I say this knowing of my sins more than I know of yours. But it is my duty to command you to obey God and to refrain from disobeying Him. I seek God’s forgiveness.” He then started crying. He died soon after.

The Reasons for Having Hope in a Long Life

You should know that having hope to live long has two causes: ignorance and the love of the life of this world.

The love of the life of this world is caused by becoming comfortable in his life and enjoying its pleasures. This makes it difficult for him to relinquish all of this. Therefore, he refrains from remembering death because death will cause him to relinquish the things he loves. Everyone is in denial of that which he hates. The human being is fond of elusive wishes. He enjoys wishing for what he loves. He surely, loves to have a long live. He imagines that he will live long, so he plans for it. He will plan for what he needs: wealth, family, a house, friends, and other things that are needed for his life. His heart will be consumed in thinking about these things, and he will become heedless of the remembrance of death. He will never guess how soon it will arrive. When the thought of death crosses his mind, which should remind him that he should prepare for it, he procrastinates. He will say to himself, *“There is still time, wait until you grow older then you can repent.”* When he becomes older, he will say, *“Wait until you become a little older.”* When he becomes older, he will have to wait until he completes the building of a house or a cottage, comes back from this trip, prepares a house for his son, or defeats the enemy who is vexing you. He will continue to procrastinate until death snatches him unexpectedly. His grief will be forever. Most of the cries of the people of the fire was caused by the word, *“I will.”* The root of these wishes is in loving the pleasures of the life of this world and the lack of understanding of the Prophet’s (PBUH) saying, *“Love whomsoever you love, it is inevitable that you will leave him behind.”*

Ignorance causes a person to be deluded by his youth which will make him think that death is not close. If he would count the elderly people in his town, he would have found that their number is not more than the tenth of the population of the town. More people die young than those who die at an old age. He may think that he will not die or get sick, while death and sickness could come at any time unexpectedly.

If this heedless person reflected a little and realized that death can come at any time unexpectedly, he would come to his senses and started preparing for it. But ignorance and the love of the worldly pleasures cause him to have the hope to live long and to ignore the fact that

death can come at any time. He always thinks that even though death is around him but it will not happen to him.

If you know that the hope for living long is caused by these two causes: ignorance and the love of the worldly life, then you should know that its remedy is in getting rid of its causes. Ignorance is irradiated by the clear thought of a present heart and by listening to wise advice from pure hearts. The removal of the love of the worldly life is difficult. It is the chronic illness that no one can find a remedy for. The only remedy for it is the belief in the Day of Judgment with its severe punishment and great reward. The certitude of this belief will eradicate the love of the worldly life from the heart.

The Different Ranks of People Regarding Their Hope in a Long Life

You should know that people in this regard differ:

1. Some love to live forever, *“Each one of them wishes he could be given a life of a thousand years.”* (2: 96)
2. Some wish that they would live until they become old. He would define this by the age of old people around him. They love this worldly life very much.
3. Some would plan for a year and they do not worry about the following year. They do not think they will live for another year. But those are the ones who prepare for the summer in the winter and prepare for the winter in the summer. When they have secured a provision enough for a full year they will busy themselves with worshipping God.
4. Some hope to live only for one season. They do not save for the winter in the summer, nor do they save for the summer in the winter.
5. Some hope to live for one day. He prepares only for his day and does not prepare for the next day.
6. Some hope to live for one hour.
7. Some do not even have the hope to live for one hour.
8. Some see death in front of their eyes and as if it is waiting to snatch them. These are the people who pray each prayer as if it is their last prayer.

