



Purification of the Heart

SIGNS, SYMPTOMS AND CURES OF THE
SPIRITUAL DISEASES OF THE HEART

Translation and Commentary
of Imam al-Mawlūd's *Maṭharat al-Qulūb*

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POEM VERSES 1–8

*I begin by starting with the heart of beginnings,
for it is the highest and noblest of beginnings.*

*Have courtesy with God, the High and the Majestic,
by practicing modesty and humility—*

*Dejected out of shame and humility
humbled in awe, imploring Him—*

*By giving up your designs for His,
emptied of covetousness for what His servants have,*

*By hastening to fulfill His commands, and by being wary
of the subtle encroachment of bad manners.*

*If you—the spiritual aspirant—realize your attributes of servitude,
you will then be assisted with something of the attributes
of the Eternally Besought.*

*Realize your abject character and impoverishment, and you will
gain dignity and wealth from the All-Powerful.*

*There is no salvation like the heart's salvation,
given that all the limbs [and organs] respond to its desires.*

Courtesy: the Heart of Purification

Imam Mawlūd begins his Arabic didactic poem with a play on words that is lost in translation. “Beginning” in Arabic is *bad’u*, and the word for “heart” (*qalb*) also means, “to reverse something.” Reversing the letters in the word *bad’u* results in the word *adab*, which is the term for “courtesy”—and that is where this treatise begins, since courtesy is the portal to the purification of the heart.

Adab in Arabic holds several meanings, in addition to “courtesy.” *Adīb* (a derivative of *adab*), for example, has come to mean “an erudite person, someone who is learned,” as high manners and courtesy are associated with learning and erudition. However, the idea of courtesy is firmly established at the root of the word *adab*. Imam Mawlūd starts his treatise with courtesy, since excellent behavior and comportment are the doorkeepers to the science of spiritual purification. One must have courtesy with regard to God—behave properly with respect to His presence—if he or she wishes to purify the heart. But how does one achieve this courtesy? Imam Mawlūd mentions two requisite qualities associated with courtesy: modesty (*ḥayā’*) and humility (*dhul*).

Ḥayā’, in Arabic, conveys the meaning of “shame,” though the root word of *ḥayā’* is closely associated with “life” and “living.” The Prophet ﷺ stated, “Every

religion has a quality that is characteristic of that religion, and the characteristic of my religion is *ḥayāʾ*,” an internal sense of shame that includes bashfulness and modesty.

As children, many of us had someone say to us at times, “Shame on you!” Unfortunately, shame has now come to be viewed as a negative word, as if it were a pejorative. Parents are now often advised to never cause a child to feel shame. The current wisdom largely suggests that adults should always make the child feel good, regardless of his or her behavior. However, doing so eventually disables naturally occurring deterrents to misbehavior.

Some anthropologists divide cultures into shame cultures and guilt cultures. According to this perspective, shame is an outward mechanism, and guilt is an inward one which alludes to a human mechanism that produces strong feelings of remorse when someone has done something wrong, to the point that he or she needs to rectify the matter.

Most primitive cultures are not guilt-based but are shame-based, which is rooted in the fear of bringing shame upon oneself and the larger family. Islam honors the concept of shame and takes it to another level altogether—to a rank in which one feels a sense of shame before God. When a person acknowledges and realizes that God is fully aware of all that one does, says, and thinks, shame is elevated to a higher plane, to the unseen world from which there is no cover. At this level, one feels a sense of shame even before the angels. So while Muslims comprise a shame-based culture, this notion transcends feeling shame before one’s family—whether one’s elders or parents—and admits a mechanism that is not subject to the changing norms of human cultures. It is associated with the knowledge and active awareness that God is all-seeing of what one does—a reality that is permanent. The nurturing of this realization in a person deters one from engaging in acts that are displeasing and vulgar. This is the nobility of prophetic teachings.

