

“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)

The Light

AND

ISLAMIC REVIEW

Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement
for over one hundred years

January - December 2025

In the spirit of the above-cited verse, this periodical attempts to dispel
misunderstandings about the religion of Islam and endeavors to
facilitate inter-faith dialogue based on reason and rationality.

Vol. 102

CONTENTS

No. 1

Introduction to Special Issue . . . 3
By the Editor

Wellness as reflected by
“Qalbun Saleem” 4
Introduction to the Symposium
By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Daily Prayer 9
A Rhythm of Meditation,
Grounding and Reflection
By Maulana Kemal Hyda
(Edited by Mr. Omar Raja)

Walking the Uphill Road 12
Gaza, the Soul,
and the Work of Mercy
By Dr. Ayesha Khan

Holistic Health 17
Aligning Body and Spirit through
Conscious Choices
By Dr. Haleema Saeed

Grief and Healing 19
Mindfulness and Perspective
in Times of Loss
By Sadru Dean Sahukhan, Esq.

The Philosophy of Human
Suffering and Grief 22
Jummah Khutba from Jan. 7, 1921
By Maulana Muhammad Ali
(translated by Dr. Mohammed
Ahmad)

Opening the Heart 25
Ibn ‘Arabi on Suffering,
Compassion and Atonement
By James Winston Morris

Published on the World-Wide Web at: www.muslim.org

احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

◆ Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha‘at Islam Lahore Inc., U.S.A. ◆

The Light was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. The Islamic Review was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

ISSN: 1060-4596

Editor: Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Circulation: Dr. Noman Malik

Contact information:

'The Light', P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

Phone: 614 – 873 1030 • Fax: 614 – 873 1022

E-mails: aaiil@aol.com

Website: www.muslim.org

The main objective of the A.A.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the hearts and minds of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), our Founder, arose to remind the world that Islam is:

International: It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all. Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

Peaceful: Allows use of force only in unavoidable self-defence. Teaches Muslims to live peacefully under any rule which accords them freedom of religion.

Tolerant: Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion. Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

Rational: In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge. Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

Inspiring: Worship is not a ritual, but provides living contact with a Living God, Who answers prayers and speaks to His righteous servants even today as in the past.

Non-sectarian: Every person professing Islam by the words La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur rasul-ullah (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim. A Muslim cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad taught that **no** prophet, old or new, is to arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, Mujaddids will be raised by God to revive and rekindle the light of Islam.

About ourselves

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore has branches in many countries including:

U.S.A.	Australia
U.K.	Canada
Holland	Fiji
Indonesia	Germany
Suriname	India
Trinidad	South Africa
Guyana	Philippines

Achievements:

The Anjuman has produced extensive literature on Islam, originally in English and Urdu, including translations of the Holy Quran with commentaries. These books are being translated into other languages, including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The Anjuman has run several Muslim missions around the world, including the first ever in Western Europe.

History:

1889: Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founds the Ahmadiyya Movement.

1901: Movement given name Ahmadiyya after Holy Prophet Muhammad's other famous name Ahmad.

1905: Hazrat Mirza appoints central body (Anjuman) to manage the Movement.

1908: Death of Hazrat Mirza. Succeeded by Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head.

1914: Death of Maulana Nur-ud-Din. Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam founded at Lahore as continuation of the original Anjuman. Maulana Muhammad Ali elected as Head.

1951: Death of Maulana Muhammad Ali after fifty years of glorious service to the cause of Islam. Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (d. 1981) becomes Head.

1981–1996: Dr Saeed Ahmad Khan, an eminent medical doctor and religious scholar, led the Movement, at a time of intense persecution.

1996–2002: Prof. Dr Asghar Hameed, a distinguished retired University Professor of Mathematics, and learned Islamic scholar, served as Head.

2002: Prof. Dr Abdul Karim Saeed Pasha elected Head.

Introduction to the Special Issue

By the Editor

The Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society has upheld a long tradition of fostering a deeper understanding of Islam through its annual symposium. Our symposiums offer an educational forum for people of various faith traditions, clergy and community leaders to learn about a contemporary societal issue from an Islamic perspective. This year, we delved into the transcendental subject of “wellness” by exploring the notion of a “Sound Heart” as presented in the Islamic spiritual tradition.

In a world striving for balance, we often see wellness being reduced to the physical. Yet, we know that true wellbeing includes emotional resilience and spiritual grounding as well. Islam, a way of life rooted in harmony of the whole self, offers timeless guidance for achieving this state of inner peace. This year’s symposium addressed the ways in which Islam provides for nurturing complete wellbeing — of body, mind, and soul — through cultivating a **Sound Heart** (*Qalbun Saleem*, in Arabic).

The Holy Quran describes the heart not only as a physical organ, but as the spiritual core of comprehension, insight, and connection. Just as the ears hear and the eyes see, the heart is what truly understands. The Holy Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying:

There lies within the body a piece of flesh. If it is **sound**, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Verily, this piece is the **heart**. (*Bukhari/Muslim*)

A sound heart is a condition of detachment of the materialistic clutter that distracts humans from their divine purpose. It is a condition of acceptance of all the hardships one may encounter in this life, and of gratitude, knowing that all the struggles inherent in life only serve the purpose of facilitating closeness to the Divine.

And, all of Islam’s prescriptions for how to live a life of wellness is aimed at producing this peaceful condition of a “sound heart”. This, according to Islam, is the key to optimal wellness, an aspect of wellbeing that is often neglected. It is the spiritual component that is necessary for attaining a *lasting* state of peace and contentment.

This special issue of *The Light and Islamic Review* compiles articles from presentations delivered at the symposium, including:

- Wellness as reflected by “Qalbun Saleem” [by Fazeel S. Khan, Esq. (Attorney/Arbitrator – USA)]
- Daily Prayer: A rhythm of meditation, ground-

ing and reflection [by Maulana Kemal Hydal (Missionary, Trinidad and Tobago), revised by Mr. Omar Raja (IT Professional - USA)]

- Walking the Uphill Road: Gaza, the Soul, and the Work of Mercy [(by Dr. Ayesha Khan, (Emergency Medicine Physician, USA)]
- Holistic Health: Aligning Body and Spirit through Conscious Choices [by Dr. Haleema Saeed (Pediatrician, Pakistan)]
- Grief & Healing: Mindfulness and perspective in times of loss [by Sadru-Dean Sahukhan, Esq. (Retired Chief Prosecutor, Australia)]

Of special importance is the article titled “Walking the Uphill Road” by Dr. Ayesha Khan – author of “The Girl Who Gave Me Hope for Gaza” (New Yorker) – which includes insights from her recent medical mission at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza. Select photos from her presentation are included in her article published in this issue. Also included in this Special Issue are two additional articles. One is a *Jumma Khutba* (Friday Prayer Sermon) from January 7, 1921 by Maulana Muhammad Ali, in which he expounds on the philosophy of human suffering and grief from an Islamic perspective. In this *Khutba*, Maulana Muhammad Ali also shares moving personal reflections from his own life on this subject. The other is an article by James Winston Morris titled “Opening the Heart: Ibn Arabi on Suffering, Compassion and Atonement” (reproduced from the Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Society, Volume 51, 2012), which beautifully elucidates the spiritual significance of the heart from the writings of the great Muslim mystical luminary, Ibn Arabi.

The livestream recording of the symposium is available on the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society YouTube page at: youtube.com/watch?v=Pw57lcyxHIs&t=9475s. We invite readers of all backgrounds to engage with these reflections on wellness, healing and peace. It is our hope that this special issue provides both inspiration and practical guidance on how to develop this spiritually grounded condition, as demonstrated by cultivating a “sound heart.” ■

“Wealth is in the heart and poverty is in the heart. Whoever is wealthy in his heart will not be harmed no matter what happens in the world. Whoever is impoverished in his heart will not be satisfied no matter how much he has in the world. Verily, he will only be harmed by the greed of his own soul.”
~ Prophet Muhammad

Wellness as reflected by “Qalbun Saleem”

Introduction to Symposium

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem (I begin in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful). Good morning everyone! I would like to greet you all with the Islamic salutation *Assalamu Aleikum*, which means “may peace be upon you.”

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society’s 2025 annual symposium. We are so grateful for so many of you who join us each year, and we are equally thrilled to have new friends who are joining us for the first time today. We are excited to present another interesting program for you all, and we really hope that each one of you will enjoy your time with us today!

As most of you are already aware, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society (which is the US branch of the international Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement) works to educate people about the true, spiritual basis of the Islamic faith. And although our work is international in scope, one way in which we do this locally is by hosting an annual symposium devoted to a topic about Islam that is relevant to some contemporary issue. In the past:

- Our symposiums dealt with demystifying certain terms like “**jihad**” and “**sharia**” that had become quite common in public discourse.
- We also addressed misperceptions about certain concepts, like that of an “**Islamic Caliphate**” and the Islamic principles on “**Human Rights**”.
- We also discussed, from an Islamic perspective, popular issues in society, like the connection between “**science and religion**”, and lessons on “**civility and religious harmony**”.
- The last couple of years, our symposiums dealt with the subject of “**Divine Love**” and the notion advanced by Islam that our purpose in life is to attain “**Union with the Divine**”.

Today, we will be addressing how Islam – which is often characterized as not just a religion, but a way of life – promotes wellness, healing and inner peace, through its various prescriptions. And we will be expounding on how optimal wellness – that holistic state of complete wellbeing – can only be fully realized by attaining, what the Holy Quran refers to as, a “**Sound Heart**”.

The importance of “**wellness**” is something that is

widely recognized in contemporary times. It is understood that people need to actively pursue choices and lifestyles that promote better *overall* health (and that includes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing). Whether it is performing mindful and contemplative practices like meditation, engaging in relaxation rituals like yoga, creating a positive mindset by reciting daily affirmations, making deliberate choices about a healthy diet or an exercise routine, society today appreciates that these types of conscientious efforts are extremely beneficial to achieving a fulfilling life of wellbeing. Islam, through its various prescriptions, advances a lifestyle that is very much aligned with this holistic approach to wellness. And this is not always appreciated even by Muslims themselves.

Interestingly, the very word “Islam” reveals this association with the notion of wellness. The word “Islam” has 2 meanings, both of which are significant. It means “peace” and it means “submission”. It incorporates 2 corresponding ideas: one being the goal, and other being the means to achieve that goal. Peace (a state of complete wellness) is the goal, and submitting to God’s will (by following the divine guidance provided to us) is the means to achieve it.

And this state of peace is often characterized in the Quran as a condition in which one is free from “**fear**” and “**grief**”:

... Surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, **no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.** (2:38)

And We send not messengers but as bearers of good news and warners; then whoever believes and acts aright, **they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.** (6:48)

Those who believe and do good deeds and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate — their reward is with their Lord; and **they have no fear, nor shall they grieve.** (2:227)

So, we’re told that those who take advantage of the guidance provided by God can achieve a state of peace in which neither fear (or anxiety) nor grief (or depression) – conditions that are so prevalent in society today – will control their lives.

And this is a principle of universal application. Achieving this state of inner peace – a condition in which the anxieties and depressions normally inherent in daily life no longer rule over us – is not something that is only limited to Muslims. We are told that *anyone* who submits to following divine guidance benefits with the resulting reward of a state of inner peace:

Nay, **whoever** submits himself entirely to God and he is the doer of good (to others), he has his reward from his Lord, and there is **no fear for such nor shall they grieve**. (2:112)

Surely those who believe and those who are **Jews** and the **Sabians** and the **Christians** — **whoever** believes in God and the Last Day and does good — they shall have **no fear nor shall they grieve**. (5:69)

Now, the divine guidance as presented in Islam prescribes a way of life that nurtures the whole self: it aims at providing physical wellbeing, emotional resilience, mental clarity and spiritual grounding. All of Islam's prescriptions – whether it be:

- the daily prayers,
- the directions on charity, fasting and pilgrimage,
- the dietary guidance,
- the restrictions on consumption of intoxicating substances, gambling and other addictive activities,
- and equally important, the belief system that reinforces a positive perspective on life and a constructive outlook on its purpose ...

... all of these prescriptions are aimed at achieving this goal of complete wellness and lasting peace. But the Quran is very explicit in that such prescriptions, to be meaningful and productive, are not to be performed ritualistically. Rather, they are to be practiced with clear purpose and intention. The objective being to transform the inner-self.

This is pointedly reflected by the Holy Quran admonishing those who do not adhere to the true spirit underlying the prescriptions and who are not authentic in their practices:

Hast thou seen him who belies religion?
That is the one who is rough to the orphan,
And urges not the feeding of the needy.
So woe to the praying ones,
Who are unmindful of their prayer!
Who do (good) to be seen,
And refrain from acts of kindness!
(Chapter 107, verses 1-7)

It is this transformation of becoming more self-aware in our actions, and selfless in our personality, by detaching oneself from purely materialistic pursuits, we are told, that provides for *lasting* peace, harmony and tranquility – that state of complete wellness that is so earnestly sought after today by so many. And the Holy Quran characterizes the attainment of this state of lasting peace as that of a *Sound Heart* (in Arabic, *Qalbun Saleem*).

And this description – that of a **sound heart** – is rather profound. The significance of the heart in Islam is more than just an organ that pumps blood throughout the body. It is viewed as the center of the spiritual essence of man. The Holy Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying:

There lies within the body a piece of flesh. If it is **sound**, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Verily, this piece is the **heart**. (*Bukhari / Muslim*)

The heart is considered the spiritual core for insight, comprehension and connection with the Divine.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, explained this concept of the heart being the spiritual core of man. He writes:

The word *qalb*, which is used for 'heart' in Arabic, has two meanings. There is the apparent or physical meaning, and then there is the spiritual meaning.

The apparent meaning is one of 'turning about' since it is the heart that causes the circulation of blood in our bodies.

In the spiritual sense, the word *qalb* implies that any spiritual progress an individual hopes to achieve can only be attained through the power of the heart. Just as the circulation of blood, which is critical to sustain human life, is powered by the heart, in the same manner, all forms of spiritual advancement are dependent on the power of the heart.

(Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad,
Malfuzat Volume II, 119.)

He further contrasts the rational faculties of the brain with the comprehension abilities of the heart. He writes:

There are certain philosophers in this day and age, who attribute all positive advancement to the brain. However, such people do not realize that the brain only possesses the ability to weigh arguments and evidence. Although it is the brain that possesses the faculty of reflection and retention, it is the **heart** that possesses a unique quality which advances it to a superior position.

The mind follows a forced, mechanical process, while the **heart** is free of this and functions in an unforced, natural way. It is for this reason that the **heart** holds an affinity with the Divine and is able to determine the truth merely through its faculty of sense, without any evidence or proof. This is why it is narrated in a *hadith* (a recorded saying of the Holy Prophet): "Seek a verdict from your **heart**."

The instruction is not to seek a verdict from your brain. It is the **heart** with which a connection with the Divine is linked ... This is a deep concept and indeed can be difficult to understand, but those who are experienced in purifying the soul know that all good values inherently exist within the **heart**. If the heart had not possessed these powers, the very being of human itself would be without purpose.

(Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad,
Malfuzat – Volume II, 119-120)

And this view – of the heart possessing the faculty of understanding, just as the ears possess the faculty of hearing and the eyes possess the faculty of sight – is repeatedly reinforced in the Holy Quran by its use of the phrase: “the ears, the eyes and the hearts”.

And here are just a few examples:

Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit, and gave you **ears and eyes and hearts** (32:9)

And He it is Who made for you **the ears and the eyes and the hearts**. (23:78)

He it is Who brought you into being and made for you **ears and eyes and hearts**. (67:23)

So the heart is included along with the sensory organs of the ears and the eyes.

And in the spiritual tradition of Islam, there is a deeper spiritual significance to this reference of the “ears and eyes and heart”. It is considered a metaphor for levels of faith.

- The **ears** symbolize the lower level of faith: it refers to when one accepts the Truth based on hearing it from others.
- The **eyes** then symbolize a medium level of faith: it refers to when one accepts the Truth based on seeing it for themselves.
- But the **heart** is what symbolizes the highest level of faith: it refers to when one is immersed in the Truth, not simply as a witness from the outside, but as one personally experiencing it, so that it embodies one’s essence and becomes a part of one’s being.

So, even in this spiritual interpretation of the reference to the “ears, eyes and heart”, it is the **heart** that is viewed as the ultimate seat of spiritual comprehension and recognition of the Divine. It is the place from which the Divine connection (or union) is most completely formed.

