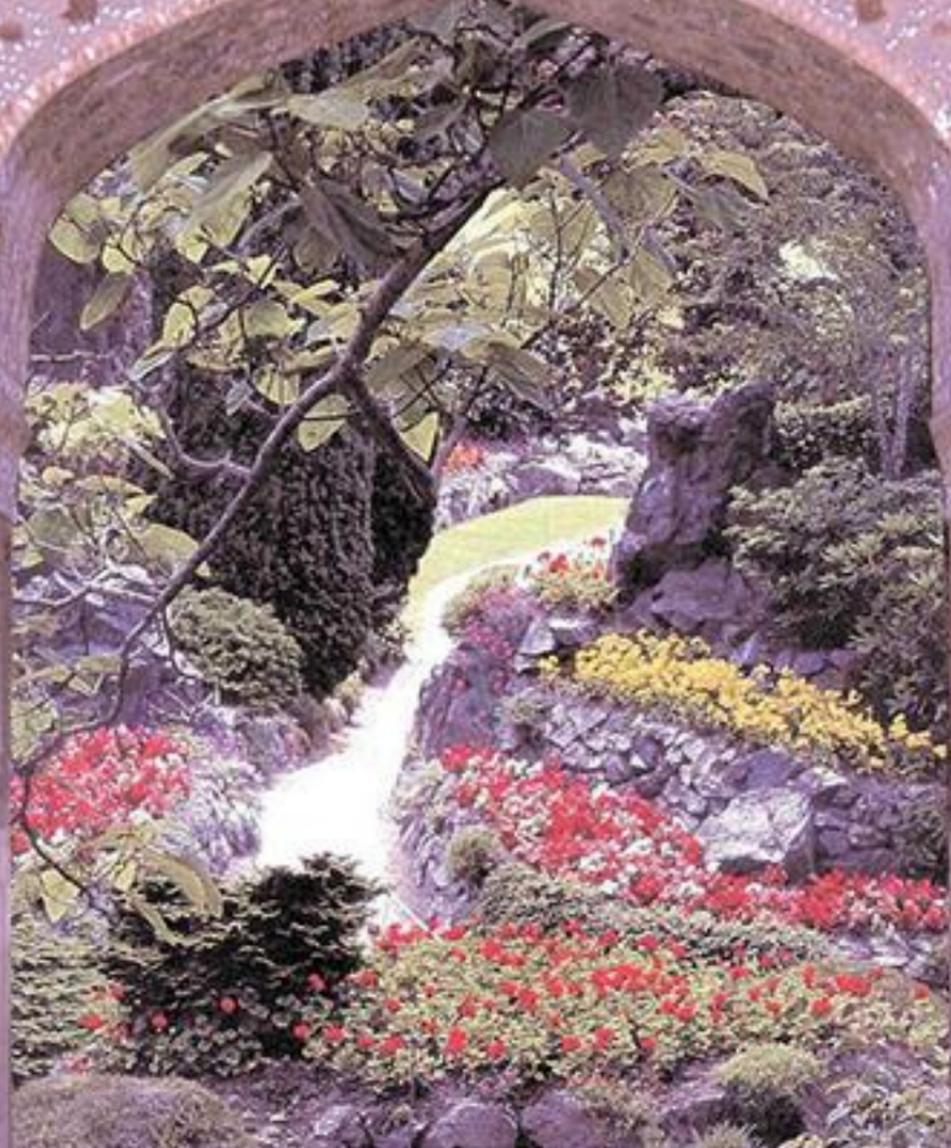


SUFI WISDOM SERIES

VOLUME 2



IN THE
MYSTIC FOOTSTEPS
OF SAINTS

Shaykh Nazim Adil Al-Haqqani

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In the Mystic Footsteps of Saints
VOLUME 2

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Grandshaykh Abd Allah Ad Daghestani (ق) with his successor, Shaykh Nazim Adil Al Haqqani (ق)

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The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order is a non profit, US based organization dedicated to spreading traditional Islamic spirituality and teachings.

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ISBN: 1 930409 09 5

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Unity beyond Duality

Does anyone think that the ocean is only what appears on its surface? By observing its hue and motion the keen eye may perceive indications of that ocean's unfathomable depth. The Lord's mercy and compassion are an ocean with no shore, providing endlessly varied vistas for those who sail its surface; but the greatest wonderment and fulfillment is reserved for those "creatures of the sea" for whom that mercy has become their own medium.

The Lord beckons us through a divine love and attraction that has been implanted in our hearts, a love that may be understood and felt consciously as divine by some, and only indirectly as love for His creatures or creation by others. In either case the pull of our heartstrings draws us to those Mercy Oceans, just as our physical bodies feel drawn to a warm and gentle sea.

By means of the revelation of holy books and through the example set by prophets and saints, all human beings have been brought in contact with those oceans. For humankind at large, these revelations serve as vessels, or as "instruction manuals" for building and maintaining vessels that ply those most spacious seas, but for those who have the means to read between the lines, a great revelation emerges: that we are of that sea, that our place, our home is in the depths of that sea, not on its surface.

The Holy Quran is an eminently unambiguous scripture, full of clear guidance for mankind at large, but there is much more contained in it than immediately meets the untrained eye. The discrimination to see into its depths is not only a matter of training, however, but

also a bestowal attainable only through sincerity and faith. There are endless levels of knowledge and wisdom through the depths of the Holy Quran, as it states:

“You shall surely ride stage after stage.”

And the attainment of each stage imparts great benefit, not only for the one who has attained it but also for those around him, for mankind and for all creation.

One may ask, “To what ends so many hidden meanings?” Understanding these meanings is the key to deriving their “wisdom essence”, and it is that essence that is an inexhaustible fountain, an elixir of eternal life. We may summarize the essence of the wisdom our Lord seeks to impart unto us through all His revelations in one word: unity.

The dominating theme of the Holy Quran is the Uniqueness and Incomparability of God, and the weakness and utter dependence of all creatures upon Him. By thus stressing His omnipotence and our powerlessness, He reminds us of our affinity with all creatures and bestows upon us the humble but honorable cloak of servanthood. Realize that you are no better than anyone else and that self improvement may be attained through serving God and His servants, and you will have grasped the tools with which to shatter your idol of conceit, your egoism. Having attained humility, the tribulations of life will propel you towards your goal, as they are a constant reminder of our weakness and are received, if not with thankfulness, at least with patience, in the knowledge that they are drawing us ever closer to ultimate unity.

Our journey towards that goal first brings us away from the illusion of multiplicity, the impenetrable veil of the common man. That is the vision of endless diversity, of apparently independent existences of billions of

creatures each striving to improve its own condition and exert its willpower. The next stage is the realization of God's omnipotence and our weakness. This realization inspires awe in the face of the majesty and might of Allah (Jalal), and one feels himself a most humble servant of a Most Transcendent Lord. Beyond this is the stage of intimacy (uns) at which the imminence of the Lord is perceived:

“And I am closer to man than his jugular vein.”

At this stage one perceives His aspects of love and beauty (Jamal). But the ultimate goal is beyond even the intimacy of “I and Thou”, a unity beyond duality, for He is All in All. That is the meaning of, “There is no God but He.” As long as we cling to the separateness of our physical and spiritual existence, we are far from our goal. Why do we fear death? Because we are afraid of being non-existent; that is why the soul and body, which enable each other to exist in this realm, cling to each other so tenaciously. We may have to pay a high price to remain alive, but yet do we endure.

All of God's prophets had the same mission: to call people to divine existence in the Lord, and to a lifestyle conducive to the attainment of that end. What exactly does such a lifestyle entail, and what are its implications? Once the idol of egoism is shattered, fulfillment is no longer found in self-aggrandizement. The emphasis shifts to seeking truth, purity and peace, to acquiring blessed attributes in the time allotted to us for preparing ourselves for that longed-for reunion. Worldly cravings and desires are drastically reduced, and the pursuit of a decent livelihood to support a simple lifestyle replaces voracious egoistic striving.

Rich and powerful people were often at the forefront of opposition to the prophets as, lacking the spiritual training that might have enabled them to handle power and wealth with detachment, they saw their power or their wealth as the essence and affirmation of their existence—and so vehemently opposed any change in the status quo. The poor and powerless were generally more receptive, as they did not feel so threatened by the advent of a new spiritually oriented order.

Certainly they also believed that money and power were the criteria of existence, but they figured, “We have nothing and are nothing anyway, so what do we have to lose by going and listening in?” Then, when the prophets called them to the Lord they could easily renounce attachment to worldly values, and said, “We have left behind everything but ourselves.” As for those who really meant what they said, from the poor who renounced little and from the rich who had to struggle hard to renounce worldliness, the essence of the message was then imparted, “Now, leave yourselves behind and approach the Ocean of Unity.”

Abu Yazid al Bistami (one of the greatest Masters of the Khwajagan line) approached the Divine Presence and “knocked on the gate.” He was asked, “Who is there?” “I have come, oh my Lord,” replied Abu Yazid. He was told, “There isn’t any place here for two. Leave your ego behind and come.” When Abu Yazid once again approached the Divine Presence and was asked who it was, he said, “You, oh Lord.”

Once Abu Yazid was asked about acts of worship and devotion of two different categories: those indicated by the example of the Holy Prophet (Sunnah) and those made obligatory through divine revelation (fard).

He said, “Sunnah is the abandonment of worldliness and fard is the abandonment of all but He alone.” So many people claim to follow the Sunnah but their hearts are awash in love of worldly pomp. As for what is obligatory, fard (usually understood as the minimum acceptable level of religious observance), Abu Yazid has penetrated to the heart of the matter, saying total surrender is the ends to which all the means (acts of worship) are truly directed. Obligatory also, because at the time of death all must leave behind everything besides Him, whether they are ready to do so or not.

The Lord is beckoning us to enter that Ocean of Unity while we are yet in this life, to dissolve as sugar dissolves in tea. When the sugar dissolves you can no longer say, “This is sugar and that is tea.” Our Lord’s invitation to join in His Unity is always extended, and it is our fate to suffer until we respond to that invitation. As long as we cling to our claim of autonomy we will have to bear the brunt of the hard lessons that this world has to offer us—and cry out in pain. Let go and nothing can harm you.

When Abdul Qadir al Jilani addressed his followers, his individuality would sometimes become completely veiled by a cloak of divine attributes or of prophetic attributes. When he was in such a state the divine would manifest through him, and his speech would become awe inspiring; but, to those who had not yet attained a sufficiently high station, this was very disturbing and even shocking.

Perfection may only be understood by perfectly complete individuals, and not at all by the unregenerate human. As for those on the way of truth, they understand perfection in accordance with their respective levels of development, and the followers of Abdul Qadir al Jilani

were not on a level to be able to receive those outpourings.

Once a grandshaykh was addressing his followers from the pulpit of a mosque. He recited a verse of the Holy Quran and explained it a little. Then he said, “This explanation will help everyone here understand this verse on a level corresponding to his attainment, but its real meaning is not for you. You can’t understand what I am saying. There is only one person in attendance who has been able to appreciate the deep meanings of this discourse—and he is hiding behind a pillar wearing a veil.”

“My words have been directed to that person—not to you—understand this, and do not think of yourselves as the suitable receptacles of every piece of precious wisdom. If you hear something from me that you understand, then fine and well, make good use of it on your way, but if you hear something you do not understand, be careful not to reject it. Whenever that occurs just hold your peace and be humble enough to accept that it may have been directed to someone else in the audience, someone who has attained a higher potential of understanding than you have.”

Then that grandshaykh proceeded to another, even deeper level of meaning of that verse of the Quran, and said, “Now, this is even beyond the level of that person behind the pillar.”

When al Jilani came to himself, his followers informed him of the nature of his utterances while in that state of absence from himself. Jilani then told them, “Oh my sons, if it is true that I say things contrary to the Shari`ah (divine law), then you must smite me with your swords.” What al Jilani meant by “contrary to the Shari`ah” was in fact, “contrary to your understanding of

the Shari`ah”, as people are not all on the same level of understanding Shari`ah.

At the next gathering, al Jilani again said something belonging to the realm of the knowledge of Allah Almighty. Then, in accordance with the Shaykh’s instructions the followers drew their swords and began to strike—but their swords passed through the Shaykh’s figure as readily as they would pass through thin air. They slashed and slashed, but it was as if his body was a figment of their imaginations.

When al Jilani came to himself again his followers told him, “Oh our master, you again spoke such words.” “What did you do about it?” he asked. “As you instructed us, we struck you with our swords, but they passed through you as through thin air.” The shaykh answered, “Then I must not have been there. There was no more Jilani to be cut by your swords. Jilani was dissolved in the Oneness of the Lord, Almighty Allah. It was He alone speaking to you.”

Certainly some people will raise objections, saying that there is no scriptural evidence for the contention that Allah may speak through an intermediary other than a prophet. Both the Quran and the Torah mention that Allah spoke to Moses through a burning bush, and every believer accepts that. In your opinion, which is a more noble vessel for divine light, a more noble instrument for divine wisdom, a bush or man? Is man or bush the “crown of creation”? Are there any grounds upon which to reject this point?

When a person attains the Station of Unity he leaves behind his own existence and is admitted to the Lord’s existence, so that divine oneness overtakes him. You may see him as al Jilani, but he is not al Jilani.

We all stagger under the weight of the burden of this life, but we bear that burden only because we have not set it down. Some foolish people are not satisfied with carrying only their own loads but in addition envy the loads of others. The result is this: as long as you carry that weight of the ego so many others attack you, and you are pierced by arrows and spears, slashed by swords of envy and enmity.

Attaining the gate of Oneness with the Almighty is the only way to be released from the sufferings of this world, and all of God's prophets have imparted methods for attaining this goal. However, man's resistance is very great, and generally, the larger our share of worldly fortune the tighter we grasp it.

That is one of the main reasons why divinely revealed law, throughout the ages, has required the rich to give charity to the poor. Besides the obvious benefits of relieving the poverty of the recipient and keeping envy away from the threshold of the donor, the poor due trains the well to do person to renounce some part of his wealth, and thus to purify it and himself. This is why the poor due is called "Zakat", or purification. Purification from what? From our attachment to separate existence.

Sha'ban ar Rai was a simple shepherd, and also one of the great Sufi saints of the early Islamic era. He lived during the times when the four renowned Imams of the Sunni schools of Canon Law were busy compiling the canon of their respective schools. One of those great scholars, Imam Shafi'i, considered Sha'ban ar Rai to be his spiritual mentor.

Another of the four great Imams, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, being skeptical of such an illiterate shaykh, decided to ask him a very elementary question to ascertain his level of knowledge. Imam Shafi'i warned

him, “Beware of thinking of him as a simpleton, for if you ask him a question with that preconceived notion, he will understand your hidden intention and put you to shame.

Imam Ahmad was, however, determined to pursue his course, so he asked him, “What is the rate of Zakat that all non-indigent Muslims must pay to the poor?” “Which Zakat are you inquiring about—your Zakat or ours? According to your variety of knowledge or according to our way?” Surprised and always suspicious of heresy, Imam Ahmad asked, “What? Do you claim that there are two rates of Zakat in Shari`ah (divine law)? I would like to know what they are, and on what evidence you base your claim.”

“According to Shari`ah as it applies to you and to those who are on your way, it is incumbent upon every person to give away one fortieth of his gold, silver, livestock and goods to the poor. According to the Shari`ah, as it applies to His slaves, the slave and all he possesses belong to the Master. So, on our way, from every forty, forty is for our Lord and nothing for us.”

Then Imam Ahmad asked him, “On what authority do you base this? Who is your Imam, and what is your chain of transmission back to the Prophet?” “Our Imam is Abu Bakr as Siddiq (the first Khalifa of Islam): he gave all his wealth for the sake of his Lord.”

By thus requiring people to relinquish at least one fortieth of their wealth every year, people are given a start on the path of renunciation—and renouncing even a few possessions is a struggle for man, who is born into this world with clenched fists, but must leave it open handed. Nothing that you can collect from this world’s treasures will enable you to abide in it forever. So, open your hands while they are yet warm; this is better for

your soul, for the practice of open handedness will train you to lay your existence down in the sublime Oneness of God.

That is the highest level of goodness in this world, and He Almighty promises a bountiful recompense:

Shall the recompense of goodness be other than goodness?