These are the ranks of people. Each one of them will have his specific rank with God according to the hope he entertained. God does not deal unjustly with anyone. Whoever does an atom of good will be rewarded accordingly. The urgency in doing good deeds will reflect how much hope a person has for a long life. Many a person would claim that they do not hope for a long life, while they are lying. The criterion is the amount of planning that a person attempts in his life. He may worry about something that he may not need in a year. This shows that he plans to live for more than a year. The criteria for success is to have death in front of his eyes all the time. He will then be prepared for death whenever it comes. If he lives till the evening, he will express his gratitude to God and he will rejoice because he did not waste his day. He used his day to do good deeds that will benefit him in the Hereafter. Similarly, when he gets up in the morning, he will do the same. This will be easy only for a person whose heart is not concerned about what happens the next day. This person will be happy and successful when he dies. During his life, he will rejoice in knowing that he is well prepared for death. He will enjoy his private conversation with God. He is happy when he dies; and if he lives, then he will have the opportunity to do more good deeds.

So, let death be always in your thoughts. You are walking hurriedly towards it while you are heedless. You may have reached the time of your death, so do not get there before you have prepared for it.

The Necessity for Immediate Action and the Dangers of Procrastination

You should know that if you have two absent brothers, you expect one of them to arrive tomorrow and the other to arrive in a month or a year, then you should prepare for the arrival of the brother who is coming tomorrow not the brother who is coming in a month or a year.

Preparation is commensurate with the urgency of arrival. A person who expects to die after a year will remember the period of a year and will forget what is its consequence. Every day he will think that he will die after the period of a year, forgetting that time passes by. This will give him reason to procrastinate. He will not do anything in preparation. The Prophet (PBUH) said¹⁰⁹ to a man, *“Use the opportunity of five things before five, the opportunity of being young before you get old, the opportunity of being healthy before you get sick, the opportunity of having money before you become poor, the opportunity of having time before you get busy, and the opportunity of being alive before you die.”* He (PBUH) said¹¹⁰, *“Many people miss the opportunity to benefit from two blessings: health and time.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said¹¹¹, *“Whoever fears Satan should walk hurriedly on the straight path. He who walks hurriedly on the straight path reaches his destination. The commodity of God is expensive; Gods’ commodity is paradise.”* Jaber (RA) said, *“Whenever the Prophet (PBUH) talked about the Hour, he would raise his voice and his cheeks become red as if he was warning about the arrival of an army. He would say¹¹², ‘I warned you day and night, I have been sent at a time as close to the Hour as these two fingers.’ He used to wave with his hand showing how close the fingers are.”*

Hudhayfah (RA) said, *“Each morning and every night a caller would say, ‘People, beware of the departure.’”* This has been referred to in the verse, *“this is but one of the greatest, a warning to humankind, to him among you who wishes to go forward or remain behind.”* (74: 35-37) Al-Mundher said, *“I heard Malek ibn Dinar says to himself, ‘Hasten before the command reaches you.’ He repeated this about sixty times. I heard him but he never saw me.”* Al-Hassan used to admonish people saying, *“Do not procrastinate. You only have so much time. When you stop breathing, you have lost the chance to do good deeds that bring you closer to God. May God have mercy for a person who considered his sins and wept for committing them. He then recited, ‘Therefore do not be in haste against them; We only countdown to them the number (of days).’ (19: 84) The verse refers to the number of breaths one has. The last number signals the departure of your soul, the last number signals your farewell, and the last number signals your burial.”* Ibn Masoud (RA) said, *“When you wake up in the morning you should consider yourself a guest and your wealth is borrowed money. The guest has to depart and the borrowed money has to be returned to its owner.”*

¹⁰⁹ Narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) and reported by Ibn Abi Al-Dunya

¹¹⁰ Narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari

¹¹¹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

¹¹² Narrated by Jaber (RA) and reported by Muslim

Chapter 3: Agonies of Death and its Difficulty

You should know that if a person has no worries except the agonies of death, then this will be enough to spoil his life; his happiness will evaporate and he will be awakened from his heedlessness. It deserves a great deal of contemplation and preparation. Particularly, when it is expected with every breath one takes. A wise person said, *“A difficulty that befalls another, you never know when it befalls you.”* Luqman said to his son, *“My son, you never know when you will meet death, so be well prepared before you are taken by surprise.”*

Consider a person who is sitting in joyful company, enjoying himself to the extreme. Consider the reaction of that person if he was told that a soldier will enter and lash him five lashes. Would not this cause him great annoyance and spoil his enjoyment? While, in the meantime, he expects death to snatch him at any time. The only reasons for this are ignorance and conceit.