And this is why in the spiritual tradition of Islam, God is not considered to exist somewhere on the outside, far away, perhaps beyond the sky above, but rather is considered to reside *within* each person, particularly within the **heart** of man. The Holy Prophet Muhammad is reported to have relayed the following words as being spoken by God:

Neither my earth nor my heavens can contain me.
But what does contain me, is the **heart** of my
believing servant.

(Hadith Qudsi)

And the writings from saintly Muslim personalities throughout history are replete with such sentiments of the direct connection between God and the heart of each person. A renowned Sufi from the Indian sub-continent, named Bulleh Shah famously stated:

Tear down mosques, tear down temples too,
Break all the divides.
But do not break the human **heart**,
As it is there that God resides.

So, what exactly is a “**sound heart**”? What comprises this state of peace and contentment to which the Quran refers? The concept of a “**sound heart**” is understood as a condition of purity. It is a condition in which a person becomes selfless, giving up their purely materialistic desires, solely for the aspiration of being at one with God.



The term “a sound heart” (or *Qalbun Saleem* in Arabic) is found in a verse of the Quran which refers to a prayer by Prophet Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions:

My Lord, grant me wisdom, and join me with the righteous,
And ordain for me a goodly mention in later generations,
And make me of the heirs of the Garden of bliss,
And forgive my sire, surely he is of the erring ones,
And disgrace me not on the day when they are raised —
**The day when wealth will not avail, nor sons,
Save him who comes to God with a sound heart.** (26:83-89)

In this prayer, Prophet Abraham speaks of the day of resurrection (the day when all souls will be held accountable for their deeds). And he describes it as a day when neither wealth nor children will avail a person, meaning no material possessions or physical attachments of this world will be of any benefit. But, what will be of value on that day, will be one possessing a “**sound heart**”.

So, a “**sound heart**” is a condition of **detachment** of the materialistic clutter that distracts humans from their divine purpose. It is a condition of **acceptance** of all the hardships one may encounter in this life, and of **gratitude**, knowing that all the struggles inherent in life only serve the purpose of facilitating closeness to the Divine.

A beautiful illustration of this condition of a “**sound heart**” is found in an anecdote from the life of Abdul Qadir Jilani, a great saintly Muslim theologian from the 11th century. One day Abdul Qadir Jilani was in the middle of a session in which he was teaching some students. A messenger came running to him and relayed that one of his ships that was loaded with merchandise that had just set sail, had sunk. Upon hearing this, Abdul Qadir Jilani was quiet, and after some contemplation said “Alhamdulillah” (which means, “All praise is for God” and is a term used when one wants to show thanks to God). A little later, the messenger came running back and relayed that the previous news given was incorrect, and that his ship actually did not sink. Upon hearing this Abdul Qadir Jilani again became quiet, and after some contemplation again said “Alhamdulillah” (thanking God). After the session with his students ended, one of them asked him why he said “Alhamdulillah”, thanking God, upon hearing both good and bad news. He then explained that when he received the first message about his ship sinking, he searched within his heart to see if he was affected by any extreme sadness or distress by this material loss. And upon not finding any sadness, he

thanked God. And when he received the second message about his ship not sinking, he searched within his heart to see if he was affected by any extreme happiness by this material gain. And upon not finding any, he again thanked God. So, the lesson was that Abdul Qadir Jilani was not thinking about any material loss or gain, he was only concerned about the condition of his heart. Upon finding his heart being sound – loyal only to pleasing God and relying on God alone – he was content and thanked God by stating “Alhamdulillah”.

As I mentioned earlier, all of Islam’s prescriptions for how to live a life of wellness, is aimed at producing this peaceful condition of a “**sound heart**”. This, according to Islam, is the key to optimal wellness, an aspect of wellbeing that is often neglected. It is the spiritual component that is necessary for attaining a *lasting* state of peace and contentment. And we can see how Islam aims at nurturing this condition of wellness by cultivating a “sound heart” by taking the example of the Five Pillars of Islam.

The first Pillar is the *Shahada*. It is the affirmation of faith, that there is only One True God and that Muhammad is a true messenger of God. The *Shahada* provides a clear purpose in life, an element necessary for a life of wellbeing. To truly believe in God, one must submit to the will of God, and not anything else (whether it be desires for wealth, power, fame, or what have you). It is to detach from the clutter of daily distractions from one’s true purpose. And it exemplifies the true meaning of “detachment” in the wellness context – it does not mean you own nothing; it means nothing (but God) owns you! And affirming belief in Prophet Muhammad as a messenger of God, indicates that one accepts the Holy Prophet as the perfect exemplar of how to live a life that follows God’s guidance and aspire to achieve the ultimate state of peace.

And this goal of submitting to God – instead of one’s purely materialistic desires – is certainly not easy. It requires steady work to transform the inner self. And the remaining four Pillars of Islam then provide specific mechanisms by which this purpose may be fulfilled, and the resulting transformation of the heart may be accomplished.

The second Pillar is that of *Salat* (or **Prayer**). The Islamic mode of prayer is a meditative and contemplative exercise. It is a means by which one communicates (and develops a personal connection) with the Divine. It provides for one to literally ground themselves by placing their forehead to the ground, five times a day, every day, in prostration before God, and reminding oneself of his/her true purpose in life.

In the Islamic tradition, prayer is spoken of as “*muna-jat*”, meaning “confidential discourse” with God. And the Quran describes the peace within that is created through prayer as “**the heart at rest**”.

The third Pillar is that of **Zakat (or Charity)**. It is a requirement that every adult Muslim give 2.5% of their accumulated annual wealth for purposes of helping those less fortunate. The word “Zakat” literally means “it grew” (in reference to a plant) and signifies growing in purity through giving. It is understood that helping others is a cleansing, not to be considered as a burden, but rather as a blessed opportunity.

The fourth Pillar is that of **Saum (or Fasting during the month of Ramadan)**. The month of Ramadan each year is devoted for the purpose of spiritual renewal. It is a bootcamp for your soul (if you will), a month-long training for the moral disciplining of one’s thoughts and actions, and the furthering of self-control over one’s physical desires. It comprises abstaining from the most basic desires – food, drink and sexual relations – during the day for an entire month. In multiple instances, the Quran refers to those who fast as “*sai’h*”, meaning “spiritual wayfarers”.

The practical lesson intended to be learned is that rather than being a slave to one’s appetites and desires, one should condition themselves to be their master. The discipline achieved through this month of training, is then able to be applied to all aspects of life for the remainder of the year. And, it is an experience that cannot but awaken sympathy for the underprivileged in the **hearts** of the devotees, and inculcate a sense of gratitude for all that one has.

And finally, the fifth Pillar is that of **Hajj (or Pilgrimage to Mecca)**. The chief features of the Hajj focus around the Ka’bah (the cube-like building draped in a black curtain near the center of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca) and Abraham (the Patriarch of monotheistic faith). The Quran states the Ka’bah is located where man built the very first House of Worship to God. Islamic tradition further explains that this place of worship to God later became used for storing and revering idols and, after time, was reduced to a dilapidated state. And, that it was Abraham and his son Ishmael who then rebuilt the Ka’bah, restored it to a House of devotion to God alone, and enjoined the ceremonial rites of the pilgrimage.

So, from the first Pillar to the fifth, we come full circle: we start with profession of faith in One God, and we end with Pilgrimage to the sacred site dedicated by Abraham for worshipping One God. Just as Abraham cleared the Ka’bah of idols, the pilgrims appreciate the spiritual significance of attending the Sacred Mosque



with their hearts cleansed of all the idols and vices within.

Imam Jafar as-Sadiq, a very influential Muslim theologian of the 8th century, explained:

A **sound heart** (*Qalbun Saleem*) is a heart that meets its Lord while empty of anything other than Him.

And this is what the hajj symbolizes. As they *circle the Ka’bah*, the pilgrims recite the words “*labbaika Allah-umma labbaika*,” meaning “Here we are, O God! Here we are, in Thy presence.” The hajj is symbolic of the pinnacle of spiritual progress, when one attains a “sound heart”.

And the remaining presentations today, will explore different aspects of Islam’s prescriptions that are intended to facilitate achieving this state of complete wellness and inner peace – a condition of a sound heart. We hope the lessons we share today will be appreciated by everyone – persons of all faiths and no faith alike – and will provide a valuable lens from which the prescriptions of the religion of Islam may be viewed. Which brings me to the end of my introduction, I thank you very much for your kind attention. ■

Daily Prayer

A Rhythm of Meditation, Grounding and Reflection

By Maulana Kemal Hydal
(Edited by Mr. Omar Raja)

Introduction

My dear sisters and brothers, may the peace and blessings of God be upon each and every one of us here this morning. I want to compliment the organizers of this symposium for the selection of what we are discussing today: *Mindfulness and Mental Wellness*.

When it comes to religious meditation and spiritual practices linked to mental wellness, much of the scientific research has focused on Buddhist meditation, Zen, yoga, and related disciplines. In this presentation, however, I will focus on the Islamic prayer (*salat*), a daily conference with God and a time devoted to His remembrance five times a day, showing how it fosters mental wellness and the cultivation of a healthy mind. We find that Islamic prayer encompasses many practices that are widely associated with modern “wellness,” including meditation, contemplation, grounding and positive affirmation.

Daily Prayer as Meditation: Cultivating Calm and Mindfulness

God says in the Quran, and I interpret as follows:

Let prayer be observed from the waning of the sunshine (*zuhr* and *asr*) until the blackness of night (*maghrib* and *isha*), and the reciting at dawn (*fajr*). Indeed, the reciting at dawn is testified. But at night too, fight off sleep with it more than you can handle. It is how your Nurturer will awaken you to a praiseworthy status. (Quran 17:78–79)

Here, God sets for us a natural rhythm, moments throughout the day and night to pause, reflect, and regain mindfulness. This regular prayer also helps us manage our time and distance us from the small things that negatively impact our day, helping us feel calm and at peace. Humans are creatures of habit: they get up at the same time every day, make the same breakfast, and drive the same route to work. Morning rush may make you unhappy throughout the day, stuck in traffic, feeling stressed. Sometimes you adopt an attitude of constant rush and agitation from the morning, and it ruins your day. You do not have peace or a steadfast mind because of these external pressures. You are not ill or mentally unwell; you are a normal human being, but interacting negatively with your surroundings can upset you and make you anxious. Prayer is given at specific times to calm the mind, put us in touch with God, and guide us

in fulfilling our moral and spiritual responsibilities to ourselves and those around us throughout the day.

The specific times of prayer are five, as taught to us by the Prophet Muhammad: at dawn (*fajr*), midday (*zuhr*), afternoon (*asr*), sunset (*maghrib*) and night (*isha*). The timing of each prayer carries meaning. *Zuhr* informs us of the misfortunes that are going on in life. Things are waning; the sun is waning in the afternoon. *Asr* means squeezing. The troubles that we see in life increase. *Maghrib* means the darkness is impending; things are getting worse for us. And *Isha* means, sometimes, things are completely dark. All of these are times of prayer that deal with our moods, but *Fajr* tells us about the rays of light once more beaming upon us. Light comes. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and that’s why the Quran mentions that the *Fajr* prayer is evidence that there is a God.

In addition to their timing, each prayer cultivates mindful presence and reflection on our purpose, brought to fuller realization through the various postures assumed during the prayer: standing (*qiyam*), bowing (*ruku*), prostrating (*sajdah*), and sitting (*jalsa*). These movements allow us to pray with our whole bodies, not just with our words. At each stage, we recite certain prescribed verses in Arabic and words of remembrance that give the prayer its structure and gentle rhythm, while still leaving room for personal reflection and our own personal supplications at any stage of the prayer.

The cultivation of a mindful presence in prayer is so central that the Quran warns against those who pray without attention or sincerity: “Woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer!” (Quran 107:4–5) This shows that it is not enough to move through the motions. True prayer requires awareness, calm and sincerity. It is a meeting with our Creator, a daily conference with the Divine. In this sense, prayer is not only a spiritual practice but also a form of meditation: the mind focuses and seeks calm, while the heart reflects on the words and movements of prayer.

This idea is beautifully illustrated in an incident from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. A man entered the mosque and prayed. When he greeted the Prophet, the Prophet returned the greeting and said to him, “Go back and pray for you have not prayed.” This happened three times, until the man returned to the Prophet and said: “By Him Who sent you with the Truth, I cannot offer the prayer in a better way than this.” He continued, “Please, teach me how to pray.” The Prophet said, “When you stand up for prayer, say *takbir* (the declaration that God is the Greatest) and then recite from the Holy Quran and then bow down until **you feel at ease**. Then raise your head and stand up straight, then prostrate till **you feel at ease** during your prostration, then

sit with calmness till **you feel at ease** and do the same in all your prayers.”

By the Prophet’s teaching, prayer must be conducted with calm, ease, and presence; not hurriedly or without feeling. This complete focus required in Islamic prayer brings about a meditative state of calm and presence. Further, when prayer is approached with such calm and attentiveness, it naturally leads to reflection. The Quran, in fact, reminds us that through contemplation we find meaning and recognize divine purpose in creation: “Those who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, ‘Our Lord, You have not created this in vain!’” (Quran 3:190–191)

Grounding the Mind and Body Through Daily Prayer

Apart from the fixed timings for prayer and its meditative and contemplative aspects, the Islamic prayer is a way to “ground yourself,” as it involves adopting, as mentioned earlier, different physical postures: standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting. In prayer, we focus our attention fully on God, praying not just with words but with our entire body. *Sajdah* or prostration, in particular, is a powerful form of grounding. With our foreheads literally touching the ground, we affirm “God is the Most High.”

When I place my forehead on the ground, I am fully present and reminded that from this lowest point, I can rise just as the Prophets rose before me. Jesus, for example, is described in the Gospels as “falling to the ground” (Mark 14:35) and “falling on His face” (Matthew 26:39) before God in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane during a time of deep trial. It is a reminder that no matter how depressed or down we are in life, we can always get back up. As we rise, we say, “God is the Greatest,” my Nurturer is incomparably Great and He can lift me from the ground and make me rise again.

This sense of grounding through physical worship is not unique to Islam. Every aspect of prayer can be traced in previous scriptures. The format of prayer is such that among Hindus they sit cross-legged as Muslims do in certain forms of worship; Christians stand or kneel with eyes closed; Jews recline and bow down; while Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists place their forehead on the earth in obeisance. Islam brings these different expressions of worship together into a single, structured form of prayer.

The physical postures of prayer adopted during the Islamic prayer also carry lessons. When I start prayer, just before the prayer I say, and this is an indication to us that I am honest with myself: I am facing the truth and reality. My face is now before my Creator, who I know will assist and empower me to face the challenges

in life. And I must be upright as a human being. But I also go to the other extreme of being flexible and humble. Bowing teaches bending a little, sometimes essential for maintaining peace. Prostrating fully teaches complete humility, grounding us on our complete dependence on God.

Positive Affirmations in Daily Prayer: Nurturing Mind and Spirit

In the context of the Islamic daily prayer, I now turn to what modern wellness practices might describe as positive affirmations, which are repeated statements that can nurture mental well-being. Every time Muslims stand up in prayer, they recite the *Surah al-Fatihah*, the Opening chapter of the Quran, described within the Quran itself as the “grand Quran” and the “seven oft-repeated verses.” The verses are as follows:

1. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,
2. The Beneficent, the Merciful,
3. Master of the day of Requital.
4. Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help.
5. Guide us on the right path.
6. The path of those whom Thou hast bestowed favors,
7. Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

In the *first verse*, we affirm our connection to Allah, that is, to God. To “praise” God is not to simply acknowledge His greatness but to try and emulate the Divine attributes in our own lives. But what does it mean to emulate God’s attributes? The purpose of religion is to present God as a Being of attributes such as Nurturing, Gracious, Merciful, Loving, Kind and Forgiving, and to show how we attain closeness to God by bringing those attributes into our lives. And the very name “Allah,” by definition, signifies that God is the One Who contains all attributes of perfection.

In the *first verse*, we also affirm our place in the universe. We are a creation of the Divine, who has destined our journey to perfection. This verse addresses God as *Rabb*, often translated as “Lord.” But in Arabic, *Rabb* carries a deeper significance: it refers to the Being who not only creates everything from nothing but also nurtures it until it reaches its full potential. Just as a seed is provided with soil, water, and sunlight to grow into a plant, God provides all that is necessary for our development and growth. Thus, to affirm God as *Rabb* is to recognize ourselves as cared for, guided, and supported on our journey toward perfection.