The Lord Almighty will accept your existence and give of Himself. That is the meaning of “Fana fillah” (Annihilation in God) and “Baqa billah (Permanence in God): real existence in the Ocean of Unity of Allah Almighty. No one can anticipate the boundlessness of that pleasure—may Allah grant us that pleasure! But it is expensive . . .



Longing

I am to our visitor here a strange person in strange clothes whom he thinks he is seeing for the first time. He knows only that this person is called “Shaykh Nazim”, more than this he does not yet know. Just as I am an unknown being to him, so is he unknown to himself. He knows of himself only what is written on his identity card: date of birth, place of birth, mother’s name, father’s name, and occupation.

As long as one remains ignorant of one’s own real existence, how can one attain knowledge of one’s Creator? Therefore, I don’t blame people for being blind to divine realities and to the existence of the Creator, for they are ignorant of themselves; how should it be any different? If they knew themselves they would accept divine realities.

As of yet he doesn’t even know whether he exists or not. He says: “One hundred years ago I was nothing and in another one hundred years I will be nothing as well; therefore, how may I say that I am something?” But, despite this logic, he now feels himself to be something, a living being.

The destination of the physical body is the grave, but the spiritual body is a heavenly being, and its life is the real life. This body is like a cage and our soul like a bird. The bird comes from heaven and enters the cage. There it remains confined, awaiting the time for the guardian to come and open the door, saying: “You are free.”

Holy people are eagerly awaiting the arrival of that guardian in order to be freed once and for all from that cage, but the heedless are not waiting for anyone; they

say: "This cage is great! We have plenty to eat and to drink, and we can jump all about: from the swing to the upper perch, down to the lower perch and up again to the swing."

There are others however who feel confined in this world and who are looking to the moment of liberation with longing and hope. They know that everything in this world is finite and provides only limited satisfaction, and something inside of them cries out for a world without limits, a joy without end. The physical body cannot respond to this cry, it cannot be the vehicle for the fulfillment of this longing. But something within ourselves is unlimited: our spiritual being may attain to the Infinite.

Endless longing is what sets man apart from other creatures. Other creatures have not been given the spiritual power of mankind, their desires are confined to the realities of their bodily needs, but man's endless longing comes from the eternal and limitless spirit within him, the power with which his Creator has endowed him that he may attain knowledge of Him Almighty.

Now we are looking out upon the greatness of the Creator through two tiny holes the pupils of the eye through these two tiny windows we gaze out in awe at this universe. Our soul looks out through these tiny windows like a prisoner gazing through the small barred window of his prison. What can he see of the world from such a vantage point? Nothing! Now our view is like this, but it may yet open up, for it is within our possibilities to gain perception of the whole universe at a glance. If our spiritual eyes are opened, no distance can be beyond their range, no mountain block their view, no darkness hinder their penetration: such is the sight of the spiritual eyes. Now, however, while we are within the range of our senses, everything is limited. Only when the cage is

opened and your soul regains its freedom you may know the meaning of “limitless” and return to your homeland.

All the suffering of man comes from his trying to fulfill his endless desires—originating in reality from his spiritual self—with a flood of sensual gratification that can never come even close to fulfilling that endless longing. Therefore, instead of seeking to fly from their cages, men are occupied with what is in them, thinking all the while that they are free. No, we are bound to all the passing phenomena of this world, and to free ourselves from that attachment is the most difficult task and the greatest challenge of our lives.

But it is impossible to even begin to detach oneself from pre occupation with one’s surroundings unless one believes in eternal life. Therefore, every prophet sent to mankind has given good tidings of eternal life. If a person believes only in that which his senses can perceive, he will grab for everything that might conceivably give him pleasure; even if you cut off his hands he will try to clasp it with his arms and carry it off. Whosoever denies eternal life is the slave of everything around him, like a person knocked unconscious who never comes to.

Man’s endless longing for his Lord is what sets him apart from other creatures. But until he breaks the bonds that tie him to the earth, that longing will keep manifesting itself as unceasing worldly desire which cannot possibly be satisfied, as its cause lies in an entirely different realm. That is why people in this world are never happy, no matter how much they may possess. A person seeking peace and contentment of heart must strive hard, as a rocket strives until it breaks the gravitational pull of the earth. Don’t imagine that one may attain satisfaction without struggle against that earthly gravitational field! Even if we may see a few

people who seem to be successful it is easy to understand that such a situation is a very temporary one. The shadow of fear pursues such “lucky” people, for, no doubt, tomorrow will bring with it the downfall of their empires, the undoing of their happiness. This fear makes everything they have tasteless: it kills and destroys, and there is no cure.

Today he may be king and she may be queen, but who can promise anything for tomorrow except the gradual onset of decrepitude and death? Who denies the eternal realm lives in misery; people celebrate their own birthdays, but what do they have to celebrate? Another year has rushed past them like water under a bridge, and no dam can stem the flow of that current. No, they only celebrate the loss of another piece of a dwindling treasure. Every white hair that appears in the mirror is like a dagger piercing their hearts. But I am looking every day to see if there are still any black hairs left in my beard. I am looking forward to its turning all white. Why? Because it is a sign that I am approaching eternal life, and I have been preparing for that jump from this world to the next.

All believers look forward to that homecoming with great longing and anticipation, just as our brother here who has been away from home for two months is looking forward each day to reaching his home. Every day he is looking at me hoping to make me hurry—but yet I am sitting. Just as each day he feels more and more longing to reach his home and his darling, so my soul, with time passing, has fresh desire to jump to that eternal life. As it approaches I feel within myself such pleasure that cannot be described, for that day will be for me a high holy day (Eid). I am ready and waiting anxiously for that transference, listening for that call that I may heed it. But

who is not on that level, who believes in nothing but this life, every day presses down on him like a heavy weight.

Have you heard of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, the world famous Master of the order of the “whirling dervishes”, the Mevlevis? He made a will instructing people not to weep or lament at the time of his leaving this life. He said that that night would be his “wedding night”, and that his joy upon that event would be greater than that of a groom being led into the bridal chamber to be alone with his bride. Therefore, in accordance with his wishes they made a wedding procession of his funeral: with tambourines and pipes he was taken to the grave.

We are now, all of us, like fish who have been caught and hauled out of the sea. Look at the fish jumping about: you may think they are dancing, but no, they are slowly dying. If those fish are thrown back into the ocean in time they will be content, not now. I am waiting for that day of relief from the difficulties of this life, the day of immersion in endless Mercy Oceans, Beauty Oceans, Favor Oceans, Knowledge Oceans in the Divine Presence. That is my hope, to the fulfillment of which every day brings me a step closer, and so I am more joyful with each passing day, I am advising you, as my sons and daughters, how to be happy during this life and throughout eternity.



The Cavemen

Your attendance of such a meeting as this one is a sign that something inside of you is stirring. Among millions of people you are but a handful, but considering the conditions under which we are now living we are happy that even such a few distinguished people may seek to awaken their inner realities.

We are like people imprisoned in a dark mountain cave—we are seeking a way out. Therefore, we are not just sitting and feeling sorry for ourselves, but are groping towards the places where the air currents lead us, to see if, by moving a rock or two, we can at least let in some sunshine. But for blind people it is all the same: illumination and darkness—and most of the people living now are blind in their hearts.

And so, most people are making do with their lives in the cave, and it never even occurs to them that such a thing called “light” may exist, nor can they imagine such a thing or what it may be like. But those whose hearts’ eyes are ready to be opened feel the longing to see. They are certain that there is a realm of light, and so they are doing what they can to emerge from the cave.



Essential Practices for Beginners

It is the outstanding attribute of all prophets and saints to exhibit the utmost tolerance and forbearance in calling their peoples to their Lord's guidance. It was the duty of the prophets, Allah's representatives among mankind, to invite people to eternal felicity by a method suited to their temperament, a method which would find acceptance with all except those completely hard of heart. A main pillar of these methods was extreme patience and not looking after people's shortcomings.

But along the course of history, divine wisdom has constantly lightened the load of responsibilities; a continual increase in tolerance as mankind's weakness and inconstancy grew throughout the ages, culminating in the people of our time who, in general, are barely able to admit the existence of God, what to speak of worshipping Him.

The law revealed to Moses was too severe for the people at the time of Jesus Christ, therefore, God lightened the load and relaxed the discipline; and the law observed by Jesus was too difficult for the people living at the time of Muhammad and following generations, peace be upon all the prophets of Allah. But divine religion along the course of history has always contained the element of tolerance, and every prophet has been tolerant. Divine Tolerance Oceans are with our Lord, and the tolerance of anyone else is confined; therefore, all religions, governing not only man's relation to God but also man's relation to his fellow man, contain not only tolerance, but also limits to tolerance.

The Lord's tolerance and leniency with His servants is endless; otherwise, how would the world be allowed to continue? Were it not for our Lord's utmost

indulgence, He would instantly punish the whole human race for what goes on among us, but He is indulgent; and among all prophets and all religions, the last and Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad, peace be upon him, represents his Lord's attribute of forbearance most perfectly. The Last Prophet was sent with the most liberal of the divinely revealed laws, a law which is as wide as the distance between East and West.

When I say that the Islamic Law is "liberal", I do not, of course, mean liberal in the sense that it has come to be known nowadays, meaning to tolerate all evil and degeneracy, no! What I mean by a liberal method is that within it one can find endless possibilities for doing good, for developing one's humanity along lines that are pleasing to the Lord, not endless possibilities for evil. There is unrestricted space in Islam for healthy human development, not just a very narrow path; but space to work towards evil ends cannot be found, and we don't accept tolerance of actions that are harmful to people as being really liberal.

We must make this distinction clear. Nothing that is forbidden in the liberal system of Islam is beneficial for mankind. Some people may make claims to the contrary, but sooner or later they will have to admit that they are at fault, as science and medicine eventually confirm that these things are harmful to people's health, character or productivity. What then is the essence of Islamic tolerance? Islamic teaching guides people, according to their own capacity, to an awakening of the conscience, the most valuable faculty of man, which, once awakened, will prevent him from falling into ways harmful to himself and others.

The sincere seeker asking guidance in Islam will be led to understand the saying of the Holy Prophet, "*Oh people, do your best and harm no one.*" That is the

utmost tolerance as it makes people able to hear the inner voice of the heart that always inspires to the best of ways.

To lead people to an awakening of the conscience is the only effective way of bringing them to a good end of their lives, to prevent them from wasting their lives in activities that weigh them down and degrade them to the level of animals. If a religion fails to establish man's contact with his own conscience, no amount of prohibition, no amount of courts and judges will be able to keep a population from evil.

Therefore, the main principle of Islam is, *There is no compulsion in religion.* (Qur'an, Surah 2, Ayat 257) Faith is a voluntary action, and declaration of faith under compulsion is not valid. No one likes to be told, "Do this" or "Don't do that": the ego always rebels when given such direct orders. The object of divine guidance is not, of course, to make people rebel, but to make it easy for them to follow. Therefore, especially with matters of interest to the ego (that hit close to the ego's desires), prohibition was declared gradually and not directly. For example, the prohibition of wines was not revealed all at once, rather the use of spirits was more and more discouraged.

When the prohibition came more specifically, it came not in the form of a prohibition at all, but in the form of a question: "Will you not desist?" Now the harm of drinking to one's health and character is clear and has been duly established by science and medicine; no one may dispute this. But Allah Almighty, when addressing mankind on this subject says, in His endless wisdom: "You must stand informed of the harmful effects of drinking, and leave it by means of your will power. That gives you more honor."

Therefore, who believes in the Lord and in the prophets of the Lord, makes himself honorable in the sight of his Lord and in the sight of His prophet by preparing himself to follow goodness and abandon evil. This ability to distinguish is the greatest divine gift to man. So why are you awaiting orders when you yourself can know what you must do? It is as if your Lord says to you, "I have given you existence in this universe, now use it in the best of ways." Who can find a school of thought, a sect or religion with such wide ranging vision?

During the lifetime of our grandshaykh, Shaykh Abdullah Ad Daghistani Sultan Al Awliya, may Allah Almighty sanctify his blessed soul, a number of Western people visited him in Damascus. An elderly lady from New Zealand who had met our grandshaykh wrote a letter to her friend, also an old lady of about eighty years, "Oh my sister, I have attained my life's goal. I have arrived at my destination in this life and am ready to step into the life of the hereafter without sorrow. If you wish to find the goal of your life and attain inner peace to carry you into the hereafter, you must visit a person named Shaykh Abdullah Ad Daghistani who lives on Mount Qasiyun in Damascus. You must look for his servant, Shaykh Nazim, and he will lead you to him. I have met them, taken my trust and reached my goal. I hope that you will visit them also, so that you may be among the fortunate few who reach their destination."

This lady had received her friend's letter and had traveled to Damascus. When she found me she began to weep. I took her to our grandshaykh and she wept some more and kissed his hands. Then she wept some more and kissed his hands. Then Grandshaykh bade her be seated and addressed her, while I translated for him. She continued to weep the whole time he spoke to her; when it was time for prayer and we stood up to pray, she prayed

with us of her own accord—hat, shoes and all. It was a great blessing for her to have prayed with our grandshaykh.

The next morning Grandshaykh called her in for breakfast, and after the meal we sat for an association. What Grandshaykh said on that occasion is very important, and I have been ordered to relate it to you now, as an excellent instruction for our brothers and sisters on how to treat newcomers. Particularly our brothers who were raised as Muslims in Muslim countries must heed this lesson if they propose to teach Western people about Islam.

Grandshaykh ordered me to tell her the following: “Oh Nazim Effendi, last night in the private assembly of the Holy Prophet I asked him, peace be upon him, ‘Oh Prophet of Allah, this elderly woman from your nation has come to me and entered Islam. What shall I instruct her to do, what shall I teach her, being that she is so old and cannot remain here with us a long time?’

“The Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: ‘Instruct her and all others from my nation who may embrace the faith but may not perhaps, be able to alter their situations so easily, on the following three points: firstly, let them repeat the Kalimat ash Shahada (the profession of faith) three times a day, saying: ‘Oh my Lord, I accept Thee alone as God, and I accept Muhammad as Your Prophet and Representative.’ The second point is for them to learn the five prayer periods: dawn, noon, afternoon, evening and night; and to give their respects to their Lord in those appointed times by prostrating themselves to the ground once, facing any direction, and saying, ‘Subhanallah’ (glorified be God Almighty). And if it is too difficult for them to learn this phrase it is sufficient to only prostrate.

That is enough for this lady and for others in similar situations. This practice is a seed being planted in her heart, and as it sprouts and grows she may be inspired to learn more of the ritual prayer, but in the beginning it is enough for her just to prostrate. What could be simpler and easier: no directional orientation, no ablution, no recitation.

Thirdly, she and all new Muslims should keep love in their hearts towards the community of Muslims and not allow themselves to hate them, in spite of their bad actions and characteristics. Tell them to overlook the shortcomings of the people and peoples of my nation and try to love them despite their pathetic state. Even if Muslims do bad actions under the banner of Islam, Islam is always above this, innocent of the blame. To try and use the name of Islam to attain one's selfish ends is the greatest sin, and Islam disclaims responsibility for such people'."

These are the three points our grandshaykh related from his meeting with the Holy Prophet, and these conditions are so wide that thousands and thousands of people may enter Islam and fulfill them, becoming sincere servants of the Lord.

Now, no doubt, many Muslims who are reading this will say, "What, shall we believe that the Holy Prophet has declared it to be so easy to become Allah's obedient servant, when our Islamic Law spells out so many different types of obligatory worship and prohibitions which we are meticulously observing?"

Oh Muslims! Do not imagine that Allah Almighty is waiting for your prayers, your fasting, your covering your heads or your dressing in Islamic clothes! No! Allah Almighty is looking to your hearts to see if they contain an atom's weight of sincerity, and only if He finds that

sincerity does He accept anything from you! None of your actions are, of themselves, pleasing to your Lord if they are not motivated by sincere intentions.

The heart of that old woman who came to Damascus may have been full of sincerity, so that her performance of these simple devotions may have been more acceptable in the Divine Presence than my prayers. Yes, that is all there is to it and it is enough for you to now know how to relay the message of servanthood of Allah Almighty to Western people.