Imam Mawlūd also mentions that one should have *dhul*, which literally means, “being lowly, abject, or humbled.” The Qur’an mentions that people who incur the anger of God have this state of humiliation thrust upon them. This humility or humbleness assumed before God is required for courtesy. Interestingly, the word *munkasiran* is translated as “dejected,” though it literally means, “broken.” It conveys a sense of being humbled in the majestic presence of God. It refers to the awesome realization that each of us, at every moment, lives and acts before the august presence of the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the one God besides whom there is no power or might in all the universe.

When we seriously reflect on God’s perfect watch over His creation and the countless blessings He sends down, and then consider the kind of deeds we bring before Him, what can we possibly feel except humility and shame? These strong feelings should lead us to implore God to change our state, make our desires consonant with His pleasure, giving up our designs for God’s designs. This is pure

courtesy with respect to God, a requisite for spiritual purification.

The Prophet ﷺ said, “None of you [fully] believes until his desires are in accordance with what I have brought.” Being aligned and at peace with the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, which embody the legacy of the prophetic teachings of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus ﷺ, entails striving to free oneself of greed and refusing the ethic of doing something for an ulterior motive that is essentially selfish and dissonant with the teachings of God’s prophets ﷺ. A person should not seek anything from God’s servants. If one wants anything, one should seek it from God, the Sovereign of the heavens and the earth. The basic rule is to ask God and then work; that is, one should utilize the means (*asbāb*) that one must use in order to achieve something in this world.

Imam Mawlūd then says that one should hasten “to fulfill [God’s] command” and be “wary of the subtle encroachment of bad manners,” namely, faults that one is unaware of. A hadith states, “One of you will say a word and give it no consideration, though it will drag the person [who uttered it] through Hellfire for 70 years.” People often become so disconnected from prophetic teachings that they unwittingly inflict great harm upon themselves. It is comparable to a heedless person who finds himself in diplomatic circles laden with protocol, yet he makes horrendous breaches of protocol without realizing it. With regard to God, the matter is obviously much more serious, as one’s soul may be harmed by one’s own breaches. In this case, the protocol involves knowledge of God and what He has enjoined and proscribed.

Freedom and Purification

Imam Mawlūd speaks next about freedom, which is achieved when one realizes the qualities of shame and humility, and empties oneself of their opposites (shamelessness and arrogance). With these qualities come true freedom, wealth, and dignity, which require manumission from the bonds of one’s whims. People may claim to be “free,” yet they cannot control themselves from gluttony in the presence of food or from illicit sexual relations when the opportunity presents itself. Such a notion of freedom is devoid of substance.

Freedom has real meaning when, for example, a situation of temptation arises and one remains God-fearing, steadfast, and in control of one’s actions. This holds true even when the temptation produces flickers of desire in a person who nonetheless refrains from indulging. Imam al-Ghazālī speaks at length about the desires of our limbs and organs and refers to the stomach and the genitals as being the two “dominators”; if they are under control, all other aspects of desire are kept in check. The tongue is also a formidable obstacle. There are people, for example, who appear incapable of refraining from backbiting and speaking ill of others, and they often do so without realizing it.

It is common for people to dislike impoverishment or humility because they perceive them as abjectness. Yet the Prophet ﷺ chose poverty over wealth; he

did not have money in his home; he did not have jewelry; he slept on the floor upon a bed made of leather that was stuffed with palm fibers; and he had two pillows in his room for guests. In much of today's culture, living this way would be considered extreme poverty. Imam Mawlūd stresses that dignity with God comes to those who are humble before Him, those who place prime value on how they are received by their Maker and not by how they will be judged by the ephemeral norms of people. Dignity and honor are gifts; the Qur'an says about God, "*You exalt whomever You will, and You debase whomever You will*" (3:26). Proofs of this divine law abound. There are many accounts, for example, of people who were once in positions of authority and wealth but now find themselves as paupers, completely stripped of their former glory, reduced, in many instances, to wards of the state. God is powerful over all things, and all good, authority, and provision are in His hand, not ours.