In the *second verse*, we affirm that all our experiences in life are from the Tender Loving Mercy of the Divine (*Rahma*). Whether we perceive events as good or bad,

they ultimately serve our spiritual growth and benefit. This verse emphasizes two key attributes of God: *Rahman*, the Beneficent, and *Raheem*, the Merciful. *Rahman* reminds us that God freely provides all necessary resources, including sustenance, knowledge, and life itself without us asking anything in return. *Raheem* shows that when we act on these resources and knowledge, our efforts interact with divine mercy to bring meaningful outcomes, learning, and personal growth.

In the *third verse*, we affirm God is the Master of the Day of Requit. This awareness calls us to be mindful of our actions and purpose in life, as our condition in this life will determine what the Master of all creation has in store for us in our next life.

In the *fourth verse*, we affirm our dependence on God alone, the source of all goodness, guidance, and support. This is exactly what Adam did, the representative of the human personality, when he placed his dependence solely on God, confessing his weaknesses and seeking divine guidance. As he said:

Our Lord, we have put ourselves in the dark, and had You not protected us from our weakness and healed us, we would have been of the failed ones. (Quran 7:123)

The Quran thus presents confession and self-awareness from the very beginning of human creation. In this way, it offers spiritual insight, rooted in divine wisdom, that resonates with what modern research is discovering: that behavioral techniques, such as self-help therapies involving reflective exercises and verbal affirmations, can support mental health and wellness.

In the *fourth verse*, we also acknowledge that all worship belongs to Him alone. The Quran, elsewhere, says that true worship means to “baptize” or immerse yourself in the attributes of God, much like immersing a piece of cloth in dye. When you take it out, it takes the color of the dye. Similarly, immerse yourself in the attributes of God, and you will emerge with those attributes reflected in your personality. The God you worship must be reflected in the person you are. If I worship a loving God, I must be loving. If I worship a kind, charitable God, then I must be kind. My behavior, my human personality, must reflect the attributes of God.

In the *fifth verse*, we express our desire to be guided by Him along the path of goodness and virtue, while in the *sixth and seventh verse*, we affirm our desire to remain committed to the path blessed by God, while avoiding the paths that lead away from Divine favor.

Also, in the concluding verses, the Quran describes three kinds of attitudes toward God and one another. First are the *an amta alaihim*, those who seek God with

a sincere and humble heart. Allah responds to them, guiding them and bestowing His blessings. These individuals actively strive to embody Divine attributes in their lives, showing love, kindness, compassion, and justice in their actions. Others are *muhdub*, who remain indifferent to God and do not cultivate His attributes; this lack of engagement leads to a life disconnected from the fullness of Divine guidance. Finally, there are the *dhaalun*, those who reject God and turn away from His path. They do not emulate Divine attributes and thus miss the guidance that shapes a purposeful and meaningful life.

So, we see the essence of our prayers are contained within the *Sura Fatihah*. Repeated and affirmed multiple times during our five daily prayers, it is meditative as it brings calm to the mind; it is contemplative as it invites us to not simply remember, but to deeply ponder over God’s attributes and our place in the universe; and it invites reflection as we think about whether or not our actions in our everyday lives embody the lessons learned from prayer.

Hearts Finding Rest: Connecting with God and Cultivating Mental Wellness

The Quran wants us to understand that God is a Being Who is *reachable*. Do not look outside yourself. Seek Allah, who is within you, within your heart. That heart must be calm, what some traditions call *sakina*, the calmness of heart. The God you worship must be reflected in the person you are. Then, once we tune into Him, it is as if there is already energy flowing within us, like energy flowing in wires, and when you put the switch on, that energy flows and gives you light. We switch on that connection with God through prayer. It’s a switch that puts us into communication with the Divine entity, and that is what empowers us and gives us the ability to enlighten the world. And ultimately, it is through our connection with the Divine, strengthened through prayer, that our hearts truly find rest.

This is the experience of Prophet Zacharias, who said, “My Lord, my *Rabb*, I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer,” (Quran 19:4) and it is the experience of anyone who has ever turned to God in a moment of distress or loss and found unexpected help. Prayer does not take the place of effort. Instead, it guides our effort and brings clarity to us when life feels uncertain. As the Quran beautifully reminds us, “Surely, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.” (13:28) And to remember God is to remember and be mindful of His attributes, then reflect them in our own lives; a practice that nurtures “rest” for the betterment of our mental and spiritual wellness.

Daily Prayer as Community and Connection

My dear sisters and brothers, let us remember, while prayer brings inner peace and rest to the heart, it also strengthens our connection with others. It offers the kind of social interaction that is essential for well-being and helps counter the loneliness that is becoming an epidemic in society. The daily prayers allow for us to come together as a community and pray in a systematic way and in a shared rhythm, standing shoulder to shoulder, bowing, and prostrating as one. In these moments, each of us is reflecting quietly, yet we are aware we are part of something greater that brings us closer together.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my dear sisters and brothers, prayer benefits the worshipper, not God. Our five daily prayers, from dawn to nightfall, give our lives a steady rhythm of calm, grounding, meditation and reflection, practices associated with modern “wellness” that nourish the cultivation of a healthy mind. They provide opportunities to step away from the pressures of the day, connect with the Divine, and inspire us to imbue His Divine qualities in our everyday interactions with others. Prayer also brings us closer to each other, creating a sense of community and shared purpose.

Thank you very much. ■

Walking the Uphill Road

Gaza, the Soul, and the Work of Mercy

By Dr. Ayesha Khan

I spent five weeks at the end of 2024 living inside Al-Aqsa Hospital in central Gaza. It was an active battle zone; but what marked me most was not the violence—it was the stubbornly enduring humanity I witnessed in the most dehumanizing of circumstances.

I carried into Gaza a high-school memory: Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl refused to write a simple chronicle of horrors; instead, he asked



why some souls collapsed under the weight of suffering while others were enlarged by suffering. In this same vein, what follows is not a timeline of facts, but a set of moments from an overwhelmed emergency department under siege—and how those moments illuminated Qur’anic guidance on the development of the soul.

Moments That Would Not Let Me Go

There was a little girl with a big bow and a bigger smile who refused to let her injuries name her as she was wheeled toward surgery. Despite being critically injured, with all sorts of tubes and medications going into her, she decided to wake up and dress her best for her surgery that day.



A group of kids playing in the rubble and dust of a city that once was ran around me asking for a shekl: “No, I need a shekl!” I teased back and a young boy in the group suddenly stopped; he reached into his pocket and, with earnest seriousness, pressed his last coin into my hand. Another child danced through the dust, all smiles, eating his ration of rice as if it were a feast.

There were harder images. Many hospitals had been struck, and Al-Aqsa itself bore scars. With little infrastructure or even the simplest of resources, families and friends were the backbone of the hospital system. We had one computer for X-rays so family members would take pictures of the scree and show us the x-ray at the patient’s bedside. Orders were scribbled on scraps of paper, as the blockade didn’t even allow in paper, and carried by relatives from department to department.



Families acted as porter, nurse, and advocate. Sometimes that family was a nine year old child, like Heba, the last relative left to her father, speaking for him with an adult's steadiness. Or Sheikh Khaled, Instagram famous for clutching the body of his departed granddaughter and weeping, "Soul of my soul!" Now he was advocating for his childhood best friend, the only brother he had left.



I remember Ahlam, admitted with a severe head injury. I intubated her at night; by morning we removed the tube, found she had recovered most of her faculties. Happy at this small win, I continued my rounds. As I was walking away, her father ran after me and I worried that perhaps she had had more pain or a seizure when I left. But no. He wanted to let me know her little sister was quite jealous that the doctor hadn't examined her. I went back and did a very serious mock exam on the little sister. Satisfied, she flashed me a smile and a thumbs up from her little casted arm.

But there were also children we did not save. There were children whose entire families had died. There were children we saved but who didn't have enough food or nutrition for their wounds to heal.

Outside the hospital, dignity persisted in unexpected innovations. A boy who had lost both legs and a hand, strapped a rollerblade to one arm and pulled with his other so he could move independently around the tents. Another little boy, Umar, gathered soggy, discarded coffee cups from the street, set them in a row and poured sand in them to absorb moisture than scooping it out with a stick. It was a game he had invented, I thought. But in actuality, he shyly told me, he was drying them so his family could burn them later for cooking fuel. He was proud of his small system. He had a purpose helping his family get by.

My friend Khalil, a physician and artist, continued to create art with whatever he could find:

"991 is an unidentified child that was brought to me in



the ER, critically injured, due to an intense carpet bombing of a whole residential block, as I was checking his pulse, he took his last breathe. This has been a very reoccurring scene for the past 200 days, to have humans both injured or dead, labelled as unknown No# 991 isn't the first nor the last child, that I've witnessed passing away on the cold floors of the hospital. There was no time to send 991's blood samples to the lab, as he passed away almost immediately. And in his honour I didn't want his blood to be just thrown away, for his story to never be untold, for him to be forgotten."

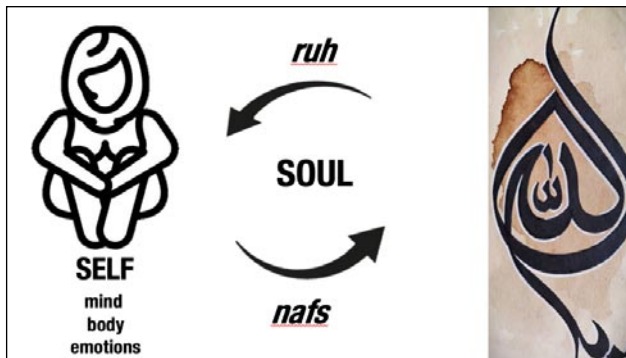
Khalil painted this picture with his blood.



Shifting Frames to Create the Nafs

What gives people strength not merely to endure, but to find peace amidst the struggle?

In the modern west, when we think of the "self," we may consider it to be our mind, body, heart or emotions. This is the self that so rawly defines our experience of life—the self we try to guard against pain. Depending on our circumstances, we may try to find peace— either by detaching from these parts of the self during difficult times or seeking some balance amongst them. Sometimes, into the idea of balance we add the "spirit" or "soul" as well. This idea of the "soul" captures the part of us that we can't otherwise attribute to the material parts of us.



In Islam, however, the concept of the soul is not nebulous, it is very well defined.

In the Qur'an, it is called the *rūḥ* when it is breathed into us by the Divine, and it constitutes the 99 attributes of the Divine in their seedling form. The *rūḥ* is the God-breathed life, the seed of the Divine attributes within us and this is the only stage in which the Qur'an only refers to the soul as *rūḥ*. Once the soul is part of you, and you start to act, the soul is called the *nafs*. Your mind, body, and heart all influence the choices you make, and those choices affect the *nafs* or the soul.

While your mind, body and heart are all part of you, it is the *nafs* that will survive after death and so it is the immortal part of you. This is the part Muslims are taught to think of first as the most precious part of the self. It develops through life in three stages, and our task is to cultivate it, stage by stage. These stages in the Qur'an are called "the animal spirit," "the self-reproaching spirit," and what the Qur'an names: "*O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased (and) well-pleasing.*" (89:27–30)

In a struggle between the material self and the *nafs*, Islam encourages you to choose the *nafs*. And it is this choice that allows the *nafs* to grow stronger. If you act in a way that exercises the 99 attributes, especially if it is a choice that requires you to choose a divine attribute at the expense of the material self, you strengthen your *nafs*, and it grows closer the Divine. For example, the attribute of mercy is strengthened only when there is an injury to forgive. Generosity is strengthened only when we give what we think we cannot spare.

An interesting frame shift happens here in how we face the struggle in our life— because struggle required to grow the *nafs* is no longer something that is negative or without purpose. In fact, the struggle is the very means by which we have an opportunity to grow. Think about a muscle and how it grows stronger—it does so when you exercise it against resistance. If a person adds extra weight for us when we are exercising that muscle, it is for our benefit. We even pay trainers good money to add weight for us and to keep pushing us. Conversely, in an atmosphere of no resistance, for example when humans are in zero gravity, muscles atrophy, they shrink up into nothing. The same is true of the brain. It thrives when it works against resistance. This is a concept called productive struggle. It causes myelin production in the brain, literally strengthening neural connection, giving us bigger brains, and preventing dementia. It releases dopamine to reward us for making the effort and to make sure we do it again. Because the brain has a competing part called the anterior cingulate gyrus that tells us to always take the easy way. Don't listen to it! Long term, doing hard things builds resilience, for both the

body and brain. It almost seems like we are created to thrive when we struggle.

The Qur'an tells us exactly this. It links chapters together by relevance to each other. Following the chapter describing, "the soul at rest" is the chapter which states plainly: "*We have certainly created man to face difficulties.*" (90:4) Hardship is not a design flaw; it *is* the design. Like muscles that strengthen against resistance, the *nafs* advances when it meets the weight of struggle.

In Gaza I saw people choosing actions aligned with the Divine attributes despite unbearably difficult circumstances, repeatedly: people choosing the health of the soul over the comfort of the body. The struggle was not only tolerated, but it was also regarded as benefiting the people facing it. Suffering became not merely something to "get through." It became the arena for the soul's training.

The Uphill Road

The Qur'an often informs the reader of the general nature of humans and then gives the person the guidance to act in a way that builds contentment for the soul. In this part of the Qur'an, immediately after telling us we are created to face difficulties, we are given a map for what course to take when we encounter such difficulties. The Qur'an portrays two paths—an easy descent and an "uphill road" that looks hard but leads to freedom and peace. Then it defines the ascent:

But he attempts not the uphill road, And what will make thee comprehend what the uphill road is? It is to free a slave, or to feed in a day of hunger an orphan closely related, or the poor man lying in the dust a needy person in the dust. Then he is of those who believe, & exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to mercy. (90:12–17)

Let's examine this verse and see how it applies to us. The Qur'an is a book revealed for all times and for it to still be relevant in a time when slavery is abolished, "freeing a slave" must include more than abolishing formal bondage. There are many forms of slavery that still shackle us: to race and tribe; to wealth and power; to custom when it eclipses conscience; to leaders when we surrender our judgment; to ignorance; to tyrannical politics and predatory economics; to social hierarchies that diminish women or any group; and, most insidiously, to the self. We must start our ascent on the uphill road by obtaining **freedom** from these.

After freedom from these shackles, the next step on the path is creating **equality**: "...*feed in a day of hunger an orphan closely related, or the poor man lying in the dust a needy person in the dust.*" Studies show that equal

society is necessary to the peace and health of all people in the society, whether they have money and means or not. Islam gives many practical methods for the establishment of an equal society that but here it emphasizes that the sustenance of orphans must be cared for and their condition improved till they can stand as equal members in society. Here, the word "closely related" is to emphasize that all orphans are closely related to every individual in a free society. A child is the child of their parent, but the orphan is the child of every Muslim. Similarly, caring for those in need, whether of humble means or poor, here signified by "*lying in the dust*," is necessary to establishing a free and equal society.

Freedom and equality are prerequisites to having true faith. So only after the path to establishing these is faith mentioned: "*Then he is of those who believe, & exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to mercy.*"

The Qur'an is not satisfied with a person making the uphill climb themselves. A person should help others do the same.

Although the ascent calls for extraordinary strength, the distinctive mark of faith which instills bravery and courage is that a person should take those weaker than them to the top of the mountain too. Additionally, along the journey, your mindset should be that the struggle is an opportunity, not a test. It is an opportunity, because





an individual gains strength of body and mind and the society gains a healthy individual.

In Gaza, I saw, despite terrible constraint, a people working at these chains. In a place where mosques and churches had been struck down, I saw worship freed from buildings: prayer moved into living rooms and hospital corridors; sermons were given by whoever was able where people gathered—showing that it was not to an institution or leader that people were following but rather it was God. And when no gathering was possible, prayer continued solitarily. “Indeed, My earth and My heaven cannot contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant contains Me,” as the tradition says.

I saw a fierce hunger for knowledge—doctors, students, nurses, and even patients gathering for impromptu lessons; literacy as resistance to superstition. I saw women leading clinical teams and logistics with competence and calm. I saw neighbors taking in orphans so completely a person would not know the children had lost parents. I saw people labor without pay so the fragile bonds of society would hold. And I saw selflessness: a boy offering me his last shekel; another boy, limbless, teaching himself to move forward anyway.

The Qur’anic order is striking. Freedom and equality are not the *result* of faith; they are the road *into* it. Only

after walking this path—prying open the chains and feeding those who hunger—does the verse speak of being “among those who believe,” and then immediately of exhorting one another to *ṣabr* (steadfast patience) and *raḥma* (mercy). True faith is communal ascent. The mark of belief is not reaching the summit alone but taking others upward with you.