We are seeking servanthood in the Divine Presence, nothing else, and we are trying to communicate some details of that servanthood in the Divine Presence to everyone. When we are praying we are not going to let our prayer be a cause of pride and conceit. We are not looking down on people. You must try only to keep your servanthood, nothing else, and this is the latest message from our Prophet on what is the least degree of worship to attain that goal.

Look, a king may have thousands of subjects in his employ. Each of the king's servants has a distinct rank and a distinct duty to perform. The king will be pleased with the servant who performs the duty that has been assigned him well, as pleased with the common infantryman as with a Field Marshall. That Field Marshall has an awesome responsibility towards his king, and he will have attained that rank, presumably, because he is qualified for it, and will be expected to live up to his immense responsibilities. But the foot soldier is not expected to perform the duties of a Field Marshall; his duties are simpler, but they are also important, and doing them well will earn him the good pleasure of the king.

And so, Allah Almighty has called all mankind to His service, everyone according to his rank. According to her circumstances that elderly woman was given a light load, and if she carried it well she will be rewarded. If you are carrying more than that you must persevere in carrying your appointed burden and not throw it off halfway towards your goal—then you may attain your Lord’s pleasure.

And you should know also that a Field Marshall should not be proud because of his position, glorying in the edge that he has over those who have been assigned lower ranks. He must be thankful to his king who has honored him with such responsibilities, and must strive to fulfill that trust. It is not seemly for him to boast and gloat, saying, “Look at me, I am a Field Marshall.”

Oh foolish mankind, given over to false pride, know that this universe is full of the servants of the Almighty. What do your poor devotions amount to? Nothing! Now very many of our Muslim brothers from Islamic countries who have been raised on the strict observances of Islam look at themselves approvingly and say, “MashaAllah, we are as we should be or nearly so”, and now, perhaps, their way of seeing themselves and others, some of their conceit and complacency, as well as their false self opinion, is spreading like a contagious disease to some of our new Muslim brothers from Western countries, who have begun to observe the prescribes of the divine law.

Beg your Lord to free you of such vain self opinion, for it is the self opinion of Satan. All the prophets have said, “Glory to You, I have been a wrongdoer.” Seek earnestly the honor of being a sincere servant of your Lord in humility and lowliness.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.

Fitting Spiritual Realities into Block Heads

Nowadays you cannot find two people whose hearts are in accord. In every nation and within every community one may observe mounting civil strife and discord. This is because Allah Almighty is punishing the people of this time by setting them loose on each other.

Because of this divine punishment one may find all nations divided into two main groups—even the Jewish people who are generally known to be strongly united and close knit are divided. Muslims nowadays are also divided: one party holds to traditional Islamic beliefs, following in the way of the prophets and saints, while the other party is trying to negate all spiritual power, explaining away all miraculous occurrences as resulting from material causes, as being easily explicable events that normal reason can accept and the mind understand. This second party tries to bring the sun down onto the earth, and the moon to the ground: it tries to make heavenly events mundane.

Instead of trying to free the mind from its normal definitions and limitations so that it may attain to a more transcendent realm, these people try to fit spiritual realities into their blockheads. When they try to stuff the endless realities of Islam into such a cube, they will get something totally at variance with the original heavenly guidance, as Islam is a religion of heavenly origin and not a system produced by man's thought processes.

Since the nineteenth century this party has been gaining a wider following as the general level of faith, piety and knowledge of the Muslims has gone down, making them vulnerable to faulted arguments, and also

more in love than ever before with material possessions while becoming less and less interested in the spiritual essence of Islam. The people of that party are dry and thickheaded—their heads are like rocks—and because of them the state of the Muslims becomes more and more pathetic.

Islam is always strong, never weak: it is like gold that may pass through centuries, through thousands of years without corroding or losing its value, but become even more valuable. Don't think that these foolish people in their pitiable state are the possessors of that fine gold, no! They are bankrupt because they have lost that treasure; but the treasure is not really lost, it is found in the hearts of true believers.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



The “Personality” of Allah

Question: How can we conceive of God as a “person” whom we can address in a way similar to that of one person addressing another, when, on the other hand, Islam confirms the transcendence of Allah Almighty: that He is beyond definition or description, that He is Everything, and always greater than His creation? In the Judeo Christian Islamic tradition, while Allah is Supreme and Transcendent, yet, somehow, He is still a “person” in some way, while in most Eastern religions the Absolute is conceived of more abstractly, in parables, or as Pure Light, a concept which is also present in Islam, as He is known as “an Nur the Light”. Can you help me to understand something of these matters more clearly?

The Shaykh: The existence of our Lord, Allah Almighty, is Absolute, Real, Eternal Existence, while the existence of all appearances is relative: they may be or not be according to their Lord’s will. You are inquiring about the Eternal Personality and Existence of Allah Almighty, but that knowledge is beyond your reach. How can our limited minds, our limited knowledge, limited personalities, encompass anything of the Personality, The One that is beyond the limits of our minds? Now you have asked a detailed question, and are trying to grapple with such matters with your mind; but all that you can know with your mind is He is in existence, that His Existence is revealed through His divine attributes, that His divine attributes are known through His holy names, and that His holy names appear in this world through His works or deeds.

Our relationship with our Lord Almighty is the relationship of Lord to servant and servant to Lord. The

Lord is never going to be like His servant and the servant never like the Lord, and this distinction is never going to be blurred or diminished in the slightest no matter how close the servant may draw or how dear he is to his Lord.

We know that He Almighty is “The Light”, but don’t think that you can describe Him as “Light” (‘Pure Light’ or ‘White Light’), as ‘The Light’ is only one of His holy names, which indicated just one of His holy attributes from among endless names and attributes. Indeed, His deeds and His creatures are endless; so don’t imagine that you can describe Him so simply. To say that Allah is Light is like saying, “Man is eye” or “Man is foot”. If you describe man as being the total sum of all his organs and limbs you have still not described him fully, so what of describing him as being just one single organ? That would be foolishness.

Allah Almighty makes Himself known to His creatures through His divine attributes, as He has implanted His attributes in mankind. The key to the knowledge God made available to man is embedded in our divine personality. Specifically, He Almighty has implanted in each person one of His divine attributes, which is his key to opening his relationship with his Lord. Everyone has such a key attribute in himself, and it differs from person to person. Through your particular divine attribute you may be able to address your Lord Almighty, to be with your Lord Almighty—your whole relationship develops through that Attribute.

Therefore, whoever seeks to approach his Lord must know the Attribute in himself that is the key. Until we have that key in hand we may be in need of an intercessor to help us perceive what our Lord desires of us, but once you have learned about that Attribute you may open yourself up and clearly see who is in you: who is out of you, who is with you and with whom you are.

Now, if you can take that key by following any spiritual tradition, then take it, but if you are not on the way to receiving it you are wasting your life. Try as many ways as you like, then, if you still feel that your key is out of hand, and if you are still seeking it, come—we have some methods, methods coming to us from the Holy Prophet to teach people how to take their keys. Then you may understand who He is and who you are. Otherwise you may ponder and perform practices, and all of it will be in vain.

Don't deceive yourself with empty titles, no; empty titles will never give you anything. You must only ask, "Where is the key that opens me?" Then you may see you in yourself.

We are practicing something here. Perhaps I am not addressing you very often, putting you to work, instead, at tasks of physical labor; it doesn't matter, the important thing is that you are with us so that you may learn the whereabouts of your key. A Shaykh who is appointed by the Holy Prophet may give you your key, and all that you are doing here is training for that.

Don't imagine that you will attain this opening by reading books. You must not imagine that everything can be encompassed by the mind. The mind is bound to earth, but our way is the way of the soul's understanding. The mind refuses but the heart accepts. The mind denies what the heart believes. That is the important point. So many thousands and thousands of people in your countries, in Europe and America, are seeking to establish the relationship between themselves and their Lord Almighty but they are following dead end ways because they are seeking to establish that relationship through their minds, and it is impossible. The spirit, not the mind, will arrive at the goal. The ego uses the mind to try and

hinder the seeker of spiritual awakening, but with the right training the soul will triumph.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



Unity and Duality

The realities of the human soul are unfathomable. Those realities are not subject to the limitations of time and space. Therefore, you shouldn't imagine that our existence is only of the duration of our brief lifespan—fifty, seventy or eighty years—and that we then disappear and exist no more. Don't imagine either that our realities are confined to these forms of flesh and bones. If you imagine for yourself such a limited existence, then, in reality, you are denying that your existence is real, as reality is eternal and unchanging.

The only thing changing in our lives is our outward form. It was created from dust and water, then caused to grow and become strong, then to shrivel and die. That form survives for its destined lifespan by means of air, water and food, then it reverts to dust and water, returning to its original form, once it has performed its duty and fulfilled its usefulness. The soul is tied to it for a short time in accordance with the Lord's will, and when it returns to its original form the soul returns to its reality in the Divine Presence.

Therefore, when Allah Almighty mentions the names of the Holy Prophets in the Holy Qur'an, He is not referring to forms made of clay, which ate food and drank water, but to their real forms in the Divine Presence. And so, when we affirm the prophethood of the Seal of Prophets, Muhammad, peace be upon him, as part of our declaration of the Unity of God Almighty we are referring to that eternal existence in the divine realm.

The existence of Muhammad, peace be upon him, in the Divine Presence is an aspect of Unity; everything in the Divine Presence is eternal and real, so his existence pertains to that realm of absolute existence. There is no

partition in that realm, the realm where all existence is engulfed in Unity Oceans, united in the reality of divine existence.

So don't imagine that the Qur'an, which is an eternal book in the Divine Presence, refers to the physical temporary existence on earth of the Prophet Muhammad, Abraham, Moses, etc; no, it refers to their heavenly existence in the Divine Presence in Unity Oceans, in absoluteness.

Question: This is a very difficult point to comprehend, because when we say, "Allah, Muhammad, Abraham" these are distinct and separate entities in our minds. In the mind there are partitions: one for Allah, one for Muhammad, one for Abraham. It is difficult to conceptualize Unity and yet have these undeniably distinct categories. The mind cannot encompass this.

The Shaykh: One can only begin to approach such divine realities with the heart. When you say "The Atlantic Ocean", it includes everything that exists in that ocean, but we do not say that the Atlantic Ocean is fish or ships, even though they are in it; we refer to it only as "The Atlantic Ocean". Whatever Allah Almighty causes to appear never contradicts His Unity, nor is it considered as being severed therefrom.

Now look in this mirror. Is that you in it, or not? Please, who is in it, you?

"No, I am here."

Then who is that?

"It's a reflection."

But who is that, someone else or you?

"Me."

Look, it even speaks to you!

And if you put a mirror in front of you and another one in back so that they face each other, then you may see endless images of yourself from this side and from that. Like this, the Unity of Allah is absolute and all shapes are reflections, the prophets being the most perfected reflections.

Don't imagine that the existence of such a vast universe with so many creatures in it in any way contradicts or detracts from the Unity of Allah; such imaginings would be foolishness. Yes, and you must know as well that everything has a distinct personality because Allah Almighty causes endlessly varying manifestations of His divine names to appear through His creatures.

Question: Does Allah Almighty appear in bad people or only in good people?

The Shaykh: In the sight of Allah Almighty all are His creatures. Allah Almighty created goodness and evil to test His servants. Through good people appear His divine attributes of mercy and beneficence, and through evildoers and tyrants are seen the reflections of His attributes of force, power and retribution. So, one kind of people are manifestations and so are the others. Allah Almighty has endless divine names, and every name is a mirror that has reflections in the creation.

Question: "Then is there nothing bad or evil?"

The Shaykh: In the sight of Allah this may be so, but you must know that Allah Almighty has ordered us to pursue goodness and not evil, and He has made our obedience to this order as a test, a supreme test that is at the very heart of His having created us in this world and in these forms. As His creatures, who find themselves in

the midst of a world which He created in order to test our ability to distinguish good from evil, and to follow goodness despite the attraction of evil that He has caused to be strong in us, it is our duty to stress the distinction between good and evil and not try to downgrade it or cloud it over.

So, our level, the level of all who find themselves in this world, is to distinguish; but the Creator is never in this situation, far exalted be He above all limitations. You may follow the stream to its source. If we follow creation to the Main Source, we may find, coming from the same source, a stream gushing forth with sweet fresh water, and another, taking another course, salty and bitter. So, if you follow everything to its main source, that source is Allah; but right from the Source the two streams part; this means that mankind (and we are always included in that category, no matter who we are and no matter what we accomplish) experiences the distinction between the fresh and the salty.

He is the Creator. It is His way to test His servants. He is free. He is not under the command of anyone, and He does what He wills according to His own wisdom. No one can command Him, but He commands all—and He commands us to do good and avoid evil.

Question: But many people, especially unbelievers, ask, “Why does Allah create badness if He is supposedly so good?”

The Shaykh: They would be better off, much better off, not asking such questions! Satan asked, “Why?” and he became Satan. How can weak mankind ask such a question of the Lord Almighty? What daring they exhibit in relation to their Lord, when, by contrast, they are quick to refrain from asking their bosses and directors at work “why?” for fear of losing their jobs. They are ready to

accept the dictates of the powerful in this world without question from fear of crossing them, yet they venture to cross examine the Lord of the worlds! They are very bad mannered people indeed to ask of their Lord, “Why did You create evil?”

Yes, this life is full of every variety of good and bad, at every corner a chance to demonstrate your adherence to good or fall into temptation, every day many tests to face. And He Almighty declared, “I am going to try My servants”—finished! You can’t ask why, as He has clearly said why: to test His servants.

If you can’t distinguish good from evil then you are on the level of animals and you have no responsibility for your actions. But if you lay claim to being intelligent, clever, learned, refined, perceptive, etc, then you must know that you are responsible, and that you must ultimately answer the question, “Why did you do evil?”

Question: Many people ask, if Allah Almighty has fore ordained everything that would come to pass in this world from the Day of Creation to the Resurrection Day, how can we be responsible for our actions?

The Shaykh: Ask him if he has reached such a level where he can say that or not. If he claims to have reached the level where he sees everything as proceeding from Allah Almighty, please bring him here that we may make a little test. I will first slap him across the face, then hit him over the head with my stick, and if he is not reacting or getting angry, then I will confirm that this claim is valid: that he is living on that level, seeing all as proceeding from his Lord. But if he reacts and gets angry, or moves to defend himself then I shall confirm that his is a liar and a pretender.

Years ago, as I was walking with my grandshaykh in Damascus, a football that some boys were playing

with hit me on the head and knocked off my turban. I got very angry and turned around shouting, “Oh you miserable, misbehaved brat!” Grandshaykh said, “Oh Nazim Effendi, you have just lost your faith. How can you claim to believe that everything comes from Allah Almighty when you are ready to blame someone for something that hits you on the head. Do you not know that Allah is the Original Cause of that event? So why are you blinded by secondary causes? When that ball hit you why did you look to see which one threw it in order to quarrel with him? Do you not know that it is from Allah?” Then I recited the confession of faith to renew my faith.

The level of faith that our grandshaykh was referring to is the level of prophets and saints. We are trying to attain to that level, and when men reason for all troubles on earth, for all wars and suffering, people have lost sight of their Lord’s will behind all events. They have lost sight of the hand of the One Who is testing them through those events. They have stopped seeing events as tests from their Lord, therefore they continue failing those tests.



Inspirations vs. Delusions

Question: How can we distinguish between what comes to the heart through inspiration from Allah, the Prophet or our Shaykh, and what invades the heart from the “inspirations of Satan?”

The Shaykh: Our grandshaykh taught us a method we can use right from the outset of our connection with the way in order to distinguish real inspirations from stray thoughts and the whisperings of Satan. That method is simply to wait and see whether that inspiration recurs or not. If it comes to your heart repeatedly it may be a sign that it is real. Grandshaykh compared this to the labor pains of birth. If the contractions a pregnant woman feels occur repeatedly and in decreasing intervals, then the birth is really at hand.

Real inspirations occur in the same way. Once they come to a murid they come again and again, but if they are only stray thoughts they will not persist, and if they are evil whisperings, even if they persist, it will become clear that they are no good by a kind of disturbance he feels in his heart. In this way even beginners can distinguish real inspiration sent to their hearts by the Prophet through their Shaykh, from any other stirrings.

As far as spiritual visions are concerned, they are not necessary, nor necessarily desirable for beginners in the Naqshbandi Way. In our way, spiritual visions are given only upon arriving at the destination, while in other tariqahs visions may play a major role right from the beginning. The reason for this discrepancy in method is that we are very careful to preserve our followers from stumbling into dangerous traps.