From this, we derive an important principle: if one ignobly pursues an attribute, he or she will be donned with its opposite. God humbles and humiliates the haughty ones, those who arrogantly seek out rank and glory before the eyes of people. The Qur'an gives the examples of Pharaoh and Korah and their abject fall and disgrace. Conversely, if one is humble before God, He will render him or her honorable.

Imam Mawlūd goes on to explain that there is no salvation "like the heart's salvation, given that all the limbs [and organs] respond to its desires." If one's heart is safe, so too are the limbs and organs, for they carry out the deeds inspired by the heart. The limbs and organs of the corrupt become instruments through which corruption is spread, as the Qur'an states: "*Today, We shall set a seal upon their mouths; and their hands will speak to Us and their feet shall bear witness to what they have earned*" (QUR'AN, 36:65); "*And spend [on the needy] in the way of God. And do not throw yourselves into ruin by your own hands*" (Qur'an, 2:195); "*And We shall say, 'Taste the chastisement of burning! That is for what your hands have forwarded [for yourselves]. And God never wrongs [His] servants'*" (Qur'an, 3:181–82); "*They shall have immense torment on the day when their tongues and their hands and their legs bear witness against them for what they had been doing*" (QUR'AN, 24:23–24).

According to a hadith, the tongue is the "interpreter of the heart." Hypocrisy is wretched because the hypocrite says with his tongue what is not in his heart. He wrongs his tongue and oppresses his heart. But if the heart is sound, the condition of the tongue follows suit. We are commanded to be upright in our speech, which is a gauge of the heart's state. According to a prophetic tradition, each morning, when the limbs and organs awaken in the spiritual world, they shudder and say to the tongue, "Fear God concerning us! For if you are upright, then we are upright; and if you deviate, we too deviate." Engaging in the regular remembrance of God (*dhikr*) safeguards the tongue and replaces idle talk with words and phrases that raise one in honor. The tongue is essential in developing

courtesy with God, which is the whole point of existence.

POEM VERSES 9 –15

After firmly grasping this foundation, then mastering the heart's infirmities is the second stage, Knowledge of the heart's ailments, what causes each of them and what removes them, is an obligation on everyone.

This is the ruling of al-Ghazālī. However, this does not apply to one who was already granted a sound heart,


As scholars other than al-Ghazālī opine, for al-Ghazālī reckoned the heart's illnesses as inherent To humanity. Others deemed them predominant in man— not qualities necessarily inherent to his nature. But know that obliteration of these diseases until no trace remains is beyond the capacity of human beings.

Nonetheless, here I give you what you need to know of their definitions, etiologies, and cures.

The Purification Process

Purifying the heart is a process. First, one must understand the necessity of having courtesy with God and the importance of fulfilling its requirements, as noted above. Second, one must be aware of the diseases of the heart—aware of their existence, their ailments, and the deleterious complications and troubles that ensue from them, and recognize that these diseases prevent one from attaining this courtesy. Knowledge of the diseases of the heart, their causes, and how to remove them is an obligation on every sane adult human being.

Imam Mawlūd cites Imam al-Ghazālī (an eleventh century master scholar of the science of purification) holding the position that it is indeed an obligation on everyone to learn about the ailments of the heart and their cures. Imam Mawlūd then states that some scholars hold that this is not an obligation per se for everyone, particularly for a person who has already been blessed with a sound heart and has been spared these maladies. Imam al-Ghazālī dissents and says that these diseases are inherent to the human condition. One can observe, for example, greed, jealousy, hatred, and the like in children, though the diseases do not necessarily endure. But how does this compare with “Original Sin,” the Christian concept which states that people are corrupt by nature?

In short, though Muslim scholars of the caliber of Imam al-Ghazālī do say that diseases of the heart are related to human nature, they would also say that this manifests itself as human inclination. However, Muslims do not believe that this inclination is a result of Adam's wrongdoing or that Adam  brought upon himself, and transferred to his descendants, a permanent state of sin that can only be lifted by sacrificial blood. Adam and Eve erred, no doubt, but they then turned in penitence to God, and God accepted their repentance and forgave them both. This is the nature of God's forgiveness. There was no blemish passed on to their progeny. The Qur'an declares that no soul bears the burden of sin of another soul (QUR'AN, 6:164). However, this fact does not negate the existence of base instincts among humans.

