



Transformative Worship in Islam

Experiencing Perfection

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Book Description

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

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

About the Author

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years.

He is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

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

Preface

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

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

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

Originally gathered mostly from Arabic sources which have influenced and inspired me over several decades, this book is an attempt to share with the spiritual seeker (especially Muslims), the keys to inner transformation and awareness of the One God. The book may also be of interest to the general public interested in the wisdom of the prophetic teachings. Allah’s light illumines the known and the unknown, the inner and the outer, and this life and the next. There is no light except His and He is the All-Encompassing Power and Truth. Light upon light.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

February 2013

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 1: Creation and its Direction

1.1 Cycles of Life and the Arrow of Time

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 Knowledge, Consciousness & Intelligence

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

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

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

Human consciousness has two levels or spheres of awareness:

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

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

Like others before them, Muslims have tried to chart the layers, different levels and subtleties of knowledge and conscious awareness. Various terms and descriptions have been used by Muslim scholars and realized Masters to indicate the stations and degrees which people have attained in this knowledge. Terms like *shari`ah*, *tariqah* and *haqiqah* will be familiar to readers who have sought higher knowledge through the path of Islam.

One important description states that *shari`ah* is the name applied to a divinely revealed system of laws consisting of basic tenets, or roots or foundations (*usūl*) and their various branches of knowledge (*furu`*); and that *tariqah* consists of adhering to them in a careful and consistent manner; while *haqiqah* is the confirmation of the ultimate Truth behind existence by way of illumination and witnessing, or through attaining certain spiritual states.²

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

² Sayyid Haydar al-`Amuli (d. 1385 CE / 719 AH), *Asrār al-Sharī`ah wa Atwār al-Tarīqah wa Anwār al-Haqīqah* (The Secrets of the *Shari`ah*, the Stages of *Tariqah* and the Illuminations of *Haqiqah*).

~ The *shari`ah* is a river and *haqiqah* a sea: thus the *faqih* makes his way through the river and the *hakim* dives into the sea for pearls, but the *`arif* moves along [the sea] aboard the ship of salvation. ~ Imam `Ali

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

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

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

- the Common People (*al-`am*) – this term refers to the general class of believers who adhere to the *shari`ah* of Islam and whose understanding of the Islamic way of life is centered around it;
- the Elect (*al-khās*) – these are the learned men (*al-`ulamā'*), the men of wisdom (*al-hukamā'*), and the ones with the knowledge which enables them to make legal decisions;
- the Chosen Few of the Elect (*khās al-khawās*) refers to those who possess a deeper knowledge, i.e. the Master (*`arif*) or gnostic who has awakened to the all-encompassing Divine Unity and knowledge.

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

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

– and the reunion of lovers – Truth is ONE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 Rationality, Inspiration & Revelation

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

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

It is also said that reasoning is like eyesight and that the *shari`ah* is like ‘beams of light’. Eyesight is useless unless it comes into contact with these external beams. Likewise, these beams are useless if they cannot be utilized to give sight. One of the interpretations of Allah’s words ‘...light upon light...’ [24:35] is that they refer to the light of the *shari`ah* upon the light of reasoning, because reasoning will not be illuminated except by the light of the *shari`ah*. If a speck of dust of this world falls upon the pupil of a man’s eye his vision will be marred. What clarity can there then be if one is attached to the entire world and therefore be veiled by it?

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

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

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

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

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

Revelation differs from inspiration. True inspirations are reflections of the Prophetic revelations. Those who follow in the footsteps of the Prophets and seek insights and inward inspirations must maintain outward precaution and acceptance of the revealed laws of Islam. The world of the unseen opens up to those who live in harmony with the material and unseen world. This can happen when the primal and natural codes are adhered to – that is, the *Dīn*.

The word *wahy*, translated as ‘revelation’, literally means ‘a writing, a mission, an inspiration, or words which are hidden and which originate from other than man himself’. Used as a verb, *waha* means ‘to reveal to someone’, or ‘to show, indicate or speak to someone by utterances which are

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is related from the Imams that revelations were received by Messengers (*rusūl*) while in a waking state and that the remainder of the Prophets (*anbiya'*) received them while asleep.