You should know that no one knows exactly the severity of pain during the agonies of death except he who actually experienced them. He who did not suffer such agonies, can only guess its severity by comparison to the pains he suffered before or from watching people die. You should also know that only organs which have souls will feel pain. If an organ suffered a cut or a burn, then the effect of the burn or the cut will be transmitted to the soul. The soul will suffer a pain proportionate to the amount of pain that reaches to it. The pain is distributed over the flesh, the blood and the different organs. Thus, only a certain portion of pain reaches the soul. If the pain touches only the soul and no pain is transmitted to the other organs, then the soul will suffer an excruciating pain. Only the soul suffers of the agonies of death. Thus, the pain will spread to all parts of the soul in the body. If a person suffers a prick of a needle, then only the part of the soul attached to that organ will suffer the pain. The pain caused by burns is greater because the burn runs deep into the human body so all parts of the organ touched by fire will feel the pain. The pain due to surgery will be felt in the parts that has been touched by the knife. That is why the pain caused by a cut is less than that caused by a burn. The pain caused by the agonies of death attacks the soul itself and consumes all its parts. It will affect every vein, every joint, and every nerve. Do not ask about how severe it is. They said that the agonies of death are more painful than a strike by the sword, or an attack by a saw.

Shaddad ibn Aws said, *“Death is the worst horror to be suffered by a believer in this life and in the Hereafter. It is worse than sawing, filing, and boiling.”*

There are three calamities that accompany death. These are

1. The severity of the agonies of death as we mentioned above.
2. Seeing the angel of death and the terror that he brings to the heart. Even the strongest person would be terrified when he sees the image of the angel of death while he is taking the soul of one of the sinners. But the believer sees the angel of death in his best image.
3. The ability of a disobedient servant to see his place in Hellfire and the terror they experience before they see their places. They will lose all their strength during the time they suffered the agonies of death. However, their souls will not depart their bodies until they hear the angel of death telling them of their fate: either paradise or Hellfire. This is

what the wise people dread most. The Prophet (PBUH) said¹¹³, *“Whoever loves meeting God, God loves meeting him; and whoever hates meeting God, God hates meeting him.”* The Companions said, *“All of us hate death.”* He said, *“Not that. When the believer sees where his abode is, he will love meeting God and God will love meeting him.”*

Al Hassan said, *“The believer will find his comfort only when he meets God. The time of death is a day of happiness, pride, and dignity for whoever finds his comfort in meeting God.”*

The fear of a bad ending causes a great pain in the hearts of the Gnostics. It is one of the greatest calamities at the time of death.

Chapter 4: The Death of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs

The Death of the Prophet (PBUH)

You should know that the Prophet (PBUH) is a good role model for us in his life and in his death, in his deeds and in his sayings. Every one of his states provides lessons for us and enlighten the insight of those who have insight. God honored him, chose him to be His Messenger, and took him as a beloved friend. You should then consider how he died. Did God delay his death for an hour when his time came? No, He sent the noble angels, who are assigned the task of putting people to death, to take his purified soul. They took it to a good seating place of truth near the Lord of Mercy. However, he did suffer the agonies of death; his moaning was audible, his anxiety was apparent, and his suffering was visible. Did you think that the position of prophet-hood averted what God has decreed for him? No, he submitted to what has been decreed and followed what was written for him. This is the situation of he who owns the praised rank with God and the basin that each one wants to drink from. He is the first one to come out of the grave and the only intercessor on behalf of people on the Day of Judgment. It is astonishing that we do not take a lesson from this. Do we think that we will live forever? Do we think that God will treat us generously in spite of our bad deeds? You should be certain that we will be sent to Hellfire, and then only those who are conscious of God will be saved.