This matter relates to the fact that the heart is a spiritual organ. The unseen

aspect of the heart contains a bad seed that has the potential of becoming like a cancer that can metastasize and overtake the heart. The bacterium responsible for tuberculosis, for example, lives latent in the lungs of millions of people. When its carriers age or succumb to another disease that weakens their immune system, tuberculosis may start to emerge. This analogy illustrates that there is a dormant element in the human heart that, if nurtured and allowed to grow, can damage the soul and eventually destroy it. The Prophet ﷺ stated, “If the son of Adam sins, a black spot appears in the heart. And if the person repents, it is erased. But if he does not, it continues to grow until the whole heart becomes pitch black.” (Incidentally, this notion of associating the color black with sin is not racist in its origins. The attribution has been long used, even among black Africans who refer to a person who is wretched as “black-hearted.” The Qur’an says about successful people on the Day of Judgment that their “*faces become white*” (3:106). This does not mean “white” as a hue of skin; rather it refers to light and brightness, which are spiritual descriptions not associated with actual color. A black person can have spiritual light in his face, and a white person can have darkness, and vice versa, depending on one’s spiritual and moral condition.)

Imam al-Ghazālī considers ailments of the heart to be part of the Adamic potential. He believes one is obliged to know this about human nature in order to be protected. Other scholars simply consider these ailments to be predominant in man; that is, most people have these qualities, but not necessarily everybody.

It is interesting that Imam Mawlūd says it is impossible to rid oneself of these diseases completely. This implies that purification is a lifelong process, not something that is applied once and then forgotten. Purity of heart never survives a passive relationship. One must always guard his or her heart.

There is a well-known hadith which states that every child is born in the state of *fiṭrah*. Many Muslims translate this into English as, “Every child is born a *Muslim*.” However, the hadith says, “*fiṭrah*,” which means that people are born inclined to faith, with an intuitive awareness of divine purpose and a nature built to receive the prophetic message. What remains then is to nurture one’s *fiṭrah* and cultivate this inclination to faith and purity of heart.

Miserliness



POEM VERSES 16–25

Now then: the refusal to give what is obliged according to sacred law or to virtuous merit is the essence of miserliness, which is mentioned [among the diseases of the heart].

As for the obligations of sacred law, they are such things as zakat, supporting one's dependents, rights due to others, and relieving the distressed. Examples of [virtuous merit] include not nitpicking over trivialities.

Avoiding this is even more important with respect to a neighbor, a relative, or a wealthy person;

Or when hosting guests; or concerning something in which such behavior is inappropriate, such as purchasing a burial shroud or a sacrificial animal, or purchasing something you intend to donate to the needy.

Thus one who makes matters difficult for one whose rights clearly render this inappropriate to do so, such as a neighbor, has indeed torn away the veils of dignity. This is as the majestic and guiding sages have stated.

This is comparable to one who fulfills his obligations without good cheer or who spends from the least of what he possesses.

Its root is love of this world for its own sake, or so that the self can acquire some of its fleeting pleasures.

Definition and Causes

Imam Mawlūd brings to the foreground the definitions of these diseases, their etiology (origins and causes), and how to cure them. The first disease he speaks of is miserliness (*bukhl*). It is first not because it is the worst of characteristics but because of alphabetical ordering in Arabic.

He mentions two aspects of miserliness. One relates to the shariah (sacred law), that is rights due to God and to His creation. The other pertains to *murū'ah*, which is an important Arabic concept that connotes manliness and valor. In pre-Islamic Arab culture, valor was a defining concept. It is similar to Western ideals of chivalry and virtue. (The Latin word *vir* means, “man.” Similarly, the Arabic root for “virtue,” *murū'ah*, is a cognate of the word for “man”—though scholars state that it refers both to “manliness” and “humanity.”)