If a murid easily sees visions he may become preoccupied with those experiences and forget to seek improvement. Pride and a false sense of accomplishment may destroy him as well. He may say, “This is great! I have never seen anything like this on earth!” and he gets stuck where he is. He may become complacent at his present station and think that he has reached the ultimate goal. It may be lost on him that so much, far more excellent, is yet to come.

In order to avoid such “derailment” the Masters of the Naqshbandi Way guide their followers towards perfection without visions, so that the followers may learn to work on purifying themselves for the sake of Allah Almighty, not for the sake of amazing visions or mystical powers.

We worship our Lord for His sake alone, to reach His Divine Presence, not for anything else at all, and certainly not in order to gain access of visions. If a Naqshbandi dervish ever thinks of doing something for the sake of seeing a supernatural vision, he should consider himself ritually impure and take a shower (the complete ablution for ritual impurity, “ghusl”) immediately, in order to rid himself of that spiritual impurity that makes him unable to approach the Divine Presence. Such a thought indicated that the murid has given up approaching the Divine Presence—the main goal of Tariqah—and prefers to play and amuse himself along the way.

Yes, beginners and those on the way have been protected from visions. The veils are lifted only when the murid has arrived at the Station of Safety. Just as the Holy Qur’an refers to Mecca as the place where one is safe, (killing and fighting being forbidden within the holy precincts) so, there is a spiritual station of safety. There is a long arduous journey ahead of you between

your present station and that one; indeed, those who attain to that unveiling are few.

But those who do arrive at that station will experience such visions, and they are unique for each real murid. If both of you arrive at that station, your visions will be distinct: the colors, the fragrances, the manifestations are never the same. But for now your duty is to persevere and to move patiently towards your Lord's pleasure.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



A Mass Meeting One Hundred Years from Now

India is a land of many wonders, where strange and unusual customs abound. In a certain region of India it used to be the custom to call a general meeting of the populace once a century. Yes, only one time every one hundred years, but everyone living at that time in that kingdom, without exception, was obliged to attend. Even newborn babies had to be brought by their mothers. At this mass meeting, held only once a century, only one person would speak and address the assembled masses.

Who would that person be? The one who had attended the previous meeting and was still alive—he would speak, not anyone else. And that ancient person would say, “Oh my sons and my daughters, one hundred years ago I was a small child and my grandfather caught me by the hand and brought me here. Oh my sons and daughters, except for me, not one person who attended that previous meeting is still alive: all of them have passed away. Now all of you are here, living and breathing, but at the next meeting a century from now, none of you will be in attendance except for maybe one or two of these babies and small children.”

That was a strange custom in India, but not a useless one; a custom through which people were taught, guided and awakened to the realization that they will not be on this earth forever. This lesson was an effective one for the whole population, to remind everyone that he is but a passenger on a caravan passing through this life. In particular this custom was designed to remind young people of the transitory nature of life on this earth, as young people in the heat of their youthful power can easily forget this. They were alerted to the fact that youth,

that treasure which they temporarily possess, is a fading treasure.

When people look at their own lives in perspective, they may see that youthful period as being the most precious and wonderful time of their lives. Once they have wasted that treasure there is no way of regaining it, and along their lives they will feel regret and sorrow for how they have squandered that treasure and have nothing to show for it. Had they but used that treasure wisely, and not let their possession of it drive them mad, then they might have found they can recall their youthful days with happiness and not severe remorse, and also that they may even carry something of that treasure with them throughout their lives, having resources of physical and spiritual energy at their disposal.

But nowadays, people are so wanton that youth no longer extends to the age of thirty three as it used to, but may be completely burnt out at the age of twenty three—and in the future it may be thirteen—so that the young are drained physically, mentally and spiritually like decrepit and hopeless old people.

When a young person reaches puberty he (or she) discovers that he has fallen into the huge ocean of life and is swimming in it. Little children are also in that ocean, but they cannot yet understand what it means. The onset of puberty coincides with the onset of wonderment and confusion. At this period of life, if young people are not prepared to understand what is really happening, they will be like a person happily engaged in a pleasure swim in a warm ocean, swimming and splashing this way and that, thinking only to enjoy himself.

Sooner or later, though, he feels tired from his frolic and looks for the shore, but, alas, he has been caught unawares in a current that is rapidly carrying him away

from shore. Depending upon just how soon or late he discovers that he is caught in that dangerous current, he may be still within reach of the shore or he may be already too far out to save himself.

One who has frolicked in that current must make double efforts to reach the shore, as he must not only cover the distance, but he must swim twice as hard and never may stop, to avoid being pulled back out by the current and losing all the distance he has covered. To make it safely to shore will be the struggle of his life.

The youths of our times are all facing such a struggle in their lives, as they have neither been trained to be strong swimmers nor has their attention been drawn to the fact that there is a current dragging them rapidly out to sea.

If young people have been prepared for this situation they may swim towards shore without difficulty, and enjoy themselves all the while. Instead of swimming around heedlessly in circles, if they know to swim always towards shore they will enjoy their swim and even have the energy to swim in that sea throughout their lives without peril, having become familiar with its currents and with the extent of their own power, so that they are never caught unawares.

But without attaining that shore, the shore of rest and safety, no one can keep himself afloat indefinitely. Even machines made of hardened steel need rest, so what about a bag of flesh and bones? Instead of running around a hill ten times go towards a destination! But youth is wasting all its energies uselessly. That youth energy is not replenishable, not like the gas tank of a car that can be refilled.

Therefore, divine guidance sets limits for youth, so that young people may be prevented from wasting their

treasures. If the young heed the wisdom of divine guidance they will keep the gem of youth along their lives; if they don't they will become like "walking corpses" at a very early age.

But the person who seeks to open his spiritual life and is careful of over indulgence even in those enjoyments permitted by the divine law, he is the one who will keep his youthfulness more than anyone. Part of the discipline for attaining spiritual awakening is to live a simple life, not seeking to enjoy everything that the law permits. Our grandshaykh was over one hundred years old, but he was as strong as a young man. Once when he had a medical check up the doctors were astounded to find that his blood pressure and pulse were like that of a much younger person.

Our grandshaykh drew my attention to a tradition of the Holy Prophet in which he advised a shepherd to leave some milk in the udder of a ewe rather than milking it to the last drop. The Prophet, peace be upon him, explained that if a little milk remains in the udder more milk will easily be produced to fill it up again; but if it is greedily squeezed out to the last drop it will fill again only with difficulty.

We must draw a wide ranging conclusion from this tradition. The total freedom in our time awakens the kind of greed that impels young people to drain themselves of youthful energy to such an extent that it becomes impossible to replace it. Look, the teachings of our Prophet, peace be upon him, have such wide ranging implications: he was talking to one man about milking sheep, but the import encompasses the very heart of the problems of our time.

The people of the twentieth century are in dire need of the teachings of the last Prophet, especially the young

people. Otherwise even millions of psychiatrists will not be enough to help them deal with their psychological problems, nor millions of doctors and tons of drugs will be enough to cure them of their diseases. All efforts to deal with their problems will be but a drop in the mouth of a person dying of thirst. This is the clang of the alarm bell: if no one heeds it and stands up to say “stop”, the world will sink deeper and deeper into the swamp.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



Depression

Question: As a psychiatrist, what can I do for patients suffering from depression?

The Shaykh said: In Arabic there is a proverb: “Madness manifests in at least seventy different varieties.” This proverb implies that one can easily count at least seventy distinct varieties of madness. That is a minimum, only a broad categorization; actually, there is no limit, no maximum.

In fact every person has a distinct and unique type of madness within himself: in some people it is latent and in some it has taken over; but it is present and must be present in all people. How does each person’s individual madness become manifest? By means of depression.

Depression is the medium in which madness develops, a means by which that sleeping beast is awakened. If a patient comes to you in a depressed state, you may diagnose the particular aspects of the madness that is developing through the depression and use that knowledge to help him out of his depression, otherwise he will become truly mad.

Therefore, we must all do what we can to avoid waking up our latent madness. We must avoid depression and the causes of depression, to never allow the seed of madness to germinate or sprout. Psychiatrists, and people in general, must understand the causes of depression. The causes of depression may be the same for all people, but each person may react differently to the same thing, as human beings are subtle and manifest endlessly varying reactions to the same causes.

Because human beings are subtle, psychiatrists must be masters of subtlety to be able to help their patients;

they must be able to diagnose the direction of the depression and its development in a unique personality, and they must be clever enough to know how to approach that depressed person.

The way to conquer depression is to eliminate its causes, but to be able to do that they must know how to advise a patient, how to address him. Speaking is an art, especially speaking to depressed people who are in such a delicate state.

The way of phrasing one's speech is the key; one obtains either the desired result or its opposite, as the following story will show.

Once a king dreamt that all his teeth had fallen out. He was disturbed by this dream, so he called for a man who interpreted dreams. The interpreter listened to the dream, then he told him, "Oh my king, all of your relatives are going to die before you." The king became very angry upon hearing this and ordered the interpreter of dreams to be beaten one hundred whiplashes and thrown out of the palace.

Then the king called in a different interpreter and told him of his dream. After hearing the dream the interpreter said, "Your Majesty, among your relatives you will be the one to enjoy the longest life of all." The king was very pleased and ordered that the dream interpreter be rewarded with one hundred gold coins for his services.

Look, the same dream, and, in reality, the same interpretation; but one interpreter left the palace in disgrace with one hundred stripes on his back, while the other left with honor and a purse bulging with one hundred new coins. The second man was clever, he knew how to address a king, but the first one was foolish, even though he understood dreams just as well as the second.

Likewise, in your position, as a psychiatrist, every word must be weighted for its effect. One well directed word can bring more peace to the heart of a patient suffering from depression than a whole book that misses the point.

The main cause of depression is lack of faith, believing in nothing. The important element in treating depressives is to make them believe, for if they go on believing in no one and nothing, there is nothing you can do for them. At least you must get them to believe in you: that is the strongest means and the essential key for physical and spiritual healing.

Only if the patient believes in you, can you help him: only if he is willing to take from you, can you effectively give him anything. If he believes in you he will be open, and so you will be able to work on changing the ideas and attitudes that are part of his depression. Yes, you must use your wisdom to get him to believe in you. That is the foundation of any cure. To build that strong base is essential, but it is a matter of spiritual power, not something one can learn in school.

That power calls for spiritual authorization, and we have granted you that, so that now you will find that you can do your job effectively through your inspiration. The authorization that comes to us through our grandshaykh will increase your understanding of people's situations and make you better able to address them.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



Depression and Sleep

A person in a healthy mental state finds that “sleep resides beneath the pillow”. When bedtime has arrived he falls asleep quickly and easily. But depressed people often suffer from insomnia. Such people should seek to engage themselves in strenuous physical labor so that their bodies are tired and will fall asleep despite their mental state.

For depressed people sleep is like a bird that alights on a branch of a tree, then quickly takes flight. Therefore, whenever they may feel sleepy or physically exhausted they should immediately leave whatever they are doing and go to bed or take a nap wherever they may find a quiet corner.

There is however one time of day, when nobody should fall asleep under any circumstances short of severe illness, and most particularly this applies to depressive people: the time between Asr and Maghrib from two hours before sunset until the sun has set. If a person falls asleep when it's light and wakes up in dusk or darkness, he will find himself face to face with depression. If a depressed person sleeps at this time he will be offering himself up to madness. The Holy Prophet said, *“Whoever sleeps in the late afternoon should blame only himself for whatever calamities befall him.”*

That is a terrible time in which to sleep. If you find yourself being overcome by sleep at that time of day you must try to ward it off, washing your face with cold water, drinking tea or coffee, working in the garden or kitchen, taking a walk or looking after the children.

No one should use sleeping pills to induce sleep, as they are not only habit forming but destroy the whole nervous system. Indeed it is better not to sleep than to take those pills. One may use such natural sedatives as yogurt, aniseed herbal preparations, etc.

Also, sleeping on one's belly causes depression. Satan sleeps on his belly; and none of the prophets and saints ever slept like this. For adults, sleeping more than eight hours is a cause of depression. Not to mention people who oversleep to extremes, there are so many people who are in the habit of sleeping nine hours. That extra hour is no good; it causes listlessness and bad memory. Particularly people seeking to follow Sufi ways must be careful not to oversleep.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



Advice on Childrearing

Most of the Western people I have met don't know how to look after their children properly. Somehow, the misguided notion that they should leave children to do whatever they like has taken hold of them. To say that they leave them free like wild beasts would not be quite accurate, for even animals educate their young. If even animals can be trained by their elders to behave in a way befitting their nature, then what about the most highly honored descendants of Adam, who have been granted such high potential by their Lord?

You must look after your children. If they do something laudable you must be sure to praise and reward them, so that they may be pleased with your attention and do such good actions more often. But when they misbehave you must at least point it out to them: don't ever let your children's misbehavior just pass without drawing their attention to your disapproval.

You must say, "Don't do that; it is no good to do that; it harms people." And sometimes, if it seems that the message is not getting across, you may pull their ears or spank them. Yes, the pillars of education are the hope of reward and the fear of reprimand or punishment. Western people have demolished these two pillars and leave their children to grow wild—that is their mistake.

Some of our brothers used to bring their children with them when they came to see Grandshaykh. Instead of keeping their children quiet during the meeting, some would let the children run around and cause disruption, neither controlling them nor taking them away from the meeting. Grandshaykh would tell them, "Oh my son, just you wait: those children will grow to blatantly disrespect you."

Freestyle education has brought a great calamity down upon Western civilization, so great that statesmen ask, "What can we do to maintain the peace in our society? How can we stem the tide of violence? What can we do with these wild people?" And people ask, "What can we do about these rulers who are oppressing us?"

What we are witnessing in our time is a fulfillment of a prophecy of the Holy Prophet, in which he says, "There will come a time when statesmen will curse the populace and the populace will curse statesmen."

How shall adult people be brought under control, when their parents could not exercise any influence over them when they were small? There is a saying, "Who grows up in a certain way will end up that way." This is the reason why trees growing crooked are bent into shape when they are yet small and supple. Once their trunks are thick, who can bend them? Therefore, education must begin in infancy.

A very important part of good education is to try to teach your children patience by not giving them everything they demand immediately. You must tell them, "You don't get it now, but I will give it to you in five minutes, (or in half an hour, or tomorrow, or if you do well in school)." Or you may say, "I won't give it to you until you stop bothering me, so just forget about it and I may give it to you."

Grandshaykh used to say that the major cause of depression in rich people is that they immediately got everything they wanted when they were young. Later as adults, when they find something desired to be unattainable, they taste bitter frustration, and not having learned to handle that experience, they fall into depression.

Another point is, we must train our children to respect and honor their parents, especially as family ties have so deteriorated in the West. You must not allow your children to eat of any sweets they are given until they offer them first to their mother. That way, inshaAllah, as adults they will think to bring their mother a share of their earnings.

Teach your children to kiss your hands and cheeks when they wake up in the morning and before they go to bed at night. This will instill in them affection and respect for their parents.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



Purity of Heart: To Forgive, Forget, and Be Immune to Vainglory

Once the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was sitting with his companions, when, sighting from afar a man approaching, he said, “Oh my companions, if you want to behold one of the inhabitants of Paradise, look at that man who is now approaching.” The man presently arrived and took his place among the congregation. The next day, and yet the next day after that, the Prophet delivered his companions the good tidings of that man’s eternal felicity (without saying anything, however, to the man himself).

So often I have heard people lay claim to possessing pure hearts. Especially people who reject religion and mystical practices out of hand love to make such claims. We don’t lay any such claims, but we believe that our way is the way of purification, and that our efforts should set us in the right direction. Anyone who thinks of himself as a pure hearted person should pay heed to this account and re examine his claim in light of it.

This account has reached our time through Abdullah, the son of Umar, the second Khalifa of Islam. When Abdullah heard the Prophet laud that person three times, he decided to follow him to his house and seek both his blessings and knowledge of exactly what means had led to his attaining such a high station of perfection in this life.