Limits and Lament

I would be dishonest to end here, only summing up the beauty of what I experienced. There are limits to shifting frames. Hunger gnaws. Bombardment maims. There are days when “productive struggle” is not a noble training ground but a grinding threat to survival. My friend Khalil said to me recently, “*Al-ḥamdu li-Llāh*. My faith is the only way to bear this madness.” Faith does not erase the need for bread, safety, or justice. It does, however, keep the *nafs* from collapsing into despair while we work for all these.

With Difficulty, Ease

The verse that has followed me home is repeated for emphasis: “*Surely, with hardship is ease. Surely, with hardship is ease.*” (94:5–6) I used to hear it as a promise of alternation—darkness followed by light. In Gaza I learned another reading: perhaps the ease is not beyond the difficulty but within it. The ease is the clarity that comes when we begin to break our chains and shoulder the work the Qur’an names—freeing, feeding, lifting, exhorting to patience and to mercy. The ease is the steadiness of a soul that knows why it was created and where it is going.

Children taught me this—the girl with the bow; the boy with the rollerblade; Umar drying paper cups for fuel with quiet pride. They—and so many others—walked the uphill road. The question, as I return to my own city and its comforts, is whether I will walk it with them.

May God make us of those “well-pleased and well-pleasing”—souls at rest not because life is gentle, but because, by His grace, we used our hardships to become gentle. And may He grant us the courage to free what is bound, to feed who is hungry, and to call one another—together—toward patience and mercy. ■

Holistic Health

Aligning Body and Spirit through Conscious Choices

By Dr. Haleema Saeed

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. This definition shows that health is a condition that is holistic in nature. Hence, the popularity of the term “holistic health,” which is used to emphasize the multi-faceted approach to viewing health. Holistic health is in essence a state of internal balance, not just an absence of illness, that underscores the importance of the connection between mind, body, and spirit. The concept of there being a deep connection between body and soul is an integral part of Islamic philosophy. In fact, every injunction of the Holy Quran has a physical and spiritual context with an emphasis on alignment between the two.

The Quran states: “O you who believe, why say you that which you do not? “(61:2). This verse clearly commands the believer to ensure that there is congruence in their intentions and actions. This congruence requires constant and persistent effort. Just like once a rocket is launched there is constant recalculation and adjustment to keep it on target, similarly, the human mind and body requires repeated reminders to ensure the spirit and body are aligned. One way in which Islam provides for this alignment is in the form of the five daily prayers. The daily prayers serve as a repeated reminder to the body about the true purpose of life and bring the focus back from the hustle bustle of physical life to the goal of spiritual development.

There is a prayer in the Holy Quran that states:

Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the Fire”(2:201)

This prayer encapsulates the concept of physical and spiritual alignment. It is a prayer for actions in the physical world that translate to goodness in the spiritual realm. Complete peace, which can be described as the absence of the metaphorical fire of unrest, is only achieved when the body is doing what the spirits need to develop. Only when all the water in a stream flows in the same direction does one see the calm flowing water.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (the great Muslim Reformer of the fourteenth century, the Promised Messiah and Mehdi) placed great emphasis on recognizing the deep connection between our body and spirit. As an example, unless you are physically clean you cannot attain spiritual purity. As a Muslim washes his hand, mouth, face and feet with water in *wudhu* (i.e. ablution)

before each prayer, he/she attains physical cleanliness and at the same time symbolically purifies him/herself of any wrong he/she may have done using these body parts. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad explained: “Just like when you travel, you need a car and supplies to get you there, but the real purpose is to get to your destination.” Hence, you must take good care of your car and keep it well maintained so your journey goes smoothly but the direction that it is headed must remain aligned to the final destination.

According to Islam the Holy Quran contains the road map to be followed by our body to reach the final destination of *nafs e mutmainnah* (i.e. the spiritual station where the soul is at rest). The Quran describes itself as:

“A healing for what is in the hearts, a guidance and a mercy for the believers.” (10:57)

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad states in his book, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*:

“The purpose of the Quran is to convert man from an animal to a human, and from a human to a moral human being, and ultimately from just a moral human being to a God conscious human being.”

Thus, every injunction in the Quran related to the physical world has a rationale connected to spiritual development, and the Quran teaches us to make these constant conscious choice to define the path of our spiritual progress.

Lets take a simple example of the Quranic injunction related to food consumption. According to a study, humans spend a significant part of their waking hours either eating or thinking about food. By giving clear injunctions about food, the Quran ensures that a Muslim thinks about the spiritual impact of whatever he/she is eating. For instance, the following are some general injunction related to food:

“... and eat and drink and be not extravagant; surely, He loves not the extravagant.” (7:31)

“O men, eat the lawful (*halaal* - lawfully acquired) and good (*tayyib*) things from what is in the earth.” (2:168)

“... eat of the good things (Tayyib-pure/clean) that We have provided you with and give thanks to Allah if He it is Whom you serve.” (2:172)

“And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive.” (76:8)

“O you who believe, eat of the good things that We have provided you with, and give thanks to Allah if He it is Whom you serve.” (2:172)

“He has forbidden you only what dies of itself, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any other (name) than (that of) Allah has been invoked. Then whoever is driven by necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin is upon him. Surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” (2:173)

If we study the above verses, we find that the Quran is asking us to make conscious food choices: to think about where it came from, whether it is clean, whether it was obtained lawfully, whether it creates disparity among people by not being accessible to the underprivileged, whether it is extravagant, etc. At the same time, it is teaching us to appreciate what has been made available to us to consume and be grateful for what we have. As a Muslim reflects on these questions, the simplest meal becomes a lesson in purity, sharing, gratitude and balance.

Conversely, when we look at the few things that are strongly prohibited, we find a mental and spiritual rationale for that as well. Let’s take the example for prohibition of alcohol consumption, which are relayed in the Quran as follows:

“They ask thee about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: In both is a great sin and (some) advantage for men, and their sin is greater than their advantage....Thus does Allah make clear to

you the messages that you may ponder.” (2:219)

“O you who believe, go not near prayer when you are intoxicated till you know what you say.” (4:43)

“O you who believe, intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the devil’s work; so shun it that you may succeed.” (4:90)

So, the Quran accepts that there may be some benefits in intoxicants but clarifies that the harm is greater than the good. The greatest harm is that it impedes spiritual progress and interrupts the constant alignment of spirit and body in the direction of the Creator. Prayer, one of the key components of the journey of spiritual and physical alignment, requires complete focus and clarity of thought, and as a result the intoxicated state is forbidden because it impedes progress towards this goal. Scientific evidence also confirms this. The American Cancer Society Guidelines for Diet and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention (2020) recommends that it is best not to drink any amount of alcohol and, if one still consumes, it should be limited to not more than one drink per day for women and not more than two drinks per day for men. In fact, every physical guidance in the Quran has a rational physical basis that is being increasingly accepted in modern society. The Quran itself pro-

Benefits of Intermittent Fasting



Aids in Weight Loss



Improves Metabolism



Promotes Heart Health



Improving Brain Function



Can Decrease the Chances of Cancer



Boosts Energy Levels



vides both rational explanations and the spiritual impact of every form of guidance it provides. These prescriptions, when reflected upon, understood and practiced, lead to not only optimal physical health, but also the uncovering of parallel spiritual benefits.

I will end with a quote from the famous book the “Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam” by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. In this book, he responds to a question about Islam’s teachings on the physical, moral and spiritual state, by explaining:

“According to the Holy Quran the physical state of man has a very strong relationship with his moral and spiritual states, so much so that even a person’s manner of eating and drinking affects his moral and spiritual states. If the natural state of a person is subjected to the control of the directions of divine law it becomes his moral state and deeply affects his spirituality ...

That is why the Holy Quran has laid stress on physical cleanliness and postures, and their regulation in relation to all worship and inner purity and spiritual humility. Reflection confirms that physical conditions deeply affect the soul. For instance, when our eyes are filled with tears, even if the tears are artificially induced, the heart is immediately affected and becomes sorrowful ...

The purpose of the Quran is to convert man from an animal to a human, and from a human to a moral human being, and ultimately from just a moral human being to a God conscious human being.”

Thank you so much. ■

Grief and Healing

Mindfulness and Perspective in Times of Loss

By Sadru Dean Sahukhan, Esq.

Mindfulness of “Acceptance” and “Gratitude”

Grief is a powerful and deeply personal experience that affects us in many ways. Healing can feel difficult and uncertain, as everyone processes loss differently, and some endure more loss than others. A key part of healing is acceptance: slowly and gently surrendering to the reality of loss, even when it feels unbearable. One practice that can offer support during painful times is mindfulness, not just being aware of our emotions, but engaging in thoughtful reflection on the deeper purpose of life. This kind of mindful reflection helps ground our grief in a broader spiritual perspective, opening the door to hope and eventual healing.

This brings us to the profound connection between mindful acceptance and the essence of Islam. In Arabic, the word Islam means total submission or surrender to the will of God. In this definition, one sees that “acceptance” is an integral aspect of the word. One submits, by peacefully “accepting” the will of God. Not unwillingly or by force, but rather voluntarily and with gratitude. So, the qualities of “acceptance” and “gratefulness” that have become important aspects of mindfulness in society today, are inherent in the very word and foundation of Islam.

And this understanding of mindful living can provide meaningful guidance in navigating the complex and highly personal journey of grief.

Grief, like joy, is part of the human experience. Islam acknowledges it fully. Even the Prophet Muhammad, the exemplar of spiritual strength, expressed grief. When his son Ibrahim passed away, he wept. His companions were surprised, and he said “tears of grief are a mercy.”

This teaches us grief is not a sign of weakness. It’s deeply human. And, in the words of the Prophet, it’s even a kind of mercy. But grief is not the same as complete despair. Feeling sad and missing someone deeply is different from losing all hope.

Grief also isn’t always tied to personal loss. It can arise from a place of deep love and moral concern; when we see others suffer or turn away from truth and guidance. This is a form of spiritual grief, which comes from a longing for others to find peace, purpose, and closeness to the Divine. The Prophet himself experienced this broader kind of sorrow. The Quran reflects his anguish:

“Perhaps you would kill yourself with grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message...” (18:6)

This verse shows the extent of his compassion, not just in private moments of loss, but also in his deep care for others’ spiritual well-being. His sorrow was grounded in love and sincerity, reminding us that even this form of grief is part of the prophetic legacy.

Islam gives us tools to cope with all forms of grief in ways that are healthy and constructive. It also reminds us that even in our darkest moments, we are not meant to lose our sense of purpose nor our hope in this life.

Perspective on the Purpose of Life

According to Islam, the very purpose of this life is to develop closeness to God, a closeness that is nurtured by striving to become more God-like in one’s character. This means growing in qualities such as mercy, patience, justice and compassion. When we truly

embrace this perspective, even the most sorrowful situations can be placed within a broader context, preventing grief from overwhelming our entire being.

The Quran affirms that trials are a part of life and serve as opportunities for spiritual growth:

“And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient.” (2:155)

Hardship, then, is not random or meaningless; it is an opportunity for spiritual refinement. Through trials, we are invited to cultivate patience, compassion, and resilience; virtues that, when sincerely adopted and lived out, help us endure suffering while drawing nearer to God. Grief, in particular, is a powerful emotional experience that can awaken humility, deepen empathy, and motivate acts of generosity. How often does hearing of someone else’s hardship stir a desire to help, to give, or to simply show kindness?

Islam not only acknowledges this emotional depth; it enriches it. It provides certain perspectives that, when adopted and exhibited in daily life, can serve as powerful coping mechanisms during times of hardship or distress. These perspectives help transform pain into purpose, and grief into a pathway for healing connection with others, and spiritual elevation. As we navigate this journey, Islamic teachings offer two principles to ground and support us during moments of deep sorrow.

The first is *muraqaba*, which refers to being always aware of God’s presence and being mindful of the fact that God is the Creator of everything we have including our respective lives and material things. To Him belongs everything. This concept is aptly conveyed in the following Quranic verse:

“When a misfortune befalls you, Say: “Surely we belong to God and certainly to Him we must all return”. (Quran 2:156)

The second is *tawakkul*, meaning “Trust in God” — trusting in God wisdom and decree can help individuals cope with loss. We accept God’s will regardless of what they may be. Everyone will experience trials and tribulations as part of life’s journey. These trials and tribulations are not meant to punish but rather opportunities to facilitate the development of one’s soul. The Holy Quran emphasizes that one must trust in the divine plan — that everything, the good and the bad, are divinely planned to provide for the development of one’s soul.

Together, *muraqaba* and *tawakkul* help us see grief in a new light. They don’t ask us to hide our pain, but to face it with trust and awareness, knowing that even our sorrow can bring us closer to God. Maulana Rumi explains this profound understanding of the spiritual benefits of

pain and sorrow with the following enlightening words: “The wound is where the light enters you.”

Developing patience: A remedy for enduring hardship

The primary mechanism provided in the Quran for dealing with grief and distress is to develop the quality of “patience.” I’ll share two verses from the second chapter of the Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah that expound on this guidance. These verses are commonly cited when searching the Quran for guidance on healing. I believe this is because they touch on hardship and loss in a manner that encompasses the notion that we are not ever alone, God is with us at all times, and that there is a divine plan for each of us.

O you who believe, seek assistance through patience and prayer. **Indeed, Allah is with those who are patient.**” (Qur’an 2:153)

This verse emphasizes that patience is essential for preserving through hardship or loss. It is this patience that allows us to live day by day and ultimately find peace. For those who are religious, this verse also incorporates the idea that God, is the source of this patience as He carries us through these stages. The comfort of knowing that God is with you all along every step of your affliction can bring great peace into one’s heart.

Similarly, this verse encompasses a deeper Islamic concept, which is the fact that tests and trials in life are necessary for spiritual development. Along with this comes powerful reassurance that God knows how much each soul can bear. Those who have the greatest capacity for Iman, faith, are shown the greatest burdens, and they are mindful of the fact that God, will not impose on us any form of loss or hardship that we cannot handle or bear.

The second verse is from chapter 2 verse 286, which states:

“Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope ...”

Having a firm belief in the idea that no burden is placed on a person that he/she cannot bear, provides confidence and reassurance that one has the strength to overcome all obstacles. It instills confidence that, even when circumstances are painful and challenging, one possesses the inner strength and inherent abilities, granted by Allah to endure and overcome.

This belief lays the foundation for developing true patience; not merely waiting for pain to pass, but actively facing it with faith and resilience. In Islam, patience doesn’t mean the absence of grief. Rather, it’s the willingness to stay connected to God during sorrow: through prayer, through mindful reflection, and through

resisting despair. It's remembering that life has a higher purpose, and that beyond this struggle lies something far greater; a return to God.

Greatest form of grief: loss of a loved one

Probably the most difficult challenge one experiences in life is coping with the loss of a loved one. Such a loss brings profound grief for most people. Yet, Islam offers a deeply comforting perspective on death and the hereafter, providing a meaningful way to cope with this pain. Death is not the end; rather, it is a transition to the next life, a return to God.

This profound truth is touchingly captured in a verse mentioned earlier, but worth revisiting now in this new light:

“Surely we all belong to God, and it is to Him that we must all return.” (2:156)

Earlier, we reflected on this verse in the context of accepting life's trials with awareness of God's presence. But in moments of deep personal loss, its meaning becomes even more intimate; reminding us that the ones we love have returned to the One who made them.

This truth is further echoed in another verse:

“Everyone on it [that is, the earth] passes away—and there endures forever [only] the person of your Lord, the Lord of glory and honour.” (55:26-27)

This reminder affirms that while our losses may feel overwhelming, they are part of the fleeting nature of worldly existence, whereas God's presence and glory remain eternal. This sentiment, widely shared in both Islamic and Christian traditions, reflects a powerful truth: *our loss is great, but God is greater*. In this truth, we find solace.

We also find profound comfort in the response of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) when a man asked him about the Hour, the Day of Judgment. The man asked, “*When will the Hour be?*” The Prophet replied, “*What have you prepared for it?*” The man answered, “*Nothing, except that I love Allah and His Apostle.*” The Prophet then said, “*You will be with those whom you love.*”

This promise fills the grieving heart with hope. Without this perspective, the loss of a loved one can feel absolutely devastating, as though it marks a final and absolute end. But, according to the Islamic tradition, God reminds us that what seems like an ending is actually a return, a beginning to something far greater.