The Death of Abu Bakr (RA)

People visited Abu Bakr (RA) when he was on his death bed. They asked him, *“Should not we bring a doctor to see you?”* He said, *“My doctor has checked me and said, ‘I do what I will.’”* He asked ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) to be the Caliph after him and said to him, *“You should know that God’s duties have to be performed at their assigned times, otherwise they will not be accepted. God will not accept a supererogatory duty before the obligatory duties have been fulfilled. The only way to have a heavy balance on the Day of Judgment is to follow the truth in this life, even though it is difficult. Those who followed the falsehood in this life will end up with light weights in their balance on the Day of Judgment. God mentioned the verses of mercy as well as the verses of torment, so that the believers would adopt a balanced approach of hope and*

¹¹³ Narrated by Ibadah ibn Al-Samet (RA) and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

fear. The believers should not commit themselves to self-destruction, nor would they ask of God anything but the truth.”

Abu Bakr (RA) advised those who are hoping for salvation to say, *“Lord, You have initiated people, even though You did not need them, and You made them into two groups: a group for paradise and a group for Hellfire. Lord, make me a member of the paradise group. Lord, You divided the people into groups. Some are happy, some are miserable, some are lost, and some are guided. Lord, do not make me miserable for disobeying You. Lord, You knew what will each soul will earn, even before it was created. This has been decreed. Lord, use me to become obedient to You. Lord, no one can will anything other than what You will; make Your will that I only desire that which brings me closer to You. Lord, You have decreed how people move, nothing moves without Your will. Lord, make my move to become conscious of You.”*

The Death of ‘Umar (RA)

A non-Muslim slave assassinated ‘Umar (RA) while he was praying. When he was about to die he asked his son Ibn ‘Umar (RA) to go to ‘Aiysha (RA) asking her to allow him to be buried next to the Prophet (PBUH) and Abu Bakr (RA). He said to Ibn ‘Umar (RA), *“Go to the mother of the believers, ‘Aiysha and say to her, ‘Umar, and do not say the Caliph because I am no longer Caliph, sends his greetings to you and requests your permission for him to be buried next to the Prophet (PBUH) and Abu Bakr (PBUH).”* She agreed. He asked Ibn ‘Umar (RA) to take care of the debt he owes people and he appointed a committee of seven people to choose his successor.

The Death of Uthman (RA)

Uthman (RA) was besieged and then assassinated in his house. Just before he died, people present around him heard him saying, *“Lord, unite the nation of Muhammad (PBUH);”* he said it three times.

The Death of Ali (RA)

Muhammad ibn Ali said, *“Before Ali (RA) died he counseled his sons and said, ‘There is no deity except God.’”*

Chapter 5: What Some of the Caliphs Said at the Time of Death

When Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufian (RA) was on his death bed, he started singing the praise of God, then he wept and said, *“Muawiyah, you remembered your Lord when you became old and weak, why did you not do that when you were young and strong.”* He then wept and said, *“Lord, have mercy on a disobedient old man whose heart is hard. Lord, forgive his sin, and bestow Your forbearance on a person who did not ask anyone but You and does not trust anyone but You.”*

The last speech that Muawiyah gave before his death was, *“People, whoever plants a plant will harvest that which he planted. I have been appointed over you, those who will be appointed over you after me will be worse than me, just like those who were appointed over you before me were better than me. Yazid, when my time comes, assign a wise person to wash me for burial. A wise person is closer to God. He should wash me carefully, and he should say Takbir loudly. You should find a garment of the garments of the Prophet (PBUH) in my cupboard together with the remnants of his hair and nails. Dress me in the garment and put the remnants of his hair and nails in my nose, mouth, ears, and eyes. Yazid, remember God’s commands regarding parents.*

When you have prepared me for burial and put me at rest in my grave, then entrust Muawiyah to the Most Merciful.”