When Abdullah arrived at the man’s home he knocked on his door and was welcomed in. The man asked him, “May I inquire as to the purpose of your visit?” Then Ibn Umar related to the man what the Holy Prophet had said about him each of the three preceding

days. The man said, “I know.” Abdullah Ibn Umar continued, “Oh my brother, I would also like to be one of those fortunate people to have secured a place in Paradise while still living in this world. What exactly have you done to attain such distinction in the Divine Presence? What kind of ascetic austerities have you undergone? What kinds of supererogatory acts of devotion have you performed?”

“Oh Abdullah, I don’t worship more than you or anyone else. My being given those good tidings is not a result either of my austerity or my devotions. There are, however, three attributes that I have cultivated and which I prize very much, as one would cherish rare pearls in his possession.

“First of all, every night as I lay in bed before sleeping I say to my Lord, ‘Oh my Lord, if any of Your servants has harmed me today, either with his hand or with his tongue, I have forgiven him with complete forgiveness, and will never raise a complaint against him to anyone nor to You, neither now nor on the Day of Judgment. You are my witness that I have forgiven them all, now and forever, here and hereafter.’ ”

I must ask all people who claim to be pure of heart: can you forgive in such a manner? Or do you run to court over sixpence, reciprocate for a single word of abuse with a shower? When slapped do you turn the other cheek, or answer it with ten blows? Do you hold grudges over a long period of time? If you react in this manner to provocation you must know that you are cultivating filth and disease, not purity. Don’t hold grudges, for their fruit is hatred and enmity. Where then is your purity?

Then Abdullah Ibn Umar said, “Hmmm... that is a very difficult attribute to emulate. Tell me the second attribute—that, perhaps, may be easier to aspire to.”

The man said, “Look, if I were given the whole world and its treasures, and if the people were to make obeisance to me, saying, ‘We are making you our king and putting a huge royal treasury at your disposal. Please take your place now on the imperial throne and order us to do what you like, your wish is our command’, I would not be happy or gratified at all. And what is the sign that I really feel this way? That is the third attribute, and it confirms the second, is proof that I care nothing for wealth and power. For, if those same people were to come the next day, abuse me and kick me off the throne, saying, ‘Go away! We don’t accept such a foolish king who is not even happy at being crowned king nor pleased at having sovereignty over the whole world bestowed upon him, nor with vast wealth and treasures’, I would not be sorry in the least, but greatly relieved.”

Are such attributes so easy to attain that everyone should go around claiming to have purity of heart? If someone were to give us an ordinary house—forget about palaces—we would be happy, and certainly if they came the next day and claimed it back we would be sorry. So what about having the whole world at our command? Such renunciation is a sign that the topmost point of faith has been reached.

The Lord has declared, “This world is of less value to Me than the wing of a mosquito.” That man had attained certainty of this and had taken this wisdom to heart and stopped coveting this world. The true believer will say, “Oh my Lord, as much as the material world is worth in Your sight, so let it be in mine.”



The Water of Life

Everything pertaining to this world is impermanent, constantly in a state of transition. Therefore, it is only natural that I am here addressing you today and elsewhere tomorrow. Don't let this condition sadden you, for, in reality, transition is God's Mercy to man. Don't wish even for good times to last forever, for you wouldn't be able to bear permanence—you would just get fed up.

Know that the discontinuation of any desirable state or condition is the catalyst for gaining an even deeper appreciation of what is good. Longing for the attainment of the spiritual realities of which you have caught a glimpse is the means to their attainment. Is there any morsel tastier than that upon which the fast is broken?

This is the reason that Allah Almighty created the world as it is. The signs of the heavens take their turns inspiring our souls. The rising sun brightens our day, but just when we would start to get fed up with it, lo and behold, it bows out and the soft light of the moon enchants us with its many forms, appearing first as a delicate crescent, then waxing gradually to its full and waning. If it never waned no one would be able to appreciate the awe inspiring immensity of the starlit heavens.

The threadbare pilgrim may cross snowy mountain passes and sun scorched deserts barefoot, or even on his hands and knees in order to reach Mecca. When he finally arrives he is struck dumb by the awesome majesty of the Holy Kaba. Tears stream down his face as he clings to its door, pouring out his heart and soul to his Lord—and the Lord fulfills his heart's innermost desire

in accordance with the longing that drove him to suffer freezing wind and scorching sun.

Longing brought him to the house of the Lord, but the pilgrim's dedication to his Lord will not be served by his staying in Mecca on and on, but by returning to his country with the cherished memories of his pilgrimage inspiring his faith. Should he choose to remain in Mecca he runs the risks of gradually becoming callous and hardened to the sight of the Kaba like the inhabitants, who never had a Mecca as their distant sought after goal, who crossed no deserts to attain it, but who may, rather, cross through the Holy Mosque as a shortcut to get from one part of the market to another, barely casting a glance at the magnificent Kaba.

Once a murid used to attend his shaykh's discourses only occasionally, although he lived in the vicinity of the shaykh's dargah (Sufi school). The shaykh asked him, "Why do you attend so infrequently?" The clever murid answered, "Because I don't like being asked to attend less frequently."

The sun, the moon, the stars, the Holy Kaba, the beauty of the nature of architecture, or the face of a beloved person: all these sights may inspire us, may remind us of a great truth that is alive in our hearts, but of which we are yet heedless. But don't become enamored of the signs to such an extent that they become ends in themselves, and you cease to follow the directions they seek to impart to you. The object is not a heavenly body that will set, a symbol which may become commonplace nor a face that will age or turn away from you.

When Abraham was yet a seeker of truth, at a stage of bewilderment on his road to truth, he became

enamored of the sun, moon and stars, but as each set he said, “My love is not for those that disappear.”

Love is eternal, and the transitory nature of all things pertaining to this world is a sign of truth, a sign that shows us by means of contrast. Real spiritual love of God and love of mankind for the sake of God is the only truth, the only thing in this world that is permanently and constantly sweet.

Physical separation from someone you love, in accordance with the rule that pertains to the physical, may create a longing that will cause love to increase, may augment the bliss of reunion. But on the spiritual level that love is constant, is never interrupted by distance nor by time. Your beloved may be on the moon and you may be in bliss at the thought of reunion, but if love is unrequited, that is not sweet separation but a bitter pill. The extinction of love is pitch darkness. You may regard the sunset as beautiful, but how would you feel if it were setting forever?

Love is the water of life. God created Adam from clay and water. If it were not for water the clay would hold no shape. Divine love is what binds our souls together. That is why people become so miserable when they feel unloved. It is a feeling that something essential is missing from one’s life, that life itself is incomplete, and in the face of this ache people set out in search of love with the desperation of a man dying of thirst.

Yesterday I noticed a bumper sticker that read, “God is Love.” That is a statement that accords with a common level of understanding; in reality such a description can never do justice to the Almighty. Never can a single word or emotion, nor even all words and all emotions come close to describing His splendor what to speak of “being” Him. However, the saying “God is Love” can be

recognized as a common wisdom, as the intention is to accord the highest degree of veneration and devotion to love, which is correct. But to associate God as “Love” is an oversimplification.

Love is an attribute of God Almighty which binds His servants to Him eternally. If God were to hate mankind it would be so easy for Him to bring about an abrupt and terrible end to our follies—but He loves us and therefore shows us so much tolerance.

If you are a parent, consider your love for your children. If your son grew up to be a criminal, would you not love him still? Would you not maintain that despite his bad actions (which you would perhaps readily condemn) he was still basically at heart a good boy? Would you not find excuses for his bad behavior and have faith that he would turn away again from those bad actions?

We all know the story of Noah (“Nuh” in Arabic). He invited his people to the truth over an astounding period of time 950 years! Over such a long period he showed so much patience with their continual abuse, every day they used to beat him unconscious. Finally, realizing that those people were unreformable, and that each generation was even more rotten than the one before it, he asked Allah to destroy them all, to purify the face of the earth from the likes of them. Then Allah caused it to rain for forty days and nights so that, except for the few believers who had taken refuge with him on the ark, all of the human race was destroyed.

After the flood abated God ordered Noah to make forty clay jugs, and to devote extra care and attention to making them perfectly. When Noah had finished making them the Lord ordered him to smash them to bits. Noah obeyed, but he wasn’t happy with the order, it seemed

wanton to him to destroy what he had spent so much effort in making. Then the Lord addressed Noah, saying, “Oh Noah, you made forty clay jugs, and it was odious to you to break them. Do you think that it was a pleasure for Me to kill all of My servants, even though they were unbelievers?” Then Noah began to cry and wail. So proverbial was his wailing that “Nuh” came to mean “wail” in Arabic.

Do you know the story of Moses and Korah? Among the Children of Israel at the time of the exodus from Egypt, Korah was the richest man. Korah carried a large part of that wealth into the Sinai with him, and with that wealth a great deal of influence over the Children of Israel. Unfortunately for Korah he used his influence to stir up rebellion and discontent with the leadership of Moses.

In order to discredit Moses once and for all, Korah bribed a dishonorable woman to claim that Moses had committed adultery with her and that the child in her womb was his. As he was of course innocent, Moses was livid with rage, as he could only deny the accusation but could do nothing to prove it false. How could he lead the Children of Israel when they would hold doubts in their hearts regarding his morals and veracity?

So Moses turned to his Lord, saying, “Oh my Lord, vindicate me!” The Lord replied, “I have granted you the power to command the earth. You may use it to vindicate yourself and prove your innocence to the Children of Israel.” Then Moses announced to all the people, “All who are with me come to my side and those who adhere to Korah stay by his side.” Then Moses said, “Oh earth, catch him and swallow him up!” Responding to this command the earth caught Korah, laying firm hold of his feet and ankles. Korah cried, “Oh my dear cousin Moses, for the sake of our kinship please forgive me!” But

Moses was very angry and determined to punish Korah for all of his crimes, “Oh earth, swallow him!”

Then the earth grabbed a little more of his legs, and he again cried out to Moses for forgiveness—and so it went on, a full seventy times, Korah asking for pardon and Moses refusing and demanding retribution. Finally the earth had completely swallowed Korah. Then the Lord addressed Moses, “Korah begged you for forgiveness seventy times, but you had no mercy for him in your heart. I swear by My Might and Glory, had he even once addressed himself to Me, saying, ‘Oh my Lord, I repent, please forgive me’, I would have rescued him. You had no mercy for him because you didn’t create him. I am the Creator and I have boundless mercy for My repentant servants.”

The Lord created us and loves us; that is why everyone loves love. No one complains of love or wants it to be taken from him, but all want to be loved more. Where are you seeking love? Are you taking pure water from the gushing source, or muddy, slimy water from the ditch? You love people, but they will die. Perhaps your love will be unrequited, or because of a small error or indiscretion on your part that person’s heart will harden to you and love will be no more.

You say that you love him or her, but do you love him or her unconditionally? Is your love permanent—love for the real immaculate divine essence living in that person or temporary, as a result of some desirable attributes: beauty, youth, wealth, station or wit? When that beautiful, young, wealthy, clever, amiable socialite becomes an ugly, old, penniless, senile, grumpy outcast will you still love her? Is your love of the spirit or of the world?

Oh people, seek real love, a love that cannot go astray. That love is the love of God and the love of His creatures for the sake of His love for them. That love emanation may bind all receptive hearts. There is a common saying, “The friend of a friend is a friend”, so love people if you love God, for you must know that He loves them. It is not always easy to love people, even good people, so what about the Korahs of this world?

Love pertaining to the ego is not love, as all the ego knows is to love itself, and what is commonly called love is but a mutual understanding to support each other’s egoism. Don’t trust your ego, nor anyone else’s, for the ego is disloyal by nature. When the spirit gains ascendancy the ego may be harnessed and put to good use, as the Holy Prophet said, “Your ego is your mount”, but left to its whims it will take you many miles from your path in search of herbage.

This discourse is an ocean, its summary is: what is of the world beware of, and pay attention to the dose. When crossing that ocean embark on a sturdy ship with well maintained lifeboats and life preservers, and if you swim in it keep your head above water! As for the Ocean of Divine Love, dive in and drown—that is eternal life in the Ocean of Unity.



Seek to Make Things Easy for People, Not Hard

Allah Almighty knows and understands His creatures, and descendants of Adam, best. He Almighty knows their capacities and debilities, their excellences and their shortcomings, and He only expects from them in accordance with what He knows about them. As our Lord has decreed, throughout the ages it should become increasingly difficult for human beings to live in accordance with what is good for them, and thus Allah their Lord has lessened His expectations of them.

Allah Almighty knows full well that the people of the last time will not be capable of much obedience of devotion to Him, and therefore He has made the successive divine laws revealed through His prophets progressively easier and less demanding, culminating in the law revealed to the last and seal of Prophets, Muhammad, peace be upon him, the tolerant law of Islam.

Even during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, Allah Almighty lightened the burdens that He Himself had imposed on believers, knowing that these practices would be too difficult for them to bear.

For example, fasting used to commence after the evening meal, or from when a person went to sleep at night, and continue to the next sunset. Then Allah eased fasting for the believers by permitting that they partake of a pre dawn meal and fast only from the first crack of dawn until sunset.

Although the revealed law of Islam need never change throughout history, as it is the law revealed for the people of the last time—still, from the time of the

revelation of the Holy Qur'an until the end of the world, the level of observance expected of us by our Lord, and the strictness or lenience with which He will judge our actions, is not the same now as it was in the time of the Prophet.

Yes, the complete divine law as revealed to our Prophet stands unaltered as the model of perfection to be striven for by believers of high aspiration and degree. But according to the following tradition of our Prophet it is clear that the actions of the people of such a degenerate time as our own will only be judged relative to the conditions they had to endure.

According to tradition, the Holy Prophet once addressed his companions, saying, "Oh my companions, if one of you abandons one divine command from among one hundred, he will be in danger of losing his faith, but there will come a time when anyone of my nation who holds firmly to even one command from among one hundred, may hope to save himself and his faith."

We must understand the full implications of this prophecy, but generally our Islamic scholars read such a tradition and never pause to reflect on it. Therefore, it is their habit to be too rigid and intolerant in their dealing with new Muslims from Western countries. As soon as a person agrees to become Muslim, those scholars proceed to load them down with instructions on the full level of worship, fasting, etc. required of a fully responsible Muslim, and the complete list of forbidden actions as well—all in all five hundred orders and eight hundred prohibitions!

What should be the reaction of such new people who, in our times, are not even converting from another religion with practices and prohibitions of a roughly corresponding nature, but often from a completely

unregulated way of life? If we are to present Islam in such a way they will certainly think twice before committing themselves to Islam, as they are not prepared to instantly observe the whole of the law. This is why so many Western people come to me and ask if it is possible to follow a Sufi way without embracing Islam, as they view Islam as a gigantic mountain which they would be ordered to scale to the peak, immediately, without training, without equipment—so, naturally they are hesitant.

We must be wise and aware of our responsibilities towards people whose hearts incline towards Islam. We must remember that our Lord is the One who Himself stresses His Mercy Oceans above all other attributes in His holy book, and we must learn from our Lord's tolerance towards us to be tolerant with those with whom we want to forge bonds of the heart, with those whom we want to guide toward our Lord's Love and take as our own brothers and sisters.

No one from among the Muslims can dispute the fact that the full command of the divine law was revealed to our Prophet gradually over a period of ten years in Medina, and this only after an initial thirteen year preparation period in Mecca, when nothing specific was demanded of the believers except to believe in Allah, the Last Day, His prophets, and to do good deeds. The holy Prophet summarizes the wisdom of this approach in a famous tradition, "Seek to make things easy for people, not hard. Bring them good tidings, don't drive them away."

Look, we all know that, for example, the schooling of a child from kindergarten to university involves much studying and effort on the part of the student. But don't say to that little child, "Education is a long process involving the learning and even memorization of so

many big books, the solving of difficult problems in math and science, and doing lots of homework instead of playing.” If you paint such a picture for that small child of what he is entering into, he will try to escape in sheer terror.

But we, as adults, know that in education the student will be prepared by his teachers for solving every problem he is asked to solve, that he will be given challenges that accord to his level and draw him to the next. First graders are never expected to read the books or solve the math problems in the fifth grade curriculum. To a first grader you must say, “Come here and I will teach you A, B, C . . . yes, this is your lesson nothing else.” Step by step that pupil will learn to read everything. And so, in Islam, we lead people step by step. There is a beginning and an end, but first we must help people take the first steps; if they don’t take the first steps they will never take the last ones.