This beautiful viewpoint is echoed in the words of Maulana Rumi; he writes:

When I die,

when my coffin is being taken away,
you must never think I am missing this world.
Don't shed any tears,
don't lament or feel sorry.
I'm not falling into a monster's abyss.
When you see my body being carried,
Don't cry for my leaving.
I'm not leaving, I'm arriving, at eternal love.
When you leave me in the grave,
Don't say goodbye.
Remember a grave is only a curtain for the paradise behind.
You'll see me descending into a grave.
But know I will rise.
How can it be an end, when the sun also sets and
the moon also descends.
It may look like the end,
But what may seem like a sunset, in reality is a
dawn.
It is only when the grave takes your body,
That your soul is freed.
Have you never seen a seed fallen to earth rise
again with a new life?
Why then should you doubt the rise of a seed
named “human”

Islam further deepens this understanding through its teachings on the nature of heaven and hell, not as fixed places of reward and punishment, but as reflections of the soul's inner condition. A person who was at peace with God in this life will find themselves in a heavenly state in the next life. One who remained distant from God and was in a fiery state of distress in this life will be in a hellish state in the next. But even this is not without hope. In Islam, hell is not an eternal punishment but a means for purification and reformation, a process through which the soul is prepared to receive divine mercy and eventual peace. The goal is always reunion with the Divine.

The belief that death is not the end, but a return to God, and that even suffering leads the soul towards its ultimate reunion with the Divine is beautifully captured in the words of Maulana Rumi:

“This place is a dream. Only a sleeper considers it real. Then death comes like dawn, and you wake up laughing at what you thought was your grief.”

So, the world with all its struggles, joys and griefs, is not the ultimate reality. We wake up from the dream of life into a greater spiritual reality. We realize that the things we grieved weren't as real or permanent as we once believed them to be.

Such reflections remind us that the journey toward peace in the hereafter begins with cultivating peace in

this life. By developing these qualities of mindfulness, and drawing on them in times of grief and hardship, a person can nurture a sound heart: one that is at peace with themselves, at peace with others, and at peace with God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Islam offers meaningful coping mechanisms to help navigate the pain of loss, centered on practicing acceptance, gratitude, and patience. These qualities, combined with mindful remembrance of a living God, provide deep spiritual support during times of grief. As the Holy Quran states: “Now surely in God’s remembrance do hearts find rest.” (13:28) This mindful remembrance brings profound comfort and tranquility to the grieving heart. Patience, in particular, is emphasized as the healing antidote that helps transform sorrow into strength. Islam teaches that the purpose of this life is to develop closeness to God by growing in divine qualities such as mercy and compassion. This perspective allows individuals to place their loss into a broader spiritual context, preventing despair from taking over. Moreover, Islam reminds us that life does not end with this world, there is a hereafter, a return to God, which brings comfort and hope beyond worldly loss. Ultimately, Islam guides us to see loss not as an end, but as part of a greater journey back to our Creator, where true peace and healing are found. This perspective provides invaluable benefit to the psychological wellness of a person. But, the key for being able to put it into practice, and for it to be firmly ingrained in one’s personality, is to first cultivate a “sound heart.” ■

The Philosophy of Human Suffering and Grief

Jumma Khutba from January 7, 1921

By Maulana Muhammad Ali
(translated by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad)

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah.

After this, I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O you who believe, seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient.

And speak not of those who are slain in Allah’s way as dead. Nay, (they are) alive, but you perceive not.

And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient.

Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah’s, and to Him we shall return.

Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course.

The Safa and the Marwah are truly among the signs of Allah, so whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House or pays a visit (to it), there is no blame on him if he goes round them. And whoever does good spontaneously — surely Allah is Bountiful in rewarding, Knowing. (2:153-158)

Facing Adversity is Key Towards Spiritual Development

In these verses, the believers who are addressed in words: “O you who believe...” (2:153) are told in clear terms: “And We shall certainly try you with something of fear ...” (2:155). This means they will be tested through trials. Their hidden strengths will be manifested by facing fear, hunger, loss of property, and lives and fruit. “...And give good news to the patient” (2:155). These words offer solace to those who face these difficulties with patience. Such are those when they encounter adversity; they say, “...Surely we are Allah’s, and to Him, we shall return.” (2:156). “Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course.” (2:157) The concluding words of this verse, “...those are the followers of the right course.” (2:157), always indicate that this goal cannot be achieved without meeting these preconditions, i.e., without facing the trials and tribulations. The Quranic phrase, “...these it is that are successful” (3:104), has a similar significance. In this verse, the believers are thus given the good news that they can successfully follow the right course only by encountering these adversities.

Quite a few people consider suffering and distress only as a form of punishment. They find it hard to understand why the Merciful and Bountiful God would send suffering and sorrow to His helpless and weak creation. On the other hand, it is also said that a mother’s love for her child is like a candle compared to the Light of God’s love for humanity. His love and compassion for His creation are unlimited. In the Holy Quran, the attributes of Allah, the Beneficent, and the Merciful have been repeated hundred and fourteen times. The Holy Quran also says, “...and My mercy encompasses all things...” (7:156). We, however, also observe the immense suffering of humanity, and a materialistic person thinks, why does God, the Most Merciful, the All-Powerful, subject

His creation to such suffering? These two characteristics seem mutually incompatible.

Hindu Doctrine of Salvation

The Hindu religion has also considered human suffering only as punishment. As a result of this error, suffering and distress are understood to be the basis of reincarnation. Since God is free of faults, why would He subject His creation to suffering, they ask? Their answer is that man is liable to sin; he is, therefore, reincarnated and suffers due to his evil deeds. Moreover, they argue how can the All-Merciful God punish us with distress and suffering without any sin committed by us. One can assume that a youthful person has sinned, but how can a Merciful and Bountiful God cause a child to suffer without reason? Therefore, they conclude the child must have committed some sin in a previous life for which it now faces distress and affliction.

Undoubtedly, Punishment Without a Crime is Unfair.

It is quite true that punishment without a crime is injustice, but punishing someone without informing them about the nature of their offense is also unfair. How wrong can it be that punishment is meted out, and the subject is not informed of his wrongdoing? After all, this also cannot be the doing of the Merciful and Bountiful God, that He would chastise anyone without letting him know the nature of their offense.

In this verse, Allah the Most-High has removed this very same doubt. He states that suffering and distress will undoubtedly come but does not consider them punishment. Those mentioned here are the very same believers who have sacrificed everything in the way of Allah; they have not even hesitated to lay down their lives for this purpose. Allah praises their deeds in the following words; “And they who pass the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing.” (25:64). “And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just means is ever between these.” (25:67) “And they who call not upon another god with Allah and slay not the soul which Allah has forbidden, except in the cause of justice, nor commit fornication; and he who does this shall meet a requital of sin.” (25:68)

The Holy Quran is full of their praise and does not mention any evil deeds on their part. Those with such a high standard of purity are thus addressed by Allah the Most-High in words: “And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits...” (2:155). You indeed follow Allah’s commandments, and your lives are free of sin, but you cannot achieve perfection until and unless you are subjected to suffering and distress. And without facing such

afflictions, you cannot be the follower of the right course. This also seems unreasonable as to why a believer cannot reach perfection without facing suffering and distress.

Two Types of Afflictions

The truth of the matter is that afflictions are of two types. One kind is those humans bring upon themselves, and the other is those brought upon them by others. The suffering a person brings upon himself is not very difficult to bear. Those levied by others upon him are hard to endure patiently, and one frequently may lose their determination. These are, however, the kind of sufferings whereby he can reach true perfection. There is no doubt that fire is harmful and consumes everything, but it carries with it many benefits. It can turn a mold of raw clay into a firm brick. Thus, a person cannot get strong without adversity, nor does his faith bloom to full fruition. When one of my close relatives suffers, it is a time of great trial for me, and I ‘am challenged to show kindness and compassion toward them. Without suffering and distress, love and loyalty could not have reached perfection. One can show love and devotion to a person in good health, but the real test to manifest these qualities is when that person is sick and in distress.

Afflictions Test Love and Loyalty

The sum and substance of religion are that one should love God and His creation for His love’s sake. The proof that one loves God can only be manifested through the love of His creation. The true worth of this love can only be determined when one remains steadfast in times of affliction. One who has not taken this test cannot provide proof of his love and compassion. True love can only be known during times of suffering and distress. A poet has expressed this thought well:

A true friend indeed holds his friend’s hand during distress and need.

Someone who tries to test love and loyalty in good times must correct a mistake. Strength and firmness in commitment cannot evolve without encountering suffering and distress. “Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord...” (2:157). **Grief and sorrow become a source of blessing and mercy for these people.**

A Personal Experience

Somebody has expressed well that “personal experience provides the best lesson for a person.” It is helpful to present a personal experience that may benefit others. For two years, I tended to my ten-year-old sick daughter and faced many difficulties for her sake. My friends consoled me and expressed their feelings in letters,

empathizing with my problems. But somebody who knows my inner feelings is aware that this protracted period of caregiving was a source of comfort for me. Getting up at night to tend to her needs and crying before the Lord for her, striving during the day to get her medicines and take her to the doctors, all brought tranquility to my soul. There is no doubt that her suffering was a source of distress for me. No one can call this comforting, but the thought that my loved one was in distress and I was serving and attending to her illness, and Allah the Most-High provided me with this opportunity, was also a source of serenity. Having lost this loved one, that feeling of tranquility has gone. To show compassion towards one's near relative is due to their natural bond. Hidden within this compassion is the lesson whereby one learns to be compassionate towards God's creation. Just as one feels love and empathy for the near kindred, one should have the same feelings for the rest of God's creation.

Without Compassion for God's Creation, One Cannot Form a Bond with the Creator.

Hazrat Abu Huraira reports: "The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: Allah the Most-High will ask on the Day of Judgment, "O son of Adam, I was sick, and you did not tend to me, he will answer, my Lord you are my Provider, Master of all, how could I have tended to you? The Lord will state: Did you not know that one of my servants was ill, and you did not visit him? If you had done so, you would have found Me near him. The Lord will say, "O son of Adam, I asked you for food, and you did not feed me. He will reply, O my Lord, how could I have fed you? You are the Master of all creation. "Don't you know that one of my servants asked you for food? You would have found its reward with Me if you had fed him?" God will say, "Son of Adam, I asked you for water, and you refused. He will say, why would I have given You water? You are The Master of the universe! The Lord will say my servant asked you for water, and you did not give it to him. If you had given him a drink, you would have found its return with Me." (*Sahih Muslim*).

In the verse under discussion, Allah the Most-High has called suffering and distress a blessing and mercy. This is because they engender sympathy toward God's creation in the hearts of those who undergo trials and tribulations. **The fundamental objective of religion is to generate a genuine desire in one's heart for the service of humanity. Without encountering suffering and distress, man cannot feel empathy toward the rest of God's creation.** The prayer mentioned in the *Hadith* for the funeral of a child also shows the excellence of the Holy Prophet's example in this matter. All of the Holy Prophet's prayers manifest this excellence.

They reflect the heart condition of the one Allah chose when he offered these supplications. Those who do not believe in inner revelation (*wahy khafiyy*) to the heart of the Prophet should look at these prayers. They bring a special feeling to one's heart, which could not have been possible without a Divine connection. Just look at this funeral prayer. Even in sorrow and pain, we are taught to say, "All praise is for the Lord of the worlds." On its surface, it seems strange that a dear one has left us forever; his bier is in front of us, and we are saying, "All praise is for Allah the Lord of the worlds."

What one may ask is the meaning of this. Even this significant loss manifests God's nurturing and providence for our souls if we contemplate. The death of a dear child has implicit within it this element of God's nurturing. If this nurturing is not meant for the child, it carries within it the means of our spiritual growth. The death of my friend has a similar effect. It generates feelings of caring and compassion within my soul. This also indicates that Allah is our real Nurturer to perfection (Rabb).

It happens quite often that a child is left without a parent. It is God Who provides the means for its sustenance. In this, we learn that your father or anyone else is not the source of your sustenance. In reality, the Sustainer and Nurturer of this child is the Lord of the Worlds, the Nurturer unto perfection of all creation. In the history of the world, we find that quite a few great men were raised as orphans. This is to let us know that our Lord also provides us with the means of our spiritual sustenance. The most remarkable example of this is the person of our Holy Prophet Muhammad. He never saw his father, and his mother died while he was still in infancy. From being a helpless orphan, he progressed to become the sovereign of a state and the leader of the spiritual world. His life provides the most outstanding example for Muslims: they should not despair. Nor should one worry that they have lost the visible means for their progress. They should always find solace in that their God is the One Who bestowed upon an orphan like Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) both a spiritual and worldly kingdom. **Thus, for a Muslim, there is never a period of despair. The Holy Prophet taught us this prayer on the death of a child: "O Allah! Make him for us a cause of recompense in the world to come and as one going before and a reward." (B.23:65)**

One aspect of this recompense is that the death of a child provides a means of warning and learning for a person. It generates higher moral values within one, and the love of God's creation evolves. That is why the Holy Prophet has stated in a *Hadith* reported by Muadh-bin-Jabal: "There are no two Muslims, who have had three of their children die, that Allah will make both of them

enter paradise. The companions asked, and two? To which the Holy Prophet replied or two. The companions again requested, and one? And he answered, or one. He then said I swear by Him in whose hand is my life, that the placenta of a mother who has aborted her fetus will pull her towards paradise if she manifests patience. (*Hadith Mishkat*)

Some people with uncleanness say that the Holy Prophet only said this to solace his wife Khadija when she lost her child. They do not realize this incident occurred before Allah gave the Holy Prophet the office of prophethood. Undoubtedly, a child who dies indeed becomes an intercessor for his parents. I do not believe in intercession, which does not manifest itself in some form in this world. The generation of high morals in a person is a form of paradise, as is the sympathy toward God's creation. The child's illness and death create feelings of mercy and compassion for the rest of humanity in a person. Even the most stonehearted become overwhelmed with compassion. One feels for the pain and suffering of others. In this way, that child becomes an intercessor for his parents.

I have, in recent days, suffered significant personal loss because of the death of several of my friends. Sheikh Noor Ahmed was a personal friend, but I was also bonded with him because of his genuine compassion for our common cause and his service to Islam. Every individual has a near of kin and family, and he is naturally affected by the death of one of them. However, the loss of a servant of Islam is, however, a source of great sorrow for us. We are not complaining about this. It is undoubtedly our faith that: "All praise is for Allah the Lord of the worlds." **There is, however, a lesson for us in this. It should generate and enhance feelings of sympathy and compassion for the rest of humanity.**

The Attribute of Nurturing

The greatest attribute of God is His quality of Nurturing unto perfection (*Rabubiyat*). Faith in God means that we should nurture His characteristics within us. This is the meaning of the Holy Prophet's saying, "Create the moral characteristics of Allah within you." Thus, the spirit to nurture others should predominate in you. The whole world is God's family, and He nurtures it; therefore, you should sympathize with all of His creation. Those who learn this lesson by patiently bearing the loss of someone have reached this high stage of excellence.

"The Safa and the Marwah are truly among the signs of Allah." The Safa and Marwa are both symbols of such trials and tribulations. When the names of the sites where individuals had to face suffering and hardship remain, the names of individuals who had encountered

these trials cannot be forgotten.

The Promised Messiah has also described three means of our spiritual development in his writings. These are acquiring knowledge, divine revelation and inspiration, and the third and most perfect and excellent means, manifesting patience and perseverance in facing difficulties. He had such a profound and excellent perception! This, indeed, is the case. **Suffering and distress should come upon a person and be a source of tranquility for him. That which generates such feelings of serenity and enhances one in goodness and virtue cannot be a chastisement. It is how we evolve spiritually and reach perfection.**

When we observe the example of the Holy Prophet under such circumstances, we are genuinely moved to supplicate for his exaltation. We learn from the Hadith that when the Holy Prophet is with his companions, he participates in their joy and sorrow. On the death of his infant son, he wept and said,

Surely the eye sheds tears, and the heart grieves, and we do not say but what the Lord is pleased with; and we, O Ibrahim! are full of grief on account of thy separation. (Bukhari 23:43)

His crying and laughing indeed hold a lesson for all of humanity. Of what benefit is an exemplar who does not have to face suffering and distress like us? He may otherwise be a magnificent possessor of pomp and grandeur, but what good is that individual as an example? If his heart cannot perceive these human emotions, he cannot be a role model in times of suffering and distress. We need a practical exemplar, like the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), whose footsteps we can follow in our daily conduct. ■

Opening the Heart:

Ibn 'Arabi on Suffering, Compassion and Atonement

By James Winston Morris

(Reproduced from the *Journal of The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, Volume 51, 2012, available at: ibnarabi.society.org)

In the Name of God, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful

Did We not open up for you your chest,
and lift off from you your burden
which weighed down your back,
and raise up for you your Remembrance?
For surely with difficulty is ease;

surely with difficulty is ease.
 So when you have finished, exert yourself to the
 utmost,
 and strive (only) to please your Lord.