Regarding the first aspect, the sacred law obliges the payment of zakat, charity distributed to the needy. Miserliness in the form of not giving zakat is explicitly forbidden. The same is true with one's obligation to support his wife and children. Even if a couple suffers a divorce, the man must still pay child support. When it comes to the obligations of sacred law, miserliness is the most virulent form.

In terms of valor, the Imam goes into some detail. One should never create difficulty over paltry matters, he says. When it comes to debt, it is far better for the creditor to be flexible and magnanimous than demanding and unbearable. This is especially true when the creditor is not in need of repayment, while the

debtor faces hardship. An understanding and compassionate creditor is one who has valor. Having this quality of magnanimity is not an obligation in sacred law because the creditor has the right to what is owed to him. But if he is apathetic to the needs of the debtor and insists on his payment, this is considered reprehensible.

An Islamic ethic for the wealthy is that they exude magnanimity, generosity, and the demeanor of lenience. A hadith recounts that a wealthy individual would instruct his servants when collecting money on his behalf, “If [the debtors] do not have the means, tell them their debts are absolved.” When this wealthy man died without any good deeds save his largesse with debtors, according to the hadith, God said to His angels, “This man was forgiving of people’s transgressions against him, and I’m more worthy of forgiving transgressions. Therefore, I forgive him.”

When hosting guests, one should not be persnickety, says Imam Mawlūd. For example, if a guest spills something on the carpet, the host should not display anger or, worse yet, scold the guest. It is far better to show valor and be humane in making one’s guests feel no consternation at all. The Imam also explains that when one buys a funeral shroud, there should be no haggling over the cost, for a funeral shroud should remind one of death, and a worldly matter of haggling over prices should not be involved in its obtainment. One should also not haggle over prices when buying livestock in order to give meat to the needy. The same principle applies to purchasing other goods that are intended for charity as well.

A person who doles out difficulty without cause strips away the veils of dignity; this is what the “wise guides” (the scholars) have said. It is equally regrettable when one discharges an obligation or fulfills a trust without good cheer. When paying charity, for example, one should smile and be humble, allowing the hand of the indigent to be above the giver’s hand. It is a privilege to be in a position to offer charity and an honor to fulfill a divine obligation.

It is anathema to give away in charity what is shoddy and inferior. There is parsimony and miserliness in this. The Muslim tradition is to give away from what one loves; God blesses this charity and extends its goodness. *“O you who believe, spend from the good things you have earned and from what We brought out for you from the earth. And do not seek what is inferior in order to spend from it, though you yourselves would not take it unless your eyes were closed to it. And know that God is ever-rich and worthy of praise”* (Qur’an, 2:267). And, *“You will not attain to righteousness until you spend of what you love”* (QUR’AN, 3:92).

Generosity is one of the highest virtues of Islam and one of the manifest qualities of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, who was known as the most generous of people. The word for “generosity” used here is derived from the Arabic word “*karam*,” which also means “nobility.” In fact, one of the most excellent names of God is *al-Karīm* (the Generous). It is better to go beyond the minimum of what the sacred law demands when giving charity. This generosity is an expression of

gratitude to God, who is the Provider of all wealth and provision.

The etiology of miserliness is love of the fleeting, material aspects of this world. The miser ardently clings to his wealth and hoards it. The word for “cling” in Arabic is *masak*, which is derived from another Arabic word that means “constipation.” Miserly people are those who are unable to let go of something that otherwise poisons them. The Prophet ﷺ said, “God has made what is excreted from the son of Adam a metaphor for the world [*dunyā*].” When one is hungry, one seeks out food, eats, and is pleased. However, when it leaves the body, it is the most odious of things. Giving zakat is letting go of a portion of one’s wealth to purify all of one’s other assets and, ultimately, one’s soul. It is possible that one’s earnings may have some impurity in it, some doubtful source. By giving zakat, one purifies one’s provision from whatever unknown impurities that may have entered.