Unfortunately, Islam having been both revealed and propagated in this gradual manner—without difficulty for the learner—is understood by neither Muslims nor non Muslims. Therefore, in this time we are in need of new guidance, and we are not anticipating that it will come from our scholars. It is understanding and guidance that comes through the heart, from heart to heart; not merely instruction as to what we should or should not do with our bodies.

Muslims and non Muslims alike must understand this point, as a real understanding of Islam is capable of saving the whole world. But if we persist in our misunderstanding it will be impossible to reverse the movement toward the brink of disaster.

The Holy Qur’an addresses the whole of mankind, and we are in need of people who are capable of helping

people to their shares of the Holy Book. The Holy Qur'an is a fountain, a gushing source that may quench the thirst of billions, but very few people are following the river to its source, everyone is drawing from it far downstream. We must seek the source for it is the life spring for all mankind.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



Digest Your Anger

For those of us whose physical bodies are “over the hill”, by this I mean over the age of fifty or so, we must face the fact that no matter how well we look after ourselves, our physical powers are gradually deteriorating and step by step we are approaching death.

But as for our spiritual condition, there is no such limit, no age when powers are at their maximum then recede. Spiritual power may continue to grow strongly throughout our lives, but we must seek out conditions conducive to that continuing growth, and weed out those qualities which threaten to choke the precious plant.

One of the most harmful weeds the most inimical to our spiritual growth is the anger generated by the vanity of our egos. When anger rages it engulfs the light of faith, transforming it into fire. The light of faith is the pure light of God, but when it is transformed into fire it no longer illumines, it burns.

When you find yourself overcome with anger you must quickly run to a mirror and behold your own face. That ugly spectacle will be enough to calm your anger, for who wants to look like the devil himself? When a person is angry his actions are satanic—destructive and self destructive. Our grandshaykh stressed the necessity of abandoning anger, for when the ego’s anger dominates a person he may readily deny even the sovereignty of God, and put himself in rebellion against the Overwhelming One—and that is very dangerous.

Anger also wreaks havoc on our physical bodies, causing illness and premature aging, especially when a high level of anger is maintained over a long period of time.

Very few people can turn back anger when it assaults them. This is why so few people advance spiritually. The reason that anger is so difficult to defeat is simply because it is an intrinsic part of our physical and spiritual constitution. Anger corresponds to the element of fire in our makeup, which is a balance of fire, water, earth and air. Only those who are trained from a very early age by enlightened parents or teachers will have learned to keep these elements in balance. As for most people, each of these elements may predominate on different occasions according to exterior circumstances and intrinsic propensities, setting the equilibrium off center. Fire flares up in the face of provocation and teasing, aggression or attempts to subdue the will (of the child). Since these occasions are usually frequent in our early lives, we are all adept at getting angry, and from a very early age.

Our grandshaykh also suggested that we perform a special dhikr (prayer meditation) at night in order to gain the upper hand in our struggle against anger. When you arise in the last third of the night to perform supererogatory prayers, after performing your ablutions, start by turning your face to the House of God and implore Him to aid you in your attempt to subdue anger. Then repeat one hundred times, “Ya Halim” which means “Oh (God, who is) Forbearing and Slow to Anger.” This name, al Halim, is a divine attribute of God which He wishes to bestow generously upon us, should we seek to receive it.

The first step is in this manner to ask God to help us become forbearing; then we must meditate on the divine attribute al Halim, that it may be absorbed into our being. We are literally calling the state of “Halim” upon ourselves. Next we must adopt a practice in our everyday lives that will further our purposes. This practice is

simply not to show anger, even when you feel it welling up inside. Don't spit that anger out at those around you and poison the atmosphere, like a fire breathing dragon. Hold it in, but not like a lump of undigested food; no, you must digest it.

A certain amount of anger is part and parcel of every personality. Without some of that fire in our constitution we would die; therefore, it is possible for us to digest a certain amount of anger without suffering adverse side effects. Of course, if we were to remain unchanged over a long period of time and swallow the same amount of anger, we would overdose; but that is not the case, for in time our intake of anger decreases as we learn, and are granted the ability not to react angrily to provocation in the first place. So, just as a baby initially drinks great quantities of milk, then graduates to solid food, decreasing its milk consumption drastically, we can swallow and digest anger, in the full knowledge that other forms of nourishment are soon forthcoming.

If you can manage to refrain from showing anger for forty days, you will have passed a great milestone. When it assails you, you must evade it, and when it is going to issue from you, you must swallow it. If you can successfully avoid it for forty days, anger will begin to assault you less frequently, to perhaps once every forty days. If you can manage to keep yourself in this manner the initial forty days, and thereafter, in the face of forty more assaults (forty periods of forty days, a little more than four years), Satan will announce to his helpers, "Don't bother attacking that person; you are just wasting your time and energy. His defenses are impenetrable; one thousand attacks are just as futile as one. Leave him alone, he has escaped from our hands."

Satan, along with his helpers the selfish ego (nafs), vain desires (hawa) and worldliness (dunya) are our four

great enemies, and whoso learns to control his anger will be victorious against these negative influences.

Whenever you feel anger arising in you, you must be aware that you are being tested. Such tests are sent your way from the spiritual world in order to ascertain your trustworthiness. Disliked events are sent from that realm so that you may have the chance to forbear, and thereby advance toward your goal. If there were not some benefit to be found in anger, it would not exist. The benefit is found in being patient in the face of it. Without passing this test there can be no improvement.

Forbearance is a key to divine stations, and that key is forged by facing odious events with patience and controlling our anger. So, anger is a two edged sword, and if you can grasp its handle firmly you may rent the veils that blind your heart's eyes, but if it is in the hands of your enemies your faith will be severed.



Everything is Known by its Opposite

Every single member of the human race has been honored by the Creator. How has Allah Almighty manifested His esteem for man? The Almighty had made us His deputies on earth; that is why mankind has gained such ascendancy over the rest of the Lord's creatures. Whether we, as a race, live up to that responsibility is another matter.

An important aspect of this deputization is His taking us into the intimacy of His confidence, His taking it upon Himself to instruct us. His having addressed us through the revelation of holy books is evidence of the care He has for mankind and the importance He Almighty assigns to our fulfilling our potential—the potential of earning for ourselves the rank of trustworthy deputy.

Now, let us say, we are all candidates for that position. Our allegiance to our Lord is much deeper than what would be implied by the lengths of our lives here. Do you think that your life began with your conception in your mother's womb? Were you nothing before this life? Our souls were created, but that beginning is lost to our comprehension in the depth of eternity past. Only the Creator can encompass the origin of our souls, so old are they.

Before coming to this life we existed in the Divine Presence in loving servitude to our Lord. Our relationship with Him was flawless—sincere and perfect—but the Lord in His fathomless wisdom wanted to bestow more honor upon His servants. Originally He bestowed divine light upon us (nur), but He wanted to confer on us even more generously of that light, so as to make it “light upon light” (nurun ala nur).

The nature of this light which shines upon light is also a bestowal in the sense that everything originates in Him, the Creator and Bestower, but simultaneously there is another aspect of its nature, which is earned through the exercise of our free will. Among all of God's creatures, this "limited autonomy"; this ability to choose our priorities has been granted exclusively to humankind. All other creatures are bound by a single nature that allows them neither deviation nor the possibility of gaining divine honor by choosing a difficult but noble course.

Man has been given not only a physical body and an ego that represents the desires of that body in the realm of the mind, but also the latent consciousness of something much greater and sublime. Such is Allah's Wisdom that these forces are caused to exist within us all, but according to our choice or will one side or the other may establish its supremacy.

The dominance of the physical over the spiritual (and in many cases the complete stifling of the spiritual by the physical) is the condition in which many people remain throughout the course of their lives. The physical nature is more immediate and accessible, just as water always flows down. But for those who can discover the inner world and pursue the uphill path, that "light upon light" is granted, and they have fulfilled the real purpose of their lives.

Physically we are of no account in this boundless universe, but spiritually we have been given the opportunity to attain divine knowledge and wisdom in a realm yet beyond. When the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was taken to the Divine Presence by the Angel Gabriel during his Night Journey, the Prophet was shown a procession of mankind passing by and greeting him; but it was a procession with no beginning and no

end. The Prophet's mind staggered at the idea of infinite creatures, and subsequent to this vision the following holy verse was revealed:

And no one can encompass the quantity of your Lord's 'armies' but He.

Who was the first Adam and who will be the last? Don't ask! Our father Adam represents 124,000 Adams throughout time and the endless territories of the Lord. He is the Creator, and creation is always His attribute, from eternity past to everlasting. Since creation is His attribute, were He not creating He would cease to be, and that is impossible. Now modern science refers to a "big bang" that occurred in a trillionth part of a second or thereabouts. Even that description is inadequate, for Allah's awesome creative power may appear in a unit of time so minute as to be immeasurable. Yes, such is His power that in that most minute moment He created not only this immense universe, but filled it with His servants.

Each of us is but one member of a huge caravan on one small planet, but our Lord has honored us by summoning us to unity in His Divine Presence. Prepare yourself for existence as light upon light. This is the main theme of the messages of all prophets.

Our real beings have never left the Divine Presence. Where else could they go? Only from Him to Him! Our real being is blissfully immersed in His Divine Light Oceans. So what is it that is here in this world? Only one ray from that resplendent spirit is clothed in a physical body and sent to this world, in order to attain even a greater effulgence by means of the existence here of its opposite, darkness. Through the presence of that contrasting condition we are able to absorb more light and wisdom.

Don't imagine from this discourse that only those who exercise their willpower in a positive way are destined for the Divine Presence. Everyone is appointed to an important position in this life, and just as more aspects of light are absorbed into the consciousness by means of the awareness of darkness, so is the wisdom of the believer sharpened by the existence of wretched individuals. Everyone is on an orbit leading to his destination, and that destination is in the Divine Presence.

When Allah states that He has honored the Children of Adam, He states this without distinguishing between believer and unbeliever. He didn't say, "We have honored the believers of the Children of Adam." No, that honor has been granted to the whole human race already in eternity past, whether its potential is realized here or not. Man's highest potential, however, is reached when he lifts the veils of physicality from the eyes of the heart while yet in this life in order to clearly see the truth of our eternal covenant with God.

The mission of all the prophets has been to help us lift those veils from our hearts. If you sincerely and diligently follow their way, a vision of a wonderful universe beyond the realm of imagination may appear before your very eyes. Otherwise, that universe should appear to you when you leave this world and embark upon your journey to eternity. Yes, all souls are bound for their Lord—for where else is there? But the greatest honor possible for a created being is to attain eternity in the midst of temporality—during this short life.

Today they have granted us an understanding of our position among creatures. You must know how much you have been honored, and must keep a humble attitude towards the One who granted you that honor. We could

elaborate further, but no one could receive it, no one is prepared. Beyond this limit there is unlimited wisdom.



A Person's Value

Time is the “hand of God”: it moves everything along its course towards its ordained destination. Some are able to comprehend the purport of the passage of time, and observe it with the eye of wisdom. Such people deal with time by grasping the reins of each passing day, utilizing their God given vision to move their lives in the right direction.

Others perceive time in a distorted manner, like a person looking at a convex or a concave mirror. This malady of perception occurs because they are not reconciled to the “hand of God”, haven't understood the reason why God has confined us to the realm of time and space. He intends thereby only to give us a chance to perfect ourselves, to acquire divine attributes through our own efforts in a difficult situation, and thus prepare ourselves for the day of our reunion with our Lord.

In a holy tradition the Lord said, “The Children of Adam curse time, and I am Time. In My hand is the passage of day and night.”

For those who have not yet understood this truth, time seems to behave in an erratic and disturbing way. The effect of this is to draw our attention to the need to change ourselves to feel in harmony with the passage of time, since time itself, obviously, will neither speed up nor slow down to accommodate our wishes. Our perceiving our own problem with time is a mercy from God, for as a stomachache indicates the need for a change in eating habits, so does this malady awaken us to the need for adjustment of our lifestyle.

For some people time seems to fly, carrying them along like helpless riders on the backs of stampeding

horses, in a herd headed over a cliff. For others time seems to stand still as if it were bogged down in the mire.

First of all we must understand the value of time; how once spent it is irretrievable. If all the nations were to pool their resources to try and redeem even one second of the past (in order to change a catastrophic decision, for example) would they succeed? No, a mountain of treasure cannot bring back even a second of your life. So, time is precious beyond reckoning, but yet do people idly fritter away the hours and seek means for gaining even more leisure time.

So many people (not only those who would be considered clinically manic depressive) suffer from an inability to adapt to the passage of time in a way that accords them peace of mind.

The egos of very young people want to devour the whole world immediately. The feverish heat of the fulfillment of passions and the pursuit of pleasure makes time appear to fly by. So often, at this critical time in people's lives, no prudence is exercised and heeding the urges of the ego they expend all of their energy. Such unrestrained indulgence is the sure way to deplete one's energy quickly—and foolishly—zero for life is like a marathon run: it requires pacing. If you just sprint from the start you will collapse after a few hundred yards. Keeping back a reserve of energy calls for self control and willpower—attributes rare among the young.

For the most part very young people steer clear of spiritual paths; only when they suffer a “breakdown” do they come limping in here for “servicing.” Hundreds of people come to me saying, “Oh Shaykh Effendi, can you help me?” It is such a difficult task to help people who have expended all their energy uselessly and whose physical and mental powers are at a pitifully low level.

Sometimes I am amazed at what I see, for these people are still, for the most part, quite young. Raising the dead is a miracle given only to prophets, but as long as there are signs of life we hope to be able to arouse people from their coma like states.

As a result of the excesses brought about by the manic state, its opposite—depression manifests itself in these young people. Now time no longer flies, but drags along at a snail's pace. A depressed person wishes that time would again fly, but on the contrary, minutes seem like hours, hours like days and days like weeks. Usually, people who lack useful outlets for their energies and feel unfulfilled are subject to these feelings. How foolish it is for people to wish that their time would pass quickly, when, as we pointed out, time is like a priceless jewel.

In the most distinguished Naqshbandi Sufi Order we have a rule of thumb: a person's value corresponds to the value he assigns to his time. If you perceive your time to be a worthless burden that you hope will pass away quickly, then you are a burden on the face of the earth, and it would be better to be under it than on it. Why? Because you wantonly squandered one priceless treasure—your vital energy—now that other priceless treasure—time—is not like wealth in your hands but like an immense pile of treasure underneath which you are buried.

Be judicious with your vital energy so that the value of time may become manifest to you. When you keep your time like a diamond you will be exalted in the eyes of people and in the Divine Presence, here and in the hereafter.

There is a Sufi aphorism: "The Sufi is the son of his time." This means that he treats his time with the same veneration and respect due to his parents. Filial piety is a

paramount duty in religion, and in the Sufi way we are exhorted to honor our time as if we were honoring our mother and father. A true dervish will never waste a moment, but will catch it as a skilled jockey grabs the reins of his horse, applying his skill so that it runs in the right direction and at the right speed. Look in on a true dervish and you should find him occupied with something useful, never with detrimental or useless activities.

If a person can guide himself in such a manner he is on the road to perfection, because he knows what he must do. His heart's eyes will never be blind, for he is keenly aware of the significance of all he encounters.

Our grandshaykh used to say, "Oh people, how are you filling your days? Don't waste time, but strive to weave time and space with skill so that you will leave an enduring legacy behind you in this world and be honored thereby here and in the Hereafter."

For followers of a Sufi way, wasting time either idly or in useless activity is the greatest sin. Guard your vital energy and your valuable time—make every moment live.



The Power of Love

(Shaykh Nazim led the assembly in calling upon the Holy Name of Allah, “Ya Wadud”, a divine name signifying God’s all embracing love).

Then he spoke:

There is nothing in all creation that the Creator, Allah Almighty, hates. Indeed it is impossible to be hated by Allah and to be in existence: one absolutely precludes the other. All creation appeared through His divine love. He loved them and they appeared; therefore, everything in existence carries its share of divine love in it.

When I say “everything”, I mean everything, from atoms and their parts—the very building blocks of the universe—up to mankind. Yes, everything, even the smallest particles of matter, carries that divine gift. As you know, the electrons of atoms revolve around the nuclei, and at enormous velocity. Someone told me that the famous scientist Albert Einstein once declared, “I have come to understand so much, but what I have never been able to fathom is what power gives electrons the energy to orbit nuclei at such a speed. From where does such power come to them?”