(Sura 94)

Sometimes Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Meccan Openings* – despite their well-deserved reputation for difficulty – offer amazingly direct and illuminating insights into life’s most basic lessons. Certainly this is the case with his discussions of the central role of earthly suffering in every person’s spiritual growth, and with his clarification of the complex role of suffering in the nexus connecting our (mis)deeds, their painful (but potentially liberating) consequences, and their ultimate fruits of illumination, compassion and spiritual growth and perfection. However, his primary purpose is clearly not to construct or argue for some abstract theodicy or philosophical doctrine. So the following case-study of his progressive treatment of the *sadr* (literally ‘chest,’ but in almost all contexts more meaningfully translated by the English word ‘heart’) in the long opening section of the *Futūhāt* beautifully illustrates the way his teaching and language are always carefully designed to evoke above all each reader’s own indispensable personal experience and illuminated understanding (*tahqīq*) of the realities in question. As we shall see, his own gradual ‘unveiling’ of all the dimensions of this reality closely mirrors the actual existential process of spiritual testing, purification and inspiration which each reader and student can alone bring to their study of this work.

Since this unique rhetorical and pedagogical method of the *Futūhāt* can only really be understood and appreciated through repeated practice and familiarity – which means it is still very difficult to approach using only translations, without ready access back to the original Arabic – this study also highlights the critical importance, when approaching any topic in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings, of carefully considering all the relevant, intentionally scattered passages both holistically and in their particular context. Even with a reliable translation and contextual presentation, newcomers to his work will inevitably tend to focus on either its scriptural or its other intellectual elements, which are initially always more immediately visible than the essential underlying dimension of individual realization to which they allude. Even his more direct allusions to those key dimensions of spiritual realization – whether experiences of himself and his companions, or expressed through accounts of the Prophet, the ‘Friends of God’ (*awliyā’*) and other spiritual figures – must always be carefully situated in the intended context of their particular stage and active role in the long process of each soul’s purification and perfection, since otherwise the possibilities of misunderstanding and inappropriate

application are legion. Finally, the further obstacles posed by inadequate translations and presentations of any of his writings are painfully familiar to anyone who has struggled with such works.

***Sadr* in the Quran: Divine and Human Roles**

The Arabic term *sadr*, appearing some 44 times in the Quran, refers most literally to the human chest, a meaning closely related to its etymological root of what is first, foremost or uppermost; a beginning; or to proceed or emerge from something. But its figurative and idiomatic meaning in religious contexts, as the seat of a wide range of familiar human feelings, emotions and different kinds of awareness of divine activities and inspirations, is usually very close to that of the English word ‘heart’ and to the even more frequent Quranic expression *qalb*, as well as several other less frequent Quranic expressions that could all be translated likewise by ‘heart’ in many contexts. The major difference from the *qalb* (the latter usually referring to the inherent locus of our receptive human awareness of God and the creative Spirit) is that the *sadr*, much like the bodily chest in relation to the bodily heart, also refers to that which can either ‘cover over,’ hide, obscure and close off – or else open up and reveal – the pure receptivity of the *qalb*. As such, it has a key role in both expressing and accounting for all the dimensions of our apparent human opposition to God’s will and of our subjective sense of ‘separation’ from the divine, especially those aspects of experience – often rather negative or oppressive – that we would express in everyday English usage by reference to what goes on in our ‘mind,’ ‘self,’ imagination or even more unconscious levels of subjectivity that may only be perceptible through our corresponding actions, tendencies and attitudes.

The particular association of this term in the Quran with themes of suffering, testing, compassion and the wider dynamics of spiritual growth – which are most familiar and boldly highlighted in the famous verses of Sura 94 alluding to Muhammad (in our epigraph above) – comes from the fact that it is almost always used in ways that refer to one of two contrasting perspectives: either to our *individual human responsibility* for the painful, constrictive, secretive, beclouded, oppositional and generally unpleasant aspects of the heart’s experience. Or else the same term is employed in references to *God’s corresponding responsibility* for knowing, inspiring, purifying, releasing, healing, illuminating and opening up these same hearts. Even at a purely textual level, of course, that initial dichotomy of reference is immediately complicated by the many other Quranic passages strongly insisting on the divine role in determining all our human actions and attitudes, including the negative and non-responsive ones.

Since this broad underlying problematic is immediately echoed, for those familiar with the Quran (including most of Ibn ‘Arabi’s original readers), at each use of the term *sadr*, it will be helpful to recall briefly a few of the different interrelated dimensions of this ‘heart’ that are repeatedly highlighted in the Quran. To begin with the more familiar *human* aspects of the *sadr* developed in the Quran:

- The most frequent mention of these ‘hearts’ (*sudūr*) on the human side refers to what we seek to *hide* within them – a familiar activity of constant, almost unconscious lying (particularly to ourselves) that involves the lower aspects of the self (*nafs*), imagination and selective memory. Thus people are said to ‘fold up’ and ‘hide’ what is in their *sudūr*, with their hatred and malice being mentioned in particular: *Yes, surely they fold up their hearts so that they may try to hide (themselves) from Him... (11:5). But the hatred has appeared from their mouths, and what is in their hearts is even greater... (3:118). Whether you hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, God Knows it... (3:29).*
- The Quran frequently speaks of the resulting constriction or ‘tightness’ (*dayyiq*) and ‘oppressive burden’ (*haraj*) or ‘blindness’ (22:46) of our *sudūr*, even (as in Sura 94) in reference to Muhammad and other prophets: *Perhaps you are setting aside what was revealed to you, and your heart is oppressed because of [what your enemies say]... (11:12).* See similar references to Muhammad at 15:9, and to Moses (asking God for the assistance of Aaron) at 36:13. Indeed some other people may even have their hearts subjectively lightened by their opposition to God (*kufr*) (16:106).
- People imagine all sorts of things in their *sudūr*: for example, *...be you stones or iron or some creation even greater in your hearts (4:90); and you are more fearful in their hearts than God... (59:13).* Other recurrent imaginings obscuring the heart include ‘dire need’ (59:9); and ‘fear’ (59:13).
- Finally, one of the famous concluding protective verses of the Quran mentions the *sadr* as the locus of all the insinuations and hidden promptings of Satan, *who whispers secretly in the hearts of the people (114:5).*
- While most of the Quranic references to God’s activities in relation to the *sudūr* are quite positive, still verse 6:125 openly states in this regard what is often reiterated throughout the Quran in emphasizing the divine responsibility, at some level, for all human actions whatsoever, a perspective that is eventually at the heart

of Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysical perspectives here – and most famously, throughout his later *Fusūs al-hikam*. *So whoever God wishes to guide rightly, he opens his heart to surrender-to-Peace (al-islām); and whoever He wishes to lead astray, He constricts his heart...* (6:125).

- By far the most frequent citation in this respect is the repeated Quranic emphasis on God’s direct knowing of all that is hidden in human hearts: *So be aware of God: surely God is all-Knowing of what is in the hearts (5:7).* Particularly important, given Ibn ‘Arabi’s characteristic emphasis on the Quran’s recurrent eschatological passages and imagery as symbolizing the enlightened understanding of the true Knowers (*‘urafā*), is the insistence on the unavoidable revelation to each soul itself (as to God) of what was once ‘hidden’ in our hearts, in the eschatological context of those hoping to hide their wrongdoing (at the Last Day): *Doesn’t he know that when what is in the graves is brought out, and what is in the hearts is (manifestly) realized, surely on that Day their Lord will be most aware of them? (100:9–11).*
- Verses describing God’s (this-worldly) opening and ‘release’ of the *sudūr*, whether in the famous Sura 94 of our epigraph above or in Moses’ requesting: *O my Lord, open up for me my heart! (20:25).*
- Two key verses emphasize God’s salvific role in the spiritual healing (*shifā*) of our *sudūr*: *God heals the hearts of a people who have faith (9:14); and O you people, there has already come to you a lesson from your Lord, a healing for that which is in the hearts (10:57).*
- As a particular example of such divine healing – particularly telling in light of what the Quran and hadith alike have to say about hateful anger (*ghadab*) as ‘the touch of Satan’ – two other verses emphasize how God can remove even deeply rooted rancor and malice (*ghill*) from the *sudūr*. Both verses refer specifically to the high spiritual state of the blessed in the divine ‘Gardens’: *And We have removed from their hearts whatever hatred was there (7:43); and we have removed from their hearts whatever hatred was in them (15:47).*
- Another verse often alluded to by Ibn ‘Arabi speaks of God’s ‘Clear Signs’ (*āyāt*) as directly inspired in the *sudūr*: *It (the revelation) is clear Signs in the hearts of those who have been given (divine) knowing... (29:49).*
- Many verses of the Quran specifically focus on the perverse human propensity to many different forms of resistance and disobedience

toward what we in some deeper way already ‘know’ to be right. The opposite of that inveterate, sometimes puzzling opposition of our hearts is ‘surrender to (divine) Peace’ (*islām*), and several verses specifically emphasize the divine role in that decisive spiritual transformation: *God opens up hearts to surrender-to-Peace* (6:125); and *So whoever God wishes to guide rightly, He opens his heart to surrender-to-Peace* (39:22). In particular, the same verse emphasizes that this process involves the divine illumination of the ‘opened’ hearts: *So is the one whose heart God has opened to surrender-to-Peace, such that he is upon a Light from his Lord* (like the state of the unenlightened)? (39:22).

- Finally, we come to the very heart of Ibn ‘Arabi’s own reflections on these many dimensions of the heart, throughout these foundational chapters (1–73) of his *Meccan Openings*: ... *so that God may test what is in the hearts of you all* (3:154).

The Heart’s Knowing (vs. discursive thinking)

The first place we encounter a mention of the heart (i.e. the *sadr*) in the *Futūhāt* is in Ibn ‘Arabi’s fundamental discussion – which we have translated more fully in an earlier study – of the varied types and ways of human ‘knowing’ that underpin the different levels of discourse interwoven throughout the rest of this immense work. Here he introduces the fundamental distinction between the abstract, highly fallible and unreliable ‘knowing’ of the discursive intellect, and the inspired inner awareness of the ‘knowledge of states’ (*‘ilm al-ahwāl*, or *ma‘rifā*), which is acquired through a divine inspiration (*ilhām*) that is immediately recognized as such by the receptive heart (*sadr*):

Then you must know that if this (inspired ‘unveiling’ or ‘knowing of states’) seems good and beautiful to you and you accept and have faith in it – then rejoice in that good news! For you are necessarily experiencing an ‘unveiling’ of that, even if you aren’t aware of that, because there is no other way to that, since the heart (*sadr*) is *only* delighted and pleased by that whose (spiritual) soundness it is absolutely sure of. While discursive thinking has no footing here, because this is not in its domain of perception.

As we shall see, Ibn ‘Arabi returns to develop and amplify this practically crucial opening distinction in several passages below.

The Journeying that Opens the Heart

Early in the first chapter of the *Futūhāt*, at the beginning

of Ibn ‘Arabi’s famous account of his encounter at the Kaaba with the mysterious young spiritual ‘alter ego’ (*fatā*) or angelic messenger who revealed to him everything in that immense work, that *fatā* again invokes – in contrast with the divinely inspired knowing of the heart – the profound illusions of those ‘poor souls’ (*miskīn*) who rely solely on the conclusions of their discursive thinking, imagining that it is leading them somewhere:

The poor fellow imagines he is knocking and opening (the ‘door’ of spiritual illumination), saying: ‘Can there be, in face of this constriction and heavy burden (that I still feel now) anything but expansion and opening (of my heart)? But compare that to the Quran on those who are disputing (without real knowing or faith): *So whosoever God wills to Guide, He opens up their heart to the surrender-to-Peace. But whosoever He wills to lead astray, He makes their heart constricted and weighted down, as if they were climbing up into the sky!* (6:125).

For just as the ‘opening’ (of the heart) only comes after the constriction, so likewise That which is sought is not attained until after traveling the (spiritual) path. And that poor fellow was heedless of his own acquiring of what he had attained through inspiration (*ilhām*), among those things that the people of mind and intellect (falsely assume) is only acquired by means of thinking and proofs.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s reply to his divine guide here, rather than simply echoing that figure’s criticisms of the limitations of our discursive intellect, provides another fascinating – and as we shall see, highly significant – acknowledgement of the essential interplay of *all* our human capacities, including extensive learning experiences, deep reflection (*tafakkur*), and inspiration, in the larger course of each person’s gradual spiritual growth and their uniquely individual path of perfection. He begins by acknowledging this mysterious youth’s observation that those who rely exclusively on their intellect:

will be grieved and saddened, when they arrive back at the point from which they departed. But – [Ibn ‘Arabi adds] – they will rejoice in what they have acquired of the secret mysteries in the course of their path, and to which they have returned! For if the Messenger had not been *called* to the Ascension, he would not have climbed up to the heavens, nor would he have come back down – and this journeying brought to him the presence of the Angelic Host and the Signs of His Lord.

These few carefully chosen words at the very beginning and first ‘doorway’ (*bāb*) of these immense *Openings* pointedly highlight one of the most distinctive features and orienting aims of all of Ibn ‘Arabi’s work: that is,

his preoccupation with making clear the full universality and inclusiveness of the complex processes of spiritual development, learning and illumination that unfold with miraculous detail and exactitude in every domain and level of creation. That essential quality of the Shaykh's speech is aptly acknowledged in this divine youth's own immediate reaction:

So when I brought up this knowing, which cannot be reached by the intellect alone or fully actualized and perfected by understanding (alone), (this 'young man') replied: 'You have made me hear an extraordinary secret, and you have unveiled for me a fascinating reality, which I did not hear from any *Walī* [Friend, one close to God] before you! Nor have I ever seen anyone for whom these realities were perfected and completed as they have been for you. Even though they are known to Me and inscribed in My Essence, as I shall make clear to you through the raising of My veils and inform you about through My spiritual indications (*ishārātī*).'

The Opened Heart and the Letter *Sād*

The next mention of the opening of the heart comes in chapter 2 (Ibn 'Arabi's elaborate introduction to the spiritual significance of the Arabic letters of the Quran and their cosmogonic roles), in the course of a long poem whose Speaker is at once God and the Arabic letter *Sād* – the letter whose graphic written form [ص] significantly combines twinned visible representations of both the 'whole' (closed, on the right side) and the 'half-opened' fully receptive human heart (on the left side of the letter). The immediate visual symbolism of this letter also foreshadows Ibn 'Arabi's later discussion of the 'eternal prostration' (*sujūd*) of the heart, as this letter's written image also suggests that of a person viewed from the side, facing to the left, bowing down in the prostration stage of the ritual prayer. The poetic speech of this divine letter could readily serve as the epigraph foreshadowing the rest of this long investigation:

Whatever depth there may be in the sea,
the shore of the Heart is deeper!

And if your Heart should be constricted from
(knowing) Me,
then the Heart of someone other than you is even
tighter.

Forget the ego-self (*nafs*) and accept
from a truthful One who speaks truthfully.

And don't oppose/diverge (from Me), lest you be
pained:
for the Heart is suspended from Me.

Open It, and I will release it [*iftahu, ashrahu*], and
do
that activity you've already realized!

Until when, O you of the hardened heart,
(will you keep) that heart of yours locked up?!

The Divine 'Breaths' and the Receptive Heart

The opening poem that begins the particularly rich and rewarding chapter 35 of the *Futūhāt*, 'On the true inner knowing of that person who has actually realized [*tahaqquq*]: i.e. experienced and fully understood] the waystation of the divine Breaths and its secret meanings after death,' is the first of a number of short scattered passages where Ibn 'Arabi begins to evoke more explicitly the distinctive experiential qualities of the opened or liberated heart (*sadr mashrūh*). It is no coincidence that this first stage in that depiction again focuses on the opened heart's essential receptivity to whatever is brought at each instant by the ever-renewed divine 'Breaths':

The (true) servant is whoever in the state of life
was with Him

like his state after the death of the body and the
(animal) spirit.

And the servant is whoever, (even) in the state of
being veiled from Him,

was a *light*, like the illumination of the earth by
the sun.

For the state of death has no pretense accompany-
ing it

like life has such explicit and visible pretensions
with regard to certain people – while for other
people

its pretensions are (known) by hints and intima-
tions.

So if you've understood what we were telling you,
you'll uphold in life

a Balance that is above both excess and deficien-
cy,

and you'll be among those who are purified by
His realities,

leaving no way for censure or reproach.

But if you pay no attention to what we've said,
you'll come

to the realm of (God's) Questioning *with a heart*
still unopened!