Haroun El-Rashid chose his burial cloth before his death. He used to look at them and say, “*My wealth availed me nothing. My power has vanished from me.*” (69: 28-29) Al-Maamoun used to lie down on dust saying, “*Lord, whose kingdom is ever permanent, bestow Your mercy on him whose kingdom is transient.*” Al- Mutasem said on his death bed, “*Had I known how short my life will be, I would not have done this or that.*” Al-Muntasser became agitated on his death bed. They said to him, “*Do not worry.*” He said, “*Except for this, life has gone and the Hereafter is upon me.*” Al-Hajjaj said, “*Lord, forgive me. People say that You will not forgive me.*” ‘Umar ibn Abd El-Aziz liked this statement.

Statements of the Some Companions and those who Followed Them at the Time of Death

Moadh (RA) said, just before he died, “*Lord, I used to fear You but now, I have hope in You. Lord, You know that I did not love to live long so that I enjoy flowing rivers or planting trees, but I lived to fast when it was hot, to work hard to do the rituals, and to compete with scholars in the circles for Your remembrance.*”

At the time of death, Salman (RA) wept. They asked him why was he crying. He said, “*I do not cry because I am fond of this life, but because, I remembered the Prophet’s (PBUH) saying, ‘Do not take from this world more than the provision of a traveler.’*” When he died, they found that he only had few Dirhams.

When Belal (RA) was on his death bed, his wife said, “*How sad I am?*” He said, “*But rather say, ‘How happy I am?’ Tomorrow I will be meeting the people I loved, Muhammad (PBUH) and his party.*”

At the time of death, Abd Allah ibn Al-Mubarak opened his eyes and laughed. He said, “*For the like of this let all strive, who wish to strive.*” (37: 61)

At the time of death, Ibrahim Al-Nakhie wept. They asked him why is he crying. He said, “*I am waiting to be told by God and His Messenger (PBUH) whether I am destined to paradise or to Hellfire.*”

At the time of death, Ibn Ibn Al-Munkader wept, when he was asked he is he crying he said, “*I am not crying because I know of a sin that I had committed, but because I am worried that I have done something which I thought minor but which God considers major.*”

Chapter 6: Funerals

You should know that funerals provide a lesson for those who can see, and a warning for those who are heedless. Watching a funeral increases the hardness of the hearts of those who are heedless. They think that they will always watch the funeral of someone else other than themselves. They do not think that eventually their dead bodies will be carried like the others; or it may be that they think it will not happen soon. They forgot that those who are being carried today used to entertain the same thoughts that they have. Anyone who watches a funeral, should imagine that this is his funeral; because he will indeed be carried in a funeral soon. It has been narrated that whenever Abu Hurairah (RA) watched a funeral he would say, “*Proceed, we will follow you soon.*” Makhool Al-Damashqi used to say when he watches a funeral, “*Proceed, we*

will join you soon. Profound lesson that does not last long. The former goes and the latter has no brains.” Usaid ibn Hudayer said, “Any time I see a funeral, I ask myself what will happen to him and what is his fate?” When Malek’s ibn Dinar brother died, he wept and said, “I will not be comfortable until I know what his fate was, but I will never know until I die myself.”

Their Sayings at the Graves

Uthman (RA) used to weep whenever he visited a grave. Someone asked him saying, *“I wonder why you weep at a grave while when you remember Hellfire and paradise, you do not weep?”* He said, *“I heard the Prophet (PBUH) saying¹¹⁴, ‘The grave is the first station on the road to the Hereafter. If the person was able to pass safely through this station, then what comes next is much easier. If he did not, then what comes next will be even more difficult.’”*

Mujahed said, *“The first thing that speaks to the son of Adam is his grave. It will say, ‘I am the house of worms, loneliness, and darkness. This is what I prepared for you, what did you prepare for me?’”* Abu Dhar (RA) said, *“Should I tell you about the day of my poverty, it is the day that I will be placed in my grave.”* Abu Al-Dardaa (RA) used to sit at the graves. They asked him about this, he said, *“I sit with people who remind me that I will die, when I leave them they do not backbite me.”*

What They Said When Their Children Died

A person whose son died before him should consider himself and his son as travelers; his son travelled faster and reached his destination earlier. He should not grieve too much because he knows that one of them went first and soon the other will follow him. If he realized this, his grief will be reduced, particularly knowing that a parent will be greatly rewarded for losing a son.