We believe, and furthermore, have been granted certainty in our belief, that everything in existence has life, is living. For the sake of everyday reckoning we classify certain things, such as rocks, as inanimate objects, and recognize life only in plants, animals and human beings. But we believe that beyond these outward distinctions everything has life. Therefore, atoms, and their electrons that turn around the nuclei with such speed as to baffle even the renowned Mr. Einstein, are, in reality, alive. They are alive with the divine love

Power that their Lord has granted them: that's what makes them spin at the speed of light.

Science may make penetrating and wonderful discoveries. Scientists' knowledge may advance and climb to unimagined heights in the realm of the observable and what may be proven through experiments. But even such a great realm, the realm of observation and experimentation, is finite, has its limits, and only within these limits can it draw authoritative conclusions. Therefore, scientists who recognize their limitations and are not blinded by pride may admit, that some occurrences are not applicable by science.

It is for those who have access to a realm of knowledge beyond science to say with certainty, that it is Allah Almighty, the Lord of the universe, who through His holy name "Al Wadud" (The All Loving) gives His divine love to everything in the universe. Those electrons, drunken with divine love, spin at such velocity around the nuclei. That is how the influence of divine love is manifested by them.

Science can neither prove nor deny this explanation, as this phenomenon is beyond their realm, and they cannot as much as offer a theory. But our hearts may be content with this explanation, as each and every one of us may try it himself within himself; for we all have the power of that divine love in our hearts ready to be contacted.

There is no one word in Western languages that gives the full meaning of "Al Wadud", and even explanations don't do it justice, even though the West claims its knowledge to be superior and looks down disdainfully on every religious experience. And this Holy Name, the meaning of which cannot even be adequately expressed in advanced Western languages, is

the most suitable “dhikr”, the most suitable of all the divine names to repeat and meditate upon for people who see themselves as superior beings and as being above normal standards.

“Love”, it is certainly not a concept that Western culture is unfamiliar with, and undoubtedly most people lay claim to loving and being loved, to knowing the meaning of love, and to it being an important aspect of their lives, indeed the most important. But the love we refer to in connection with the divine name “Al Wadud” is not the physical transitory love that is rapidly becoming the only meaning of love applicable to modern man, the love that one may find in the zoo. If you can’t imagine a love other than what is on the level of animals, then you belong in the zoo.

There is a real love, never changing, never dying love; and then there is temporary animal love. Both are in man through the wisdom of the Creator, but the permanent love is the love given to man through the divine name “Al Wadud”. To realize that love is the challenge and fulfillment of human existence—to come in contact with those Love Oceans, for He has given His divine love most abundantly to His most honored representatives in creation, mankind.

You may love a young lady for her youth, and when that youth departs you love her no more. That is false love. Sometimes we may have both kinds of love simultaneously, but usually the physical overpowers the spiritual, so that it is never allowed to appear. But to reach the ultimate goal of human life we are in need of permanent love, and it is only the Lord of the universe who can grant it.

Therefore, when we say “Ya Wadud” we are opening ourselves up to that divine love, asking our Lord

to awaken that love that knows no limitation, that is eternal and extends to all creation. I have been ordered to teach and advise people to call on our Lord, saying, “Ya Wadud”, as this will enable the sincere to attain real love of their Lord Almighty and to love everything around themselves. We must learn to love everything for the sake of the love the Creator has for all His creation. And we are in utmost need to pray for such love, as, although it is the essence of all success in the way of spiritual purification, it has become almost extinct in our times. Therefore, suffering, disturbances, struggle, crises and chaos are continually on the rise.

What passes for human love nowadays is indeed a very far cry from real human love. Mostly, people cling to it for two or three months then throw it away. You are saying, “Oh my goddess”, and she is saying, “Oh my god”, but look in again on them two or three months later and see what is left of that “true devotion” and “deep emotion”. That is the greatest cause of wretchedness in our times. For this reason I don’t refer to this century as a civilized one. Rather, the twentieth century is witnessing the destruction of civilization and every minute violence and misery are increasing.

A society may be termed “civilized” when it provides the surrounding in which people may easily reach to the point of extending their permanent love to everyone. One shouldn’t be so proud of being a part of “Twentieth Century Civilization”, for I really don’t consider such a violent and sick society to be civilized, and when I come here I feel my hair standing on end from what I see. Such wildness! No familiarity! Everyone looking so suspiciously to each other!

When I say this people may be offended and put on the defensive, and may ask, “If you feel such feelings here then why do you come? Why do you come if you

don't like the Western world?" Yes, people may ask. A physician may visit a hospital or a mental institution, but he is going there in order to do his job, in order to be of benefit to the patients interned in those institutions. I have been trained to heal spiritual ailments from a side and with methods not known in these countries, and so I have been sent by spiritual centers to look after the Western countries, and if even one person should benefit, we have profited.

Every little improvement in the spiritual health of Western society is a relief for the whole world, as throughout the world nations have abandoned their cultures and are following the West. Therefore, the diseases of the West are rapidly becoming our diseases, and so, we hope, improvement in the spiritual climate of the West will lead to our improvement as well.

Because of this acute situation in our times we must, first and foremost, seek to awaken permanent love. Practices, prayers and rules are of no use in this time without love. For people whose hearts have not regained contact with such love, the ego easily attaches itself to practices and uses them as a means to pin empty titles onto itself. Leave every practice that serves your vanity and strive for permanent love.

Where shall we start? Every person has a circle of friends, relations, and acquaintances. Starting from those closest to us wives and husbands, parents and children, brothers and sisters we must be generous in giving of our permanent love. How can we consider a person who cannot make peace with those nearest to him as civilized? If we could approach the level of permanent love that befits us, the world's courts would have to be closed down from a lack of suits: no complaining, no divorce, no wretchedness, no struggle.

Giving of our permanent love is the most important practice for our time. No one can say, “I am not in need of practicing it,” neither the speaker nor the listeners. Don’t tell me that so and so is on such and such a level when he is tightfisted with permanent love, withholding it even from those with whom he is most intimate.

The lower self of man, the selfish ego, never wants to give permanent love except to himself. I don’t believe that such petty self love is all we have been created for; I believe that we have been created to love all creation. Man represents his Lord on earth and has the greatest reservoir of divine love within him; he can be a great means of expression for that divine love in this world, indeed a fountain of love that every creature may drink from.

I have not spoken to you from a prepared text, but have opened up just a little from these Oceans in accordance with your spiritual thirst.



Don't Worry!

The Seal of Prophets, Sayyidina Muhammad, peace be upon him, imparted this good advice to mankind:

If you awaken in the morning and find that you are lacking nothing in the way of material sustenance, and that you and your family are in good health, then don't burden yourself with worry.

The Holy Prophet advises us not to make problems for ourselves. If there are immediate and pressing problems, that is another story, but so many “problems” in people’s minds are not problems at all except in their minds. They are only “projected problems” which may or may not ever materialize. This is the affliction of twentieth century man: anxiety, or suffering inflicted upon oneself over the possibility of future suffering. As a result of this neurotic anxiety people may suffer intensely over a long period of time, although none of what they fear ever materializes. This is the epitome of foolishness.

We are shouldering weekly, monthly and yearly burdens each day. Why carry such baggage when you may walk unburdened; and find all that you need awaiting your arrival at each station of your journey? You only exist here and now. Tomorrow’s “you” is only a fantasy, as you can’t even know if you’ll live that long. By inventing so many problems for yourself you are only making yourself ill. Is this advice of the Prophet not enough evidence of his adherence to a way that leads man to felicity?

Allah Almighty doesn't want His servants to suffer needless, self inflicted misery, and He says, “Oh My servants, don't load heavy burdens on yourselves by

worrying about the future. Just bring yourselves in line with My Will; accord with My Purposes this moment, and then rest assured that I will help you keep your future moments similarly aligned with My Will.”

Perhaps you may understand my point from the following example. When a new railway track is laid, before a locomotive and train are ever sent over it, a two wheeled cart is first drawn over it to check whether the tracks have been laid straight. In the same way, if you can align your will to that of your Lord even for one moment, without carrying a heavy burden, you may be sure that your way is right, and that, even should times get rough, and so many burdens be coupled to your locomotive, your track is straight and true and you will pass along it smoothly and safely. A solution to this moment’s problem is the solution to next year’s derailment.

When I am here in Western countries I daily encounter people carrying the weight of anticipated problems. It is so difficult in the modern world to escape from having this perspective, and to concentrate on the moment in order to put it right. With tens of thousands of problems in front of you all at once, how should a solution seem possible?

I often see people running into the mosque, saying the obligatory prayers quickly and running out. Sometimes I ask them, “What’s the rush?” Then they nervously look at their watches and say, “We have tarried in the mosque too long already. We have so many things to do today!” I reply, “It is laudable to be industrious and to look after your affairs well, but who would look after your affairs were you to drop dead here and now?”

I am not encouraging people to spend their whole days in the mosque, but only trying to remind people who are not only running after their sustenance, but leaping head over heels after ambitious, all encompassing undertakings that it is impossible to “master the world”, and destructive to devote so much energy to their attempt, and with so much abandon. First of all, the world already has a Master, and addressing Him humbly and with presence of mind (not hurriedly) in your prayers is even more instrumental in attaining your sustenance than rushing through the city. Secondly, far from attending to your affairs more efficiently by running, you are only likely to have a heart attack and die young!

Don't live in a world of great big time schemes, for such schemes will not save you from trouble, but entangle you in it even further. Simplify your problems so that the solutions may be simple, and don't regard your problems with a magnifying glass, so that they are out of perspective, that habit will destroy you physically and spiritually.



Association

Once our grandshaykh addressed me, saying, “Oh Nazim Effendi, I want to speak to you on a very serious point, a point for which you and all seekers must take the greatest care. Don’t worship your ego as a god beside Allah Almighty. You must be most careful, as this kind of polytheism is the kind you may be engaging in without even knowing it. Ego worship is the most dangerous deviation from pure faith: hidden idolatry.”

Look, we human beings are actually the weakest of creatures. Every animal that walks on the earth, swims in the water or flies in the air has better mechanisms of adaptation than we do. They may roam about in the nature eating grasses, drinking muddy water, sleeping on the ground; they have furs to keep them warm or else they are cold blooded.

They are not going to be affected by the normal change of weather. But our bodies are so delicate. We are in need of different kinds of clothes for each of the seasons, and we must maintain a certain level of cleanliness in our food and drink or else we become ill. In other words, if we were to be subjected to the conditions under which other creatures survive we would die quickly. Therefore, in this sense, mankind is a weakling among the animals.

But notice that even we weaklings, the most delicate of creatures, even as vulnerable single individuals never like to accept a partner in any activity if we think we can do it ourselves. Only when we estimate a particular task to be beyond our capability of performing alone do we seek a helper. For example, if a man establishes a business and is easily able to finance and run it himself, will he seek a partner? No, that would be useless.

And so, if you can recognize that even a weak creature never accepts a partner when none is called for, Who can you ascribe as partner or partners to Allah Almighty? Who could be a partner to the Lord of the universe, the Lord of all, who has endless power and created everything? How can He accept a partner, a son, a wife or a daughter? Which creature may be a suitable partner for Him? Can anyone be up to that? Shall the Creator create a creature and set it up with Himself? That is absurd! You accept a partner to provide something you lack, be it financing or labor; otherwise no one tolerates such a burden. So who can help Allah?

Therefore, all prophets have spoken out strongly against such foolish notions in religion, against any kind of polytheism. But there is a kind of polytheism that is secret, not so easily detectable. And in reality, so many men are worshipping a god other than God Almighty without even knowing it. Even those who claim to worship only Him alone usually persist in the worship of this secret idol in themselves. And who or what is claiming to be a partner to Allah Almighty—none other, of course, than our ego.

Your ego approaches you and says, “I am the partner. Whether you like it or not I am the idol you worship, beside Allah. If you insist on worshipping Allah and claim that He is your Lord, and I cannot dissuade you from that folly, then at least you must recognize me as your second Lord, and you will endeavor to please me too. If you strive to be an obedient servant of your Lord, you must also strive to be my servant; if you are obeying your Lord you must sometimes also obey me. Go ahead, if you must, and declare your belief in Allah, pray five times a day, fast in Ramadan, make pilgrimage to Mecca, give charity, but I will not tolerate all of this unless you

dedicate these actions to me as well—I demand my share!”

When our egos address us in such a manner, we reply, “Oh my ego, you are right to demand that I pay homage to you as well, and I shall strive to please you, to honor and obey you. And if, sometimes, I cannot do your bidding, please forgive me, please pardon me, and know that I am doing the best I can to please you.”

Now we, as Muslims, as followers of the purest monotheistic religion, may be very smug and complacent about the status of our faith. Perhaps in museums or by the roadside we may see idols that the ancients hewed from stone, shaped from clay or from metal, and we may laugh at the foolishness of worshipping the product of one’s own hands, saying, “Those ancients, how foolish they were—ha, ha—making some statues and offering them their humble obeisance, making vows to them, loving and honoring them!” And all the while we are in reality no better—devotees of the ego god. The Holy Prophet warned in the strongest terms against this pitfall, especially as it is so well hidden, like a trap in the jungle covered over with branches and grass. So many people worship this partner without ever even suspecting it.

Grandshaykh warned us also that this ego god is never really going to be satisfied with being number two. “No”, it says, “I am first, second and third . . . worship none but me.” But when it perceives resistance it makes a sly calculation and says, “Alright, He is first, I am second”, knowing that this is his chance to place himself in a position to sabotage our faith and eventually stage its coup.

Therefore, our task is to dethrone the partner; and all of the prophets were sent to mankind in order to teach them how to go about that task. We are in need of

training at the hands of someone who can be firm in the face of his ego's demands; one who, beyond that, has tamed his ego so that it never demands undue attention or pampering. Until you have reached that point you must be aware that you are a secret idolater, and so, your heart will be locked up and cut off from the blessings of divine knowledge.

By being in the company of a man who has, firstly, realized what a deadly game the ego plays, and secondly, rid himself of its domination, the seeker of truth may arrive at his goal. Therefore, the Seal of Prophets, Muhammad, peace be upon him, taught his companions, by entering them into association with him. Accordingly, the inheritors of the Prophet, the Naqshbandi Masters, stress the importance of "sohbet" association with the Shaykh as the essential pillar in the training of seekers.

Shah Naqshband, the illustrious Imam of the line of Masters we follow, the Imam after whom the path is named and without whom there would be no Naqshbandiyya, always used to repeat in his assemblies, "Our way is sohbet, association, and all good things result from congregating." He furthermore stated that if anyone attended an assembly of the way even for five or ten minutes, he would derive such immense spiritual benefit from that brief encounter as to outweigh the benefits that would be gained by seven years of supererogatory worship.

That is the power of the assembly of the inheritors of the Prophet, and augmenting that power is the unanimity of the participants in that meeting, their joining of hearts in sincerity with the heart of the Shaykh. In such a meeting such a power descends on the hearts of the participants that even the deep roots of hidden idolatry, of ego worship, can be pulled out. You may

observe that with every association the ego's power is further undermined.

Our grandshaykh explained that without association it is very difficult to catch the ego out in its game, to identify its tricks and escape from its clutches. We are in need of a guide to show us which paths lead over cliffs, as it is particularly those paths that our ego likes to point to, putting up very authoritative looking signs, saying "Through way", or "shortcut", and you think everything is alright. The ego comes and advises you, "If you do this, that may result; if that, this. This is suitable, but that not;" and with such "good advice" it seeks to change your heart, to turn you against your Lord Almighty.

But when you are associating with the Shaykh, the ego and its doings are quickly identified and become manifest. The ego's disguise is snatched off of it so that there, in front of you it stands, naked and exposed. Then you are surprised and exclaim, "That is none other than my ego! It was so well disguised that I took it for a very important and highly qualified advisor; but now I see it is just that same old rascal."

In this manner association with the Shaykh may help you to perceive your faults, and then, if you can take up the thread and work on those bad characteristics, improving yourself through applied effort, then you will undergo rapid improvement.