It is surely worth noting that Ibn 'Arabi actually opens this key chapter devoted to all those forms of divine inspiration (*ilhām*) and guidance that are the subject of virtually all of the remaining *Futūhāt* – evoking here all that is brought to the opened heart by the ever-renewed

divine Breaths – by insisting on the absolute consonance between those endlessly varied illuminations and the original scriptural formulae of innocent, unreflective ‘faith’ (*īmān*) in the prophetic revelations: that is to say, of pure faith uncontaminated by the distortions of subsequent reflection and borrowed or interpolated interpretations and explanations:

You must know! – o my brother – that the knowing of the people of God [i.e. the people of ‘opened hearts’], taken from spiritual experience/unveiling (*kashf*) completely corresponds to the *form* of innocent faith (*īmān*). For everything which faith accepts corresponds to the unveiling of the people of God, since it is *all* reality/Truth (*haqq*), since the one who reports (the divine revelation), who is the Prophet, is reporting (what he knows directly) on the basis of a sound unveiling. And the essences of those who know God through God have the attributes of every thing whose knowing they also take from God, whatever that may be.

Here again, as we find again and again throughout the *Futūhāt*, Ibn ‘Arabi quickly returns to amplify and develop these initial remarks in ways which make it much clearer that *every* human being – including those who may think they are relying only on their intellects – in fact is experiencing and then following instants of spiritual ‘unveiling’ in certain moments and situations of their lives:

Now we have just indicated for you a matter of immense significance, so that you might know what the knowledge of those relying on their intellects goes back to, and where their thoughts come from. [I.e. that their sound ideas, thoughts, and intuitions are *also* in reality the heart’s divine inspirations.] This is so that it might become clear to you that sound knowledge is not (ultimately) given by thinking, nor by those thoughts that the intellectuals have affirmed – and that (in the words of a famous hadith): sound knowing is only ‘(a light) that God casts in the heart’ of the knower. And it is a divine light by which God specially distinguishes whoever He wishes among His servants – (whether they be) angel, messenger, prophet, friend (of God: *walī*) or the person of faith.

So whoever has no unveiling (through what the divine ‘Breaths’ bring to fill the opened heart) has no real knowing!

The Healer of Hearts

One of the most characteristic unifying dimensions of the *Futūhāt* is the way that Ibn ‘Arabi constantly moves

back and forth, within every chapter, between a focus on the particular perspectives and concerns of ordinary spiritual seekers, and scattered corresponding reminders of the salvific perspective and roles of the *awliyā’ Allāh*, of the immense pleroma of spiritual instruments and personalities who, both from this world and from beyond, play their indispensable roles at every stage of each individual’s ongoing drama of spiritual growth, development and gradual transformation. Thus it should come as no surprise that the Shaykh’s first explicit allusion to God’s activity as the ‘Healer of hearts’ (9:14; 10:57), in the opening poem of chapter 36, pointedly directs our attention toward all those who fulfill and manifest this divine Intention:

Everyone who brings life to his reality
and heals (the heart) from the sickness of the
veils:

That one *is* Jesus – for us,
there cannot be any doubt about that!
... So His spiritual intention (*himma*) flows
secretly throughout the world,
among the Arabs and everyone else:
Through it their souls are brought to life,
and through it the misfortunes are taken away.

As we shall see, perhaps the most significant phrase here, in terms of Ibn ‘Arabi’s later development of the theme of the ‘opening heart,’ is his prefiguration of the ultimate divine mystery: that secret, ‘hidden flowing’ (*sarā*, from the same root as *isrā’*) of God’s transforming Lovingmercy and Compassion – the cosmic creative Breath of the All-Compassionate – that can only be grasped through the necessarily painful human dramas that eventually make possible the ‘opening’ of each constricted and overburdened heart.

‘Compulsion’ Necessarily Preceding the Heart’s Opening

The following discussion comes from Ibn ‘Arabi’s chapter built around the Prophet’s famous intimation – at what was certainly outwardly the most devastating and hopeless moment of his entire calling, when he had lost his wife and the uncle who was his strongest political support in Mecca – that ‘I am surely finding/experiencing the Breath of the All-Merciful...’: a decisive subtle experience of illuminating grace that closely preceded the providential arrival of his first tiny band of future supporters (*ansār*) from the distant oasis settlement of Yathrib. What Ibn ‘Arabi says in this short section, for each reader, necessarily requires a lifetime’s experience of ‘translation’ into those particular corresponding realities and transforming moments of Grace that are needed to bring this intensely compressed metaphysical summary to life:

Now you must know that the people embody-

ing this spiritual station are all those, among the people of God, whose state was that of those who were (first) engulfed and surrounded by the Names of divine Domination and Compulsion, throughout the entirety of His world, from its loftiest to its lowest (realms). So that they are turning to (the most intense and sincere) beseeching and yearning for the Names of divine Lovingmercy and Compassion. Then the Name ‘The All-Compassionate’ (*al-rahmān*)... reveals itself to them and the divine Determination freely bestows the gift of that (divine Lovingmercy) upon them.

In this way, the effects of all the Names of (divine) Compulsion are erased from them, so that the place (of their heart) is expanded to (receive the breaths of the All-Compassionate). Thus their heart is opened up, the divine Breath circulates (through it), and the Spirit of Life travels secretly through it.

It is typical of Ibn ‘Arabi’s approach that he immediately follows his intensely compressed evocation of this culminating spiritual illumination with an equally vivid warning about the all-too-familiar practical dangers of ‘pretense’ and self-delusion in this spiritual domain:

So whoever has this spiritual state and really knows it by direct experience (‘tasting’) within their self is among the adepts of this spiritual station.

But don’t delude yourself! For every human being knows his or her own inner state, and it is of no use to you at all to present yourself to the people as having a spiritual level that you don’t actually possess. So now I have given you this cautionary advice and explained this to you according to the path of the ‘Folk (of God)’. So *don’t be among the ignorant ones* (15:99) regarding what we have informed you about regarding this! *And worship-and-serve your Lord until there comes to you the Certainty* (of this opening of the Heart) (3:5).

‘Karmic’ Dimensions of the Heart’s Suffering and Atonement

Significantly enough, Ibn ‘Arabi’s first discussion of the opening of the heart in his immense chapter 69 (‘on our inner knowing of the secret mysteries of the ritual prayer’) comes up in connection with the repeated invocation of the divine Names ‘The All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful’ (*ar-Rahmān ar-Rahīm*), during the recitation of the *Fātiha* (the opening Sura that recurs throughout each cycle of the daily ritual prayers). What is striking here is the Shaykh’s first pointed reminder that most of the people reciting these formulae have only an illusory and dangerously deficient notion of the actual

divine realities (and their manifestations) underlying those central divine Names – a point that he develops at much greater length only a few lines later in this same chapter (in the following long citation here). Ibn ‘Arabi is elaborating here a well-known ‘divine saying’ in which God replies to the servant’s recitation of these particular Names in prayer with the phrase: ‘*My servant was praising Me!*’

But, the Shaykh immediately adds:

He didn’t say just *what* it was that the servant was praising Him for! And this is because the ordinary person only recognizes as divine ‘Compassion’ for him whatever happens to match up to his (immediate egoistic) aims (of his carnal *nafs*) – even if that (supposed act of Mercy) actually harms him, or doesn’t correspond to his (true) nature, or even if it contains (the seeds of) his tormenting punishment!

But the true spiritual Knower (‘*ārif*’) is not like that. For surely the divine Compassion and Lovingmercy may come to the servant in an abhorrent form, such as the (necessity) for the sick person of drinking or eating disgusting or foul-smelling medicine. But the healing in that is hidden.

The broader cosmic and human significance of this observation for the opening of the heart is soon carefully outlined, a short while later, in the course of Ibn ‘Arabi’s explanation of the deeper experiential meanings, for the true Knower, of the same long divine Saying (*hadīth qudsī*) describing how God participates in and responds secretly to each stage of the servant’s recitation of the *Fātiha*. Here he begins by asking ‘What is really intended’ by the verse (1:4) *Ruler of the Day of Judgment* (*mālik yawm al-dīn*)? And why is that verse of Judgment immediately preceded by the repeated evocation (1:1 and 1:3) of God as ‘the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful’ (*al-rahmān ar-rahīm*)? Ordinarily, of course, most people tend to project this reality of God’s ultimate Right Judgment (*dīn*) and infinite Compassion into an imagined, distant eschatological future. The heart of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching on this question is condensed in the following passages, which deserve the closest possible attention and reflection on their manifestations in every area of our daily life:

But whenever the Knower says ‘*Ruler of the Day of Right-Judgment*,’ he does not restrict that ‘Day of Right-Judgment’ to the other life (*al-ākhirah*). For he sees that *the All-Merciful* and *the All-Compassionate* are not separated from *the Ruler of the Day of Judgment*, since that ‘Day’ (of each soul’s eschatological Return) is only an *attribute* of both of those (intrinsically divine Realities). For the Recompense (of divine Judgment) is in

both this lower life (*dunyā*) and the other.

And that is why He manifested what He prescribed regarding the upholding of the divine sanctions (against wrongdoing): *to make manifest the corruption on the dry land and the sea, through what the hands (= actions) of people acquire* (i.e. bring upon themselves) – *so that He might cause them to taste some of what they have done, in order that they might return!* (30:41). For this (wider karmic process flowing from the proportionate consequences of all our deeds) is itself the essential reality (*‘ayn*) of the Recompense! So the Day of this lower life is also a Day of Recompense, and (for the Knower) God is (truly and visibly) the *Ruler of the Day of Right-Judgment*.

Hence the true Knower sees that the atonements/reparations/expiations are secretly flowing throughout this lower world. So the fully human being (*insān*), in the abode of this lower life, is not exempt from that which constricts his heart (*sadr*) and causes him pain, both of the senses and of the intelligence/spirit (*‘aql*) – not even (from such apparently trivial things as) the bite of a flea or stumbling and tripping.

But those pains are bounded and limited in time, while God’s Lovingmercy – may He be exalted! – is not limited in time. For His *Lovingmercy encompasses every thing* (58:26). So some of That (divine Love and Compassion) is attained and manifested by way of His freely bestowed Grace (*imtinān*), in which the source of (our) partaking in that (infinite Lovingmercy) is His pure Grace (not anything ‘merited’ or deserved). While some of that (manifest Lovingmercy) occurs by way of divine Self-obligation, (as) in His saying: ‘*Your Lordly Sustainer (rabb) has written (ordained) upon Himself Lovingmercy*’ (6:54); and in His saying (to Moses and his seventy companions): ‘*Then I shall write/ordain It...*’ (7:156).

So the (ordinary) people are taking (all their experiences they attribute to that divine *rahma*) as a strict recompense, while (in fact) it comes upon some of the responsible (*mukallaf*) creatures (simply) through (God’s) freely bestowed Grace, however (undeserving) they may be. So understand this!

Therefore every pain in this life and the other life is an expiation/atonement for certain restricted, time-limited things (inner or outer ‘actions’) that have already happened. And that (resulting pain) is a recompense for whoever is pained by it, whether they are young or old – **on the condition that they strive to understand (the expiating meaning/purpose/context of) that pain**, not by means of simply feeling that pain without actually understanding it! **For no one really grasps/perceives this particular perception except for the person to whom that (inner purpose) is unveiled.**

In the remainder of this fundamental passage, it rapidly becomes clear that Ibn ‘Arabi is actually referring more pointedly to the successive stages and unfolding of every individual human being’s relative *spiritual* ‘infancy’ and gradual spiritual maturation.

Hence the (sick) infant doesn’t really understand (the deeper meaning) of its pain, although it does feel it. Except that the infant’s father and mother, and others like them, whether they love the infant or not, are themselves pained and seek to understand that pain, because of the ills which they see besetting that infant. **So that pain itself becomes an expiation/atonement, for those who do understand that pain.**

Therefore when the person who does understand (the meaning and purpose of) that (suffering) increases their loving-compassion (*tarahhum*) for the person who is in pain, then the one who (understands and empathizes) becomes rewarded through their own expiation/atonement. This is because (as the Arabic proverb puts it): ‘Every moist heart is a (divine) reward.’ Indeed every heart is moist, because it is the home of our blood; and blood is warm and moist, the natural principle of Life.

Now as for the (spiritual) ‘youth’: if they seek to understand (the spiritual cause of) their being pained, and seek to turn away from and strictly avoid the immediate causes that necessitated that pain, then that person will have an atonement/expiation, through that act (of transforming understanding and repentance), **for their own previous actions which gave rise to pain in others – whether that other be an animal or another individual of their own species.** And whether that (pain) be (caused by) their refusing something their mother or father had asked them to do; or whether it be due to their refusing to do something someone else asked of them, so that the person who asked them is pained because that young person failed to fulfill their request.

So (in that latter case), if that young person is feeling pain, that pain appears in them as an atonement corresponding to the pain which they caused to that person who had once requested (something from them), by refusing to fulfill what that person had implored of them. Or that young person (being pained) may have harmed another animal, such as throwing rocks at a dog, or killing a flea or a louse, or stepping on an ant and killing it, or whatever else they may have done, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

For the secret/mystery (*sirr*) of this matter is strange and marvelous (‘*ajīb*), flowing secretly through (all) the existent things – so much so that the human being may be pained and their heart (*sadr*) constricted by the very existence of clouds!

So (that pain of every state of the heart's constriction is) an atonement for things one has done, whether one has forgotten them or actually knows what they are.

All of this is directly seen by the people of unveiling, as the (ongoing, universally present) verification/realization (*tahqīq*) of His saying (1:4): *Ruler of the Day of Right-Judgment*.

The Perpetual 'Prostration of the Heart' of the Perfected *awliyā*

The final discussion of the opening of the heart in the long chapter on our inner knowing of the spiritual mysteries of the ritual prayer refers specifically to the heart's extraordinary opening in the very highest of the Friends of God (the *awliyā* *Allāh*), a state which might seem impossibly distant from our own daily struggles and moments of realization. But Ibn 'Arabi's careful discussion in this section of the different interactions between the heart, the ego-self (*nafs*), and the satanic promptings of the carnal *nafs* helps us to recognize and discover as well those actions and inner tendencies – most often deeply unconscious – that can contribute to the closing and constriction of the heart.

The standard legal topic that serves as the initial occasion for this spiritual lesson is the question whether one is obligated to perform an act of ritual prayer and prostration (and in what direction) every time one might hear the Quran being recited. Ibn 'Arabi's tentative practical response to that purely external legal question is 'no.' But with characteristic directness, he immediately and sharply contrasts that external judgment to the *fully obligatory and ongoing* 'prostration of the heart' – and especially to the station of the most open-hearted of the divine Friends, whose hearts are perpetually in prostration, since they are always fully aware of, and necessarily responding to, the divine Presence ('Book', Quran, etc.) as encountered in every aspect of life and creation:

Now the deeper spiritual lesson (*i'tibār*) contained in this topic is that prostration *is* obligatory for the heart. For once the heart has prostrated itself (i.e. fully opened to God), it will never ever rise up (in pride and self-obsession), unlike the prostration of our face (in the ritual prayer).

Once it happened that (the famous early Sufi teacher) Sahl al-Tustari, at the very beginning of his entrance into this Path, saw that his heart had prostrated itself. He expected it to rise up again, but it didn't rise, so he began to be confused and concerned. Then he continued to ask all the masters of the Path about his spiritual experience, but he didn't find anyone who really understood his experience.

... Then someone told him that there was a respected

shaykh in Abadan, and that he might find what he was looking for by asking him about this. So he traveled to Abadan because of this experience, and when he entered and greeted that shaykh, he said to him: 'O dear master, does the heart prostrate itself?' And the shaykh said to him: 'Until eternity!' Thus he found the cure (for his question), and he remained there serving that teacher.

Now the very axis and center-point of this Path turns on this prostration of the heart. So whenever a realized human being attains to the direct eyewitnessing of this, that person has reached (spiritual) perfection – and likewise with their spiritual understanding/awareness (*ma'rifa*) and protection (from sinning), so that the devil no longer has any way to (influence) them.

To summarize, Ibn 'Arabi continues by distinguishing the partially 'protected' state of these fully realized saints – who still continue to perceive the temptations and inclinations of their carnal *nafs/shaytān* – from the specially complete spiritual 'immunity' unique to the prophets and rare divine messengers, whose 'satan' (in the words of the famous Prophetic hadith that Ibn 'Arabi quotes here) has become so fully surrendered to God that they do not even perceive its distracting promptings.