He should be sincere in praying for his dead son. There is high hope that such prayer will be accepted by God. Muhammad ibn Suleiman stood at the grave of his son and said, *“Lord, I appeal to you on his behalf and I fear you for him. Lord, accept my appeal and remove my fear.”* Abu Sinan prayed for his son saying, *“Lord, I have forgiven him for any shortcoming that he may have had for me, I pray that you forgive him for any shortcoming in his duties to You because You are Most Generous.”*

When Dhar ibn ‘Umar ibn Dhar died, his father said, *“Dhar, I have been occupied by the grief for you so I did not grieve over you. I wonder, what did you say, and what was said to you?”* He then prayed, *“Lord, this is Dhar, you made me enjoy him until he died. You never treated him unjustly. You commanded him to obey You and obey me. Lord, I give him whatever reward you promised me as a result of his death so make me suffer instead of him.”*

¹¹⁴ Narrated by Uthman (RA) and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

Conclusion: The extensive Mercy of God

Let us conclude with a chapter on the extensive mercy of God, by way of optimism, since the Prophet (PBUH) loved the good omen. We do not have enough deeds to qualify us for forgiveness, so we follow the example of the Prophet (PBUH) in loving a good omen. We end this book by a discussion of the mercy of God and we hope that our ending would be good both in this life and in the Hereafter. God said, *“Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases;”* (4: 48) *“Say, ‘My servants who have transgressed against themselves; do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins. Indeed, He is All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy;’”* (39: 53) *“Whoever does evil or wrongs his own soul and then seeks God’s forgiveness, he shall find God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* (4: 110)

We seek God’s forgiveness for any mistake that we may have made or any transgression which we may have committed in this book as well as all the other books we wrote. We seek His forgiveness for the things we said which do not agree with the deeds we did. We seek His forgiveness for any claim we made regarding our knowledge or insight about the religion of God. We seek His forgiveness for anything we did with the initial intention that it is done for the sake of God alone then it was tainted by other intention. We seek His forgiveness for any promise we have made then we fell short in its fulfillment. We seek His forgiveness if we used one of His blessings in committing an act of disobedience. We seek his forgiveness for all our shortcomings. We seek His forgiveness for entertaining any thoughts to embellish the book for the sake of people. We hope that after seeking God’s forgiveness for ourselves and everyone who read this book, copied it, or listened to it that God will honor us with His forgiveness and His mercy; and He would overlook our bad deeds whether apparent or hidden. God’s generosity is great and His mercy is comprehensive. His generosity covers all His creatures and we are of His creatures. We have no means except His generosity. The Prophet (PBUH) said¹¹⁵, *“God’s mercy has a hundred components. He brought down one component to be used by the jinn, the humans, the birds, the animals, and the insects. This is the mercy which enable them to be kind and merciful towards each other. He will use the remaining ninety-nine components to treat His servants on the Day of Judgment.”*

It is narrated that on the Day of Judgment, God will extract a book from under the Throne. The book contains the statements: My mercy preceded My anger and I am the most Merciful of all who are merciful. At this point, a number of people equal to twice the number of people in paradise, will exit hellfire.