The direct and inward receiving of knowledge without the existence of any external agent is due to the capacity of man's soul to perceive the nature of phenomena, as well as its original root and essence of phenomena. This essence is usually veiled due to man's lack of preparation to accept these illuminations and knowledge.

When this veil becomes thin or is lifted altogether insight becomes clear. In Arabic, this insight is referred to as *basirah*. It is by means of this inner vision that the soul witnesses what is inscribed upon the 'Preserved' or 'Well-guarded Tablet' [85:22]. The ease by which the veil is lifted is proportionate to the degree of the soul's readiness and its submission, the purity of the heart, and the evolvment of intellectual reason.

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

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

~ My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved than by way of the obligations which I have ordained for him. He may draw near to Me with additional actions (*nawāfil*) if I love him. If I love him I become his hearing by which he hears and the sight by which he sees. I become the tongue by which he speaks and his hand with which he grasps. If he asks Me in prayer I will answer him, and if he beseeches Me I will grant it to him.

The state of the spiritual Master is described as:

~ His body is within creation and his heart is with Allah. If his heart should become distracted from Allah for one instant it would perish because of its longing for Him. The Master (*`ārif*) is the guardian of Allah's Trust, the treasure-house of His Secrets, the mine of His Light, the guide to His Mercy over His creation, the storehouse of His Knowledge, and the scales of His Abundance and Justice. The *`ārif* has become annihilated from the creation, from desire, and from the world and has no companion but Allah, no speech, no signs of indications, no self except in Allah, for Allah, from Allah, with Allah. ~ Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq⁴

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

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

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

1.4 States & Stages of Development

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

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

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

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

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

The Purified Heart and the Light of Soul

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *The first group*: They understand the manner of performing the physical / mechanical aspects of prayer, and they may even understand the meanings of the words they utter. The inner state, as far as they are concerned, is to pay attention (i.e. have presence of mind) during the actual recitations and to conceptualize them in their heart while they are actually in prayer. This group equates the inner truths with the traditional meanings only.
- *The second group*: They understand the inner truths and meanings of the various forms of acts of devotion and remembrance, both intellectually and conceptually. They know that everything which is praiseworthy is attributable only to Allah. Presence of the Heart for them is when their hearts are focused on the remembrance of these qualities or Attributes.
- *The third group*: They perceive these truths conceptually and intellectually and realize them within their own hearts. They have realized a deep and profound knowledge of these truths. There is a great difference between the degree of faith one attains in the heart and the mere perception of it by reasoning. Often man has an intellectual understanding of something, which is confirmed by empirical evidence, yet his belief in it has not reached or affected his heart.
- *The fourth group*: They have combined these truths and experience them within their heart and thus have reached the station of serenity and contentment – a wholesome realization of truth. They now know that acts of devotion resonate within the heart, making clear the foundation of unity (*tawhīd*).

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

- *The first division*: Those who discipline themselves outwardly by way of the revealed laws, the *shari`ah*, and by performing the night prayers, fasting, giving alms in charity, making sacrifices, observing religious celebrations and various congregational activities, and so forth.
- *The second division*: Those who discipline the heart and purify it of impurities.
- *The third division*: Those whose state absorbs divine Attributes and who unify with them.
- *The fourth division*: Those whose self has vanished and whose very being has been annihilated, whose wandering has finished and whose sights are fixed only on the light of Allah and nothing else.

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

1.5 Oneness, Dualities & Universal Connectedness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We return to the divinely revealed tradition already mentioned:

~ My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved than by way of the obligations which I have ordained for him. He may draw near to Me with additional actions (*nawāfil*) if I love him. If I love him I become his hearing by which he hears and the sight by which he sees. I become the tongue by which he speaks and his hand with which he grasps. If he asks Me in prayer I will answer him, and if he beseeches Me I will grant it to him.

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

Drawing 'near' to Allah is always preceded by withdrawal from all else. Pre-eminent among the things which one turns to other than Allah is the self itself and its various spheres of influence, which are:

1. The sphere of the senses, that is, the connection with the material realm of nature.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.6 The Return to Origin– *Ma`ād*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Edited By: Munawar A. Anees

Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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