For the *walī* is protected from whatever that satan desires of him, when he casts into the heart of the *walī* whatever (prompting) God may wish of him. So the *walī* turns around away from it/him, by turning toward that aspect that pleases God. Thus he attains through that (regular overcoming of temptation) a spiritual station with God that is absolutely prodigious! Indeed were Iblis (the archetypal tempter) not so enthusiastic and determined to bring about disobedience (to God) – [hence immediately rushing off to work on another victim] – that he doesn't return to that *walī* a second time, then he would notice that what he was bringing the *walī*, in order to distance him from God, was actually increasing him in blessedness and proximity to God.

Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain that a few of the trickiest and slyest devils do manage to influence some of the saints – though not those of the highest order, to whom he turns in just a moment – by 'encouraging them to do acts of obedience that keep them from performing even higher acts of obedience.'

But if the *walī* is *upon clear guidance from his Lord* regarding that, then he (knows and) does what is preferable. However, the devil is unable to penetrate/deflect the *walī*'s knowing of the divine Self-manifestation in any way at all....

This situation is contrary (Ibn 'Arabi continues) to the

case of those whose (supposed) knowledge of God comes from intellectual thought and reasoning. Because the satan casts into such a person's heart doubts regarding his arguments, in order to confuse him and send him back to the first instance of his thinking, so that he will die in ignorance of his Lord....

All of this does not apply to any one of God's Friends (*awliyā'*) except for those whose heart prostrates itself before God. For the satan only withdraws from the human being who is in a state of prostration both outwardly and inwardly. So if the heart of the *walī* isn't bowing down, then he isn't divinely protected.

Now this is an extremely subtle topic in the Path of the people of God, and it only happens to rare individuals (*afrād*) whose being He specially strengthens. They are the ones who are (truly) *upon a clear guidance from their Lord [and a witness from Him follows it]* (11:17), (following) His Self-manifestation (*tajallī*) to them. So what *follows* that *clear guidance* for the justly balanced servant, is a (divine) *witness* (*shāhid*) – which is precisely the prostration of their heart...

Finding the 'Key' to the Heart: the universality of Loving mercy

Ibn 'Arabi begins this section in his lengthy chapter 72, 'on true understanding of the inner mysteries of the Hajj,' by contrasting the famous hadith (or Sufi saying) that 'God's House/Temple (*bayt Allāh*) is the heart of His servant, the person of faith' with the many Quranic verses describing the divine Throne as 'the standing-place of the All-Compassionate' (*mustawā al-Rahmān*). The poignant contrast of our very different degrees of realized awareness of these two supposedly equivalent all-encompassing divine Names (*Allāh* and *al-Rahmān*) provides another occasion for highlighting the centrality of suffering and the soul's ineluctable search for understanding of its causes as the transformational 'key' to lastingly opening the divine House of the illumined heart:

For the difference in level between the heart and the (divine) Throne is like that between the Name 'God' (*Allāh*) and the Name 'the All-Compassionate.' For although (the Quran says): [Say: 'Call upon God or call upon the All-Compassionate.'] *Whichever (Name) you all call upon, His are the Most-Beautiful Names'* (17:110), still no one denies (the reality of) God – although they do deny (the reality of) the All-Compassionate. Hence [whenever it is said to them 'bow down to worship the All-Compassionate,'] they object: 'What is 'the All-Compassionate?'' (25:60).

So the (manifest universe as the) place of witnessing 'God-hood' (*ulūha*) is (apparently at first) more encompassing, because of everyone's affirming/observing

that, since that place includes both (painful) testing/hardship (*balā'*) and well-being (*'āfiyya*): both of them are found/existing in the world, so that no one denies either of them.

But the place of witnessing (all-encompassing divine) 'Compassion and Lovingmercy' (*rahmāniyya*) is only known by those who are the objects of that Lovingmercy (*marhūm*) through faith. And no one denies that but those who are excluded (*mahrūmūn*: from faith) – only without their being aware that they are excluded. **This is because the quality of Lovingmercy only contains well-being and absolute Good. But God is truly/personally known through (directly experienced) 'states' (*Allāh ma'rūf bi-l-hāl*).** So the *All-Compassionate* is (likewise) *denied* because of a state (i.e. our lack of realized awareness of the full extent of God's Compassion and Lovingmercy).

Therefore when it is said to them: '...whichever (Name) you all call upon, His are the Most-Beautiful Names' (17:110), the people of testing/hardship acknowledge that claim (only) out of outward social conformity (*taqlīd*) to what God has described, from 'behind the veil' (42:51) of their testing and hardship.

So understand this! For I have pointed you toward matters which, if you practice and follow them, then a divine knowing will become manifest to you which none but God can measure. For surely the Knower (*'arīf*) who knows God to the extent that we have mentioned, knowing Him through direct experience (*dhawq*), is rare and precious today!

The Heart of the Matter: 'Repentance' and Spiritual Discernment

Tawba – 'repentance' or literally 'turning around' (either toward God, or by God, in the Quran) – is the opening stage of the spiritual Path of realization in virtually every classical Sufi work. This includes the widely read spiritual handbook of the *Risāla* of al-Qushayri that Ibn 'Arabi took as the starting point and overall framework for his metaphysical discussion of all the spiritual virtues of the Path in the long second section of the *Futūhāt* (chapters 74–189): the *fasl al-mu'āmalāt*. The title of this section is a technical term traditionally dealing primarily, in the books of hadith and *fiqh*, with the proper 'social interrelations' between the human servant and other creatures, a social perspective that is still fairly prominent even in Qushayri's classic Sufi discussion of the succession of spiritual stations. But Ibn 'Arabi's constant subject here is instead a very special sort of *mu'āmalāt*: it is entirely devoted – like much of the remainder of the *Futūhāt*, in fact – to the heart's interrelations with God, and particularly highlights the ways those interactions, no matter where and how they outwardly begin, always end up in a heightened realiza-

tion and appreciation of the divine ‘Presence’ and Reality (*al-Haqq*) revealed in each of those forms of encounter. It should be no surprise, then, that the first words of this opening chapter and the fascinating section it inaugurates turn our attention immediately to the fundamental *practical* underpinnings of every lasting opening of the heart:

I’tirāf, for every realized seeker (*muhaqqiq*), is the (true) place of turning:

and through it the *true* God (*al-ilāh al-Haqq*) opens up his heart.

God is pleased with the one who disagrees (with His command), just as

God is pleased with the one who agrees with His command.

How great it/He is, that His Aim is (always) attained –

especially if you truly know His secret!

Through the reality of His Grace, the one who disagrees attains

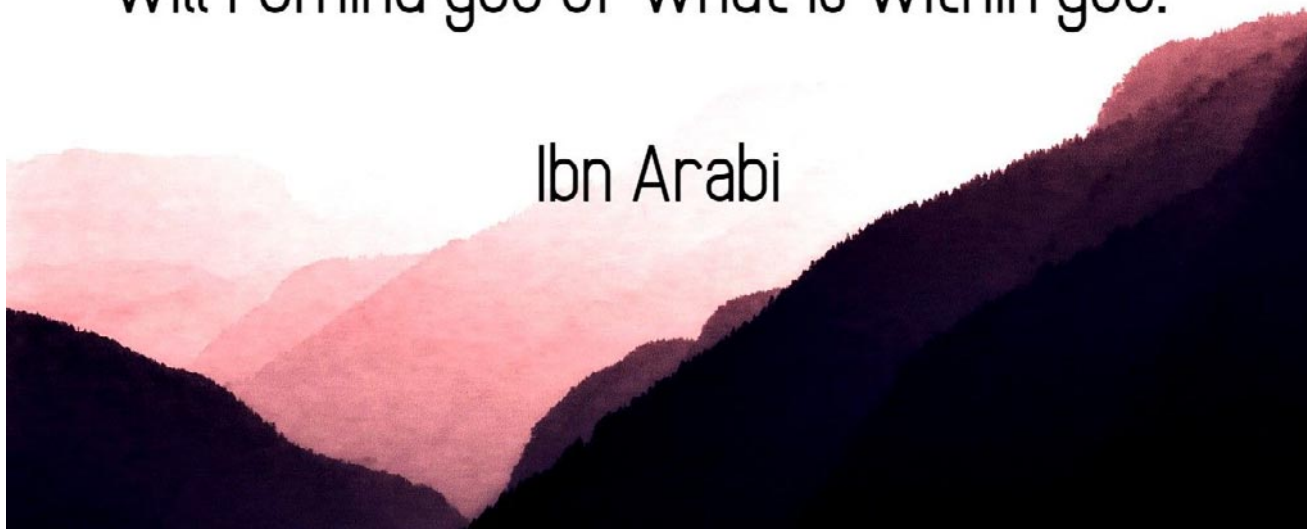
what he attains: the one of whose rank you’ve been ignorant!

One could devote a long essay to exploring the meanings and contexts assumed in the first line of this open-

ing poem. Its key opening term, *i’tirāf*, immediately recalls Ibn ‘Arabi’s pointed emphasis, earlier in chapter 69, that the actual effective transformation of the heart’s struggling pain and suffering into wisdom and compassion depends essentially on seeking – and eventually finding – inspired understanding (*ta’aqul*) of the underlying opportunities and the divine *aims* embodied in that particular transforming experience. Accordingly, *i’tirāf* – ordinarily translated as acknowledgement, recognition or even confession – is an intensive and reflexive Arabic form of the same recurrent Arabic root (‘-r-f) that one constantly encounters in almost every chapter title of the *Futūhāt*, since each chapter is devoted to a distinctive form of *ma’rifa*, of immediate, personal knowing and recognition. As such, it might be more literally translated as ‘intensive, unavoidable self-knowing’ – a qualification that immediately distinguishes this profound spiritual state and transformed perspective from a great deal of what is ordinarily imagined to be ‘conversion’ or ‘repentance.’ The deeper, metaphysical and divine grounds of that S/self-knowing, which are already familiar to every serious student of the Shaykh’s thought, are carefully summarized in the next three paradoxical verses of this opening poem. However, given the length of this chapter 74, which is entirely devoted to unfolding the meanings of those poetic lines, the continuation of that discussion must await another occasion. ■

“These stories I have recounted to you
will remind you of what is within you.”

Ibn Arabi



Some of our publications

World-renowned literature published by
Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore (USA)

"Probably no man living has done longer or more valuable service for the cause of Islamic revival than Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore. His literary works, with those of the late Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, have given fame and distinction to the Ahmadiyya Movement." — Marmaduke Pickthall, translator of the Quran into English.

The Holy Quran pp. 1418. \$26.95 HB. \$20.95 PB.

Redesigned, retypeset new edition published in year 2002.

Arabic text, with English translation, exhaustive commentary, comprehensive Introduction and large Index. Has since 1917 influenced millions of people all over the world. Model for all later translations. Thoroughly revised in 1951.

Also available in Spanish, French, Russian, German, Italian and Dutch.

The Religion of Islam pp. 617. \$24.95 HB. \$18.95 PB.

Comprehensive and monumental work on the sources, principles and practices of Islam.

"Such a book is greatly needed when in many Muslim countries we see persons eager for the revival of Islam, making mistakes through lack of just this knowledge." —

Marmaduke Pickthall.

Also available in German, Dutch and Indonesian.

A Manual of Hadith pp. 400. \$15.95 HB.

Sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad on practical life of a Muslim, classified by subject. Arabic text, English translation and notes.

Muhammad, The Prophet pp. 200. \$8.95

Researched biography of Holy Prophet. Corrects many misconceptions about his life, and answers Western criticism.

Early Caliphate pp. 214. \$8.95

History of Islam under first four Caliphs.

"Indeed two books (1) Muhammad The Prophet, (2) The Early Caliphate, by Muhammad Ali together constitute the most complete and satisfactory history of the early Muslims hitherto compiled in English." — Islamic Culture, April 1935.

The Muslim Prayer Book pp. 90. \$6.95

Details of Muslim prayer, with Arabic text, transliteration and translation into English. Illustrated with photographs.

Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad

Brief biography of the Holy Prophet, and his teachings.

"... so beautifully done by Muhammad Ali ... should form part of the education of every person who aspires to know the life and career of a great historical personality" —

Times of Ceylon. pp. 156. \$8.95

The New World Order pp. 86. \$6.95

"... makes a thorough analysis of the complicated problems of the world ... examines the various solutions offered by Islam to the numerous problems of the modern world" — The Dawn, Karachi.

History and Doctrines of the Babi Movement pp. 115

By M. Muhammad Ali. Deals with the Bahai religion. \$5.95

The Teachings of Islam pp. 226. \$7.95

by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Highly-acclaimed discussion of the Islamic path for the physical, moral and spiritual progress of man.

"The ideas are very profound and very true." — Count Tolstoy, Russia.

Muhammad in World Scriptures, v. 1 pp. 412. \$15.95

By Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, scholar of scriptural languages. Prophecies about Prophet Muhammad in the Bible, with quotations in original Hebrew and Greek. HB.

Jesus in Heaven on Earth pp. 471. \$18.95 HB. \$18.95 PB.

By Khwaja Nazir Ahmad. Post-crucifixion journey of Jesus to Kashmir and identification of his tomb there.

Islam to East and West pp. 142. \$4.95

By Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din. His famous lectures delivered in various countries of the East and West during 1913 to 1926.

Table Talk pp. 65. \$3.95

By Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din. Religion for the rational thinker.

The Ideal Prophet pp. 212. \$8.95

By Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din. His character and achievements.

Fundamentals of the Christian Faith in the light of the Gospels, by Maulana Sadr-ud-Din pp. 62. \$3.95

Anecdotes from the life of Prophet Muhammad pp. 49

By M. A. Faruqui. Life of Prophet in simple language. \$4.95

Introduction to Islam pp. 66. \$4.95

by Dr Zahid Aziz. For younger readers and beginners. Basic Islam explained in question/answer format.

The Meaning of Surah Fatihah pp. 16. \$4.95

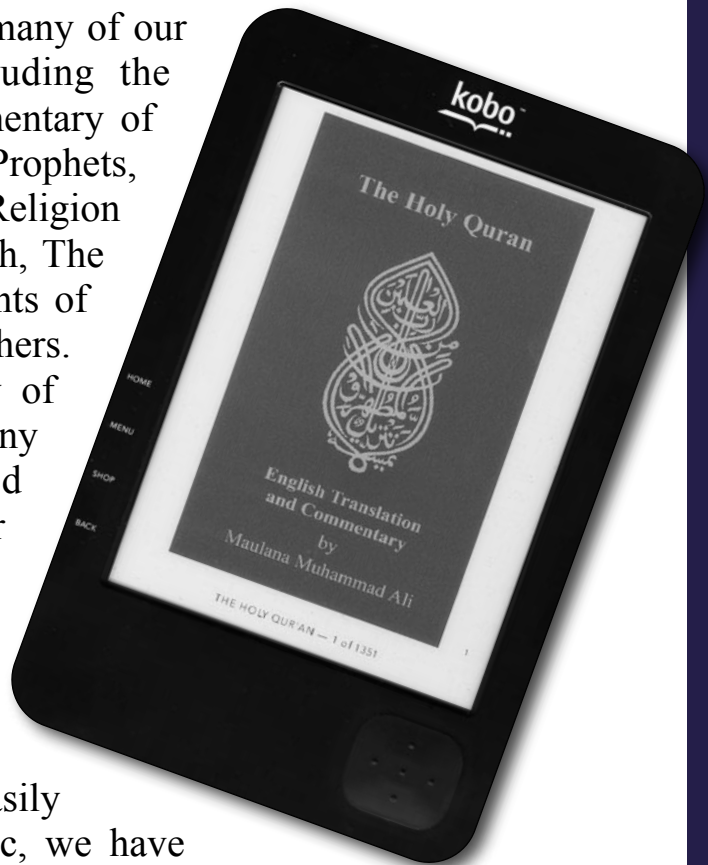
By Fazeel Sahukhan. Illustrated, color, children's book.

Al-Hamdu-li-llah pp. 18. \$7.95

By Fazeel Sahukhan. Illustrated, color, children's book for under-fives to teach them ten basic Islamic phrases.

“And when the books are spread” (81:10)

It gives us great pleasure to announce the conversion and availability of many of our titles in e-book format, including the English Translation and Commentary of the Holy Quran, History of the Prophets, Muhammad the Prophet, The Religion of Islam, The Manual of Hadith, The Early Caliphate, Living Thoughts of Prophet Muhammad, among others. With the increasing popularity of e-readers, e-books have, by many accounts, become a preferred means to read literature. In order to continue to have the world-renowned literary treasures written by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Maulana Muhammad Ali, and other Lahore Ahmadiyya authors easily accessible to the general public, we have ventured to generate e-books of our standard publications.



These, and a growing library of our e-book publications, are available through all major on-line book vendors or by contacting us directly at:

**Ahmadiyya Anjuman
Isha'at Islam, Lahore (USA)**

P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

www.muslim.org