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹¹⁶, *“The people of hellfire will be gathered together in Hellfire with whomsoever God willed to be with them from the Muslims. The disbelievers will say to the Muslims, ‘It did not avail you anything that you were Muslims.’ The Muslims will say, ‘We are being punished for the sins we committed.’ God (SWT) will command that the Muslims will be taken out of hellfire. The disbelievers will say, ‘We wish, we were Muslims.’”* The Prophet

¹¹⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah (RA) and reported by Muslim

¹¹⁶ Narrated by Abu Musa al-Ash’ari (RA) and reported by al-Hakem and alOBayhaqi.

(PBUH) then recited, *“It may be that those who disbelieve wish ardently that they were Muslims.” (15: 2)*

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said¹¹⁷, *“Allah has more mercy for His believing servant than the mercy which a merciful mother has for her baby.”*

Jaber ibn ‘Abd Allah (RA) said, *“The person whose good deeds outweigh his evil deeds will be admitted to paradise without reckoning. He, whose good deeds equal his evil deeds will be admitted to paradise with easy reckoning. The intercession of the Messenger of God (PBUH) is kept for those who are overburden by their bad deeds.”*

Al-Sanabigay said, *“When I visited ‘Ibadah ibn al-Samet (RA) while he was on the death bed, I wept. He said, ‘Why do you weep?’ By Allah, I narrated to you all the hadiths that I heard from the Prophet (PBUH) except one. I will narrate that one today. I heard the Prophet (PBUH) say¹¹⁸, ‘Allah will save whoever bears witness that there is no deity except Allah, and that Muhammad is His prophet, from Hellfire.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹¹⁹, *“I have seen a scene of the Day of Judgment in which prophets will pass by, each with his followers. One prophet has a single follower, another has two followers, a third prophet passes with no followers. Then I saw a great nation passing by, I entertained the hope that this would be my nation, but I was told that this is Moses (PBUH) and his people. Then I saw a greater nation, I was told that this is my nation. They will be admitted to paradise together with another group that will reach 70,000 thousand persons.”* The Prophet (PBUH) did not explain who are the extra people. The Companions said, *“We were born disbelievers, but we accepted Islam. These are our children.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“They are those who do not get themselves cauterized, nor seek Ruqyah, nor do they see evil omens, and they put their trust in their Lord.”* So 'Ukashah bin Mihsan stood and said, *“Am I among them O Messenger of Allah?”* He said, *“Yes.”* Then another man stood up and said, *“Am I among them?”* The Prophet (PBUH) he said *“Ukashah has preceded you to it.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹²⁰, *“I met Gabriel around al-Hurra, he said, ‘Give your nation the glad tidings, that whoever dies believing in the Oneness of Allah will enter paradise.’ I asked, ‘Even if he committed theft or adultery?’ He said, ‘Yes, even if he committed theft or adultery.’ I asked again, even if he committed theft or adultery?’ He said, even if he committed theft, adultery, or drank alcohol.”*

Abu al-Darda’ (RA) said¹²¹, *“The Prophet (PBUH) recited, ‘But for those who feared the standing before their Lord there are two gardens.’ (55: 46) I asked the Prophet (PBUH), ‘Even if he committed theft and adultery?’ He said, ‘But for those who feared the standing before their Lord there are two gardens.’ I asked again, ‘Even if he committed theft and adultery?’ The*

¹¹⁷ Narrated by ‘Umar (RA) and reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

¹¹⁸ Narrated by ‘Ibadah ibn al-Samet (RA) and reported by Muslim.

¹¹⁹ Narrated by Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) and reported by al-Bukhari.

¹²⁰ Narrated by Abu Dhar (RA) and reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

¹²¹ Narrated by Abu Darda’ (RA) and reported by Mishkat al-Masabih.

Prophet (PBUH) said, 'But for those who feared the standing before their Lord there are two gardens.' I asked for the third time, 'Even if he committed theft and adultery? He said, "In spite of Abu al-Darda'"

These traditions and others which came in the Book of Hope, give us glad tidings about the Mercy of Allah. We pray to Allah (SWT) that He would not treat us according to what we deserve. We ask Him to bestow His Grace and Mercy on us.