Another important point to understand is that whenever any group of our brothers or sisters meet for the sake of Allah Almighty, unanimously joining their hearts with the Masters of this way, that meeting will attain to the level of an association with the kind of beneficial effects just described. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the only beneficial meeting is the one where the Shaykh is physically in attendance. When our

brothers or sisters meet, one of them must be the channel for inspiration to come from the Shaykh, one must speak and the others listen, one must take from the Shaykh. The Naqshbandi Way is the Sufi path adhering most closely to the practices of the Holy Prophet, and association in this manner was his way, and the way of his companions, as he always appointed a leader to preside in his absence.

Yes, one must speak and the others must listen, this way all the meetings of our brothers are blessed. If more than one person speaks, or if there are arguments and contention, then there will be no spiritual power in that meeting and hearts will be left cold. Therefore, if we indicated that one of our brothers should make association in any meeting, you must listen to him. When you listen to him, he will be able to receive the inspirations of our grandshaykh whose heart is in connection with our Prophet, peace be upon him, whose heart is always with the Lord Almighty. In this manner Allah Almighty is going to help that person and pour out on him from His endless Blessings, His endless Mercy, Knowledge and Favor Oceans, so that through his words the attendees of that meeting may be guided towards their destinations.

When a person is asked by the Shaykh to address people anywhere and anytime on the Shaykh's behalf, there may be one hundred, one thousand or one million people listening to that person's address, and every one of them will be able to take what he is in need of. It is impossible that someone should address a meeting on the Shaykh's behalf without anyone drawing any benefit from that association; on the contrary, everyone will take his share.

I was in our grandshaykh's association for about forty years, and I was accustomed to writing down his words. All in all it came to more than seven thousand

associations. He was so generous with his company and in sharing his wisdom; even if only one person were in attendance he would sit with him and teach him. He addressed people with such ease, never finding himself at a loss of what to say to anyone or any group of people children or adults, men or women, young or old, educated city dwellers or villagers. He was able to address people according to their minds' capacities, to speak to them on their levels, this despite the fact that he himself was unlettered. This was possible because his knowledge was not derived from books, but from the heart, and through his heart flowed everything we are in need of.

Wa min Allah at Taufiq.



The Love Oceans of Our Lord

(Shaykh Nazim visited a center dedicated to spiritual endeavor. Two groups there were at odds, one claiming that the other was not behaving in a manner befitting a holy place).

The Shaykh said:

The Lord—our Lord, your Lord, their Lord—is One. He created them and planted His divine love in the very yeast of their being. You must know that, although that love may be temporarily covered, it is running through their hearts as a river runs to an ocean. Along the course of that river love may manifest only as temporary human love, and that love current may even seem to disappear completely, like a river that flows under a mountain, only to re emerge on the other side. But there can be no doubt that our Lord has placed in every heart a current that flows irresistibly to His Love Oceans in the Divine Presence. Therefore, don't imagine them to be cut off from divine love—it must be with them, whether that is now apparent to you and to themselves, or not.

As our heart current flows toward that ocean, the main difference we notice is that our love is not tied to physical beauty. Everyone loves nature, greenery, rushing waters, youthful forms, beautiful people—but what about the others? The Lord gave of His love to people in general, not only to the young and beautiful. And the One who implanted His love in our hearts says, “Oh my servant, as I have given you from My divine love, so have I given it to all creation; so spread your love to everyone, that you may be in harmony with My Will.”

In reality, everything that contains His love is green and beautiful, but to perceive the beauty in all creation

you must transcend outward forms and penetrate to the realm of spiritual reality oceans. First of all, it is important to pass from forms to meanings, from fleeting shapes to eternal spiritual realities, as forms are limited and limiting, whereas spiritual realities are oceans, endless oceans of contentment. To arrive at those oceans will bring you inner peace.

Therefore, I am trying to love everyone. It is easy to say to a person, “I love you” as long as that person has never harmed you, but according to our grandshaykh such is not the measure of real love. He used to quote a famous Daghistani Sufi poet who said, “I don’t accept the love that you claim to hold for me to be real until I have tested you. What is my test? If I put you through a meat grinder and you came out the other end as minced meat—but were still alive—and if then I returned you to your original form, would you still love me?”

What this poet meant was: if I cause you so much suffering, and harm you as no one has ever harmed you before, will you still love me despite all that I have done? That is true love. But if I am with you for forty years, and the, because of one hurtful word I may utter towards you in a moment of stress, you leave me and declare me to be your enemy, denying the love of forty years and saying, “I don’t love you anymore”, that is not the love we are referring to.

Therefore, as I have said, there are levels of love along the way, differing in quality according to their nearness to the goal, the absolute love oceans of our Lord. When one has reached that goal he may take any amount of harm from others and still love. He may say, “I love you for the sake of my Lord, not for any other reason. That love will never change or diminish, as no matter what you do your Lord’s love is with you. You may behave like a wild animal, you may wound me, but

yet, for you to even exist, my Lord's love must be with you, and therefore I am loving you, too."

Only the highest and most select of mankind are ever on such a level, and we are trying to reach that point—but it is so difficult. You must know that this is a test for you and an opportunity to gain spiritual ranks. Now you are in a situation where you must be patient with people who may not be upholding the same level of decorum that you are accustomed to. Here is an opportunity for you to advance, as holy people have advised us: rather than avoiding all ill mannered and badly educated people, we should mingle with them and establish contact with them, that they may benefit and that you may test yourself and gain thereby.

They are servants of the Almighty's will, and we are His servants too. Our Lord is their Lord and their Lord is ours. We must be patient and we will gain, little by little. Cherry trees first yield bitter fruit, but you must wait—little by little, little by little, the tree starts to yield sweet and tasteful cherries.

The holy Masters have promised me that whoever sits with us and listens with his heart full of love must come to the same level. However, their hearts must open to divine love. The Masters are not going to abandon us, and we are not going to run from them, as our hearts have been bound with the strongest of bonds divine love, that strongest form of love that exists between the Creator and His creatures. That relationship is the ultimate goal of existence, and we pray that it may grow stronger always.

Those with whom we sit and whose hearts are receptive to divine love will attain that love. This is a promise from the Masters, and therefore our meeting indicates that your time is approaching, the time when

you will be able to break the bonds that make you slaves to your egos. Soon you will be free to approach your spiritual goals, and that is why everyone here feels himself affected and moved to tears.

If the love that were with me were only transitory love, you wouldn't even bother sitting with me for a moment. But the love that is with me is real, permanent and divine; and I have extended a ray of it to your hearts to awaken permanent love.



Of Mice and Men

That prophets were sent to their nations to guide them to truth is a well understood fact. What is often overlooked or even denied, however, is that there were always two aspects to their missions: a general and explicit message, and a private, hidden, inner one.

A general spiritual transformation of their people was the goal of their missions of exhortation and instruction, but never could an ongoing transformation be carried on to generations subsequent to the departure of the prophet without the establishment of a line of inwardly purified people. The establishment of such a succession ensures continuity, that there are always inheritors of those prophets alive among their people—true heirs of the light of truth, not merely of words.

If not for the reality of this manner of transmission, holiness would be but a memory ascribed to some inhabitants of the cemetery and described in ancient texts. There would be no sweet honey to give believers a foretaste of felicity; there would be only stings to drive people away from religion altogether. This is not our Lord's Intention. Therefore, He Almighty assured the Holy Prophet that sanctity would never disappear from the face of the earth, and the Holy Prophet passed these good tidings on to us, when he said, "My nation will never be devoid of representatives of the truth, even up to the Resurrection Day."

These holy people are often hidden to varying degrees, as their duties don't require them to be visible. And it is important for them to be discreet and circumspect when imparting divine gifts, as in the hands of the wrong people these can be as dangerous as a whole bottle of potent medicine in the hands of a child. Because

of the unsuitability of the majority of people to accept training at the hands of saints, and, beyond this, their tendency to attack holy people from pride and envy, the Almighty has hidden many of them for their own protection and for the protection of those envious people who would incur great sin by harming holy men.

Allah Almighty has also chosen to hide the Night of Power, the most auspicious night of the year. It is on that night that, if a worshipper is absorbed in ardent supplication of his Lord, the good of what he sought will be granted. He has hidden this night among all the nights of the year, for were He to announce it men would abuse this knowledge by abandoning all other occasions for worship.

The Almighty has also kept the most potent of His holy names secret. Allah's are the most beautiful names, and they are without number. Of these infinite names and attributes ninety nine are mentioned in tradition (such as the Almighty, Merciful, Forgiving, Sustainer, Judge, Bestower, Overwhelming), but the hundredth name containing unfathomable power, is hidden. Whoso knows this hundredth name may perform miracles, but who should be given such powers except those whose hearts are in perfect accord with their Lord's Will and are completely trustworthy? You may be sure that the group of those deemed worthy of such a trust is very small indeed.

Once there was a murid (Sufi aspirant) who used to pester his shaykh to reveal the greatest name to him. The shaykh would admonish him, saying, "Patience, oh my son, you cannot yet carry that burden." But this particular murid was very insistent. Finally the shaykh gave him a box along with its key, and told him to deliver it to a certain shaykh in a neighboring city. "Deliver this box to that shaykh, and don't open it on the way. When you

have successfully delivered this trust he will impart to you that secret name.”

Then the murid set out on his way with the box. He heard something scurrying around in it and became curious as to what could be inside. His curiosity got the better of him and he opened it up: a little mouse jumped out, ran into a hole and disappeared. He closed the box and continued on his way to that other shaykh, who then asked him, “Where is the box with which you were entrusted?” “Here it is, but I am afraid that I have opened it and let the mouse escape,” replied the murid.

“Oh my son,” enjoined the shaykh, “you are not trustworthy enough to guard a small mouse, so how should you be entrusted with such a holy secret as this? Were you to be given that weapon you might use it for selfish or evil purposes, and destroy yourself and everyone else in the process.”



Familiarity Breeds Enlightenment

Shah Naqshband, the most important pillar of the Naqshbandi tariqat, often said, “The essence of our tariqat is to be found in gathering in the company of the shaykh or of fellow aspirants. Such meetings generate pure goodness.” This kind of gathering is referred to as “association” or “sohbet”, and may involve either the shaykh (or his appointed deputy) addressing the group (after having linked his heart with the chain of shaykhs through which he is connected to the heart of the Holy Prophet), or simply an informal “get together”, a happy occasion for intimacy. (Often a sohbet consists of both aspects, a discourse followed by familiar interchange).

Why does Shah Naqshband assign so much importance to such gatherings? Why does he stress this even more, seemingly, than prayer or dhikr (prayer meditation)? Why? Because the familiarity arising from such blessed gatherings opens our hearts to each other and to our Lord. Gathering people in such an intimate atmosphere was the method utilized by the prophets to soften the hearts of their people, and soft hearts make our worship acceptable in the Divine Presence.

If people cannot bring themselves to defer to another, as when people gather with a shaykh or a deputy of a shaykh, they will grow to be ever more assertive, wild and egoistic. In our assemblies one person must be the symbolic leader and address the others. If he is a deputy of the shaykh, he may be, on the level of everyday life, just one among a group of brothers pursuing a common goal, or he may have already attained spiritual stations which enable him to take on a more comprehensive role in guiding the members of his group.

Whether the former or the latter be the case, when any of our deputies puts his heart in connection with the spiritual transmission for the sake of leading dhikr and delivering a sohbet discourse, he should become the means for that spiritual power and blessings to pervade that assembly.

Divine blessings descend on meetings where one person is presiding humbly and the others are deferring humbly. Such blessings never rest on a group where each is vying to prove the superiority of his views. No, our assemblies should not be debate clubs. If we follow these guidelines, after one person addresses the group and the others defer both outwardly and inwardly, a special atmosphere of intimacy should settle on that meeting, so that everyone feels well inclined towards the other members of the group, and all are able to exchange ideas in a constructive, non confrontational manner.

Our egos rebel against being on an equal footing with others, so how should they feel about showing deference! The ego is a wild creature, constantly seeking to assert its uniqueness and superiority and to belittle others. If we can manage to get the upper hand in the struggle with our egos, they may reluctantly accede to show deference, but they will never do it voluntarily.

Man is subject to conflicting impulses. He wants to be unique, but he is also a social animal. Uniqueness is an attribute of our Lord, and we have all been given a share of that divine attribute in that we are all different physically and in the realm of personality. In fact, there is a unique divine name reflected in each and every one of us, which the Lord has bestowed us a share of to the exclusion of others.

Because of this we have an intrinsic tendency to see ourselves as being unique—because we are—but the

mistake is to see ourselves as being superior to others, for it is in unity with others that we fulfill our potential for completeness, as our unique name is made manifest through the act of joining it to the whole of divine attributes.

The way to the fulfillment of this great potential passes through familiarity with people. Whosoever finds a way to the hearts of mankind finds his Lord's Divine Presence. This is why the Holy Prophet brought people together in such informal meetings. But don't think that this is an easy task! The power to draw people together is a gift of Heaven. The prophets and their inheritors have been granted the gift of addressing people's hearts directly, so that all those whose hearts are not of stone all open hearted people and all those whose hearts are closed but not locked must be affected by their message.

Usually a humble class of people responded widely to the message of the prophets, as being close to nature they were more easily able to distinguish something living from a fabrication. In general, women also were more open to the message of the prophets than men, because women's hearts are more easily opened. Men's hearts are often locked tightly.

It is impossible for an open hearted person to reject the guidance of a prophet or one of their inheritors. But as for people who are puffed up with their knowledge, and approach men of God in order to make them accept their ideas rather than accepting divine teachings, such people are likely to lock their hearts to tariqahs (spiritual paths).

The sign of real spiritual transmission is that hearts are affected and softened so that real familiarity and affection grow among the recipients of that transmission. That is the first step towards real faith. You aren't a real

believer until you want for others what you would like for yourself, until you can put yourself in the shoes even of those with whom you find yourself in conflict. Until you can feel affection and familiarity towards a group of fellow seekers, it is impossible to imagine sympathy for people inimical to yourself.

How is it possible to open up your heart to your fellow man? Your hearts must meet in the heart of one of Allah's Saints, for in their hearts is divine attraction, and it is that power which enables them to be a medium for the binding of hearts. If there is no connection to the source of all love—the Lord of all beings—then no really durable familiarity can develop between people, only the commonplace surface familiarity that is so easily disregarded when self interest intervenes.

If a person has not undergone training at the hands of an inheritor of a prophet, it is impossible for him to bear with people who inflict trouble upon him. He will become like a thorn bush: unapproachable, always ready to prick whomever approaches, friend or foe. Usually, however, such people are unable to perceive that they are prickly, but attribute the thorniness to others. This is not surprising, as it is a common mechanism of the human psyche to put off on others our own objectionable characteristics. We are all mirrors, but we do not realize that it is our own ugliness we abhor in others.

The Lord sympathizes with His creatures, and whosoever has received a ray of that attribute may find his heart inclining towards people. This familiarity is a transmission from heart to heart. Don't bother with my words, just receive my transmission.

Familiarity with our fellow men is only the first level upon which divine familiarity is made manifest, for

the truly loving soul evokes affection even from wild animals.

Once I was with my grandshaykh in the countryside. As we approached the house of the person we had gone to visit, a yellow dog started to rush at us with his tail curved between his legs like a scorpion. I thought that we would be torn to shreds, but as the dog came within clear sight of us his whole aspect changed (even though Grandshaykh had never been there before, and therefore, the dog did not recognize him in the ordinary sense of his being a frequent visitor) and he began to wag his tail. Then the dog approached and Grandshaykh rubbed his head. At this the vicious guard dog took on the aspect of a frolicking puppy, rolling on the ground and prancing about. Then Grandshaykh explained to me, “He recognized me. I am no stranger to anyone.”

Even ferocious lions may become pussycats in the presence of the receptacles of divine familiarity. Once, in the early days of Islam, a caravan of pilgrims were coming to visit the House of God in Mecca. All of a sudden the caravan stopped. Abdullah Ibn Umar was with the caravan and when it stopped he went forward to see what was the matter. The people were in a state of great trepidation, for a lion was sitting in the middle of the road, and they were afraid he would attack the pilgrims. Abdullah Ibn Umar made his camel kneel and climbed off its back. He went over to the lion, lifted up its ear, and reprimanded him gently, saying, “Don’t stay here. This is not the place for you; this is a road for the pilgrims bound for the House of God. You must be obedient and respectful and not attack us, as we are under the protection of the Almighty.”

Wa min Allah at Tawfiq.

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