Imam ‘Alī said, “The worst person is the miser. In this world, he is deprived of his own wealth, and in the Hereafter, he is punished.” The ultimate casualty of miserliness is the miser himself. Many wealthy people in our society live impoverished lives, though they have millions in the bank. Their choice of lifestyle is not inspired by spiritual austerity. On the contrary, it causes them great discomfort to spend their money even on themselves and their families, let alone on others. The nature of the miser is that he does not benefit from his wealth in this world; and in the Hereafter he is bankrupt and debased for refusing to give to the needy. In doing so, he refuses to purify his wealth and prevents it from being a cause of light and relief in the Hereafter. The miser would argue that he hoards wealth to alleviate his fear of poverty. Remarkably, however, the miser never truly feels relieved of anxiety; a miser is constantly worried about money and devoted to servicing his worry. The Prophet ﷺ once asked some clansmen about their leader. They mentioned his name and said, “But he is a bit of a miser.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “A leader should never be a miser.” Then he added, “Do you know of any disease that is worse than miserliness?”

POEM VERSES 26–29

Treat this by realizing that those who achieved [affluence] did so only by exhausting themselves over long periods of time, thus finally accumulating what they sought.

Meanwhile, just as they approach the heights of [earthly] splendor, death suddenly assails them.

[Treat miserliness by also recognizing] the disdain shown to misers, and the hatred people have for them—even [hatred] amongst [misers] themselves.

With this same treatment, treat the person whose heart’s ailment is love of wealth.

Treatment

The treatment for miserliness is realizing that those who achieve wealth usually do so only after exhausting themselves over long periods of time, working for it day and night. Meanwhile, life passes on and time runs out. The culture of wanting more simply for the sake of more can occupy a person for an entire lifetime. But in the end, life is over. It terminates for the beggar and the affluent

just the same, whether one is old or young, rich or poor, happy or sad.

Imam Mawlūd's counsel is to reflect long and hard on the fact that just as people climb the heights of affluence and start to achieve what they have worn themselves out for, death assails them without invitation. When death takes us and moves us on, our wealth stays behind for others to wrangle over and spend.

One must also realize the level of disdain shown to misers. Nobody likes a miser. Even misers loathe each other. Realizing the hatred people have for misers is enough to turn one away from this disease.

Wantonness



POEM VERSE 30–31

As for [the disease of] wantonness, its definition is excessive mirth, which, according to the people of knowledge, is having excessive exuberance.

Treat it with hunger and the remembrance of the Hereafter, reminding yourself that [God] says He does not love the excessively joyful—which alone is a deterrent.

Definition and Treatment

The next disease the Imam writes about is wantonness (*baṭar*), along with excessiveness, an unbridled desire to need and want more. The word *baṭar* has several meanings: “the inability to bear blessings; bewilderment; dislike of something undeserving of dislike; and reckless extravagance.” Imam Mawlūd says that according to the people of knowledge, it is defined as “excessive mirth and exuberance.”

The Qur’an says, “Obey God and His Messenger, and dispute not among yourselves lest you falter and your strength departs from you. And be patient, for God is with the patient. And do not be like those who leave their homes *baṭar* [filled with excessive pride about their state], showing off before people and preventing others from the way of God. And God encompasses what they do” (QUR’AN, 8:46–47). And, “How many cities have We destroyed that exulted in their livelihood? Here are their homes now uninhabited after them except for a few” (QUR’AN, 28:58). The world of ancient civilizations is full of ruins of once grand structures and communities that used to be teeming with life, inhabited by people who exulted in their wealth and accomplishments. When one visits these ruins, one notices the utter silence of these towns. Each soul that lived there is now in another state, awaiting God’s final judgment.

Wantonness is a disease to which the world’s affluent societies are particularly vulnerable. In societies that are extremely pleased with their standard of living, their extravagance and hubris are obvious. One sign of these conditions is the ease with which people enter into debt and live contentedly with it. People are consciously living beyond their means in order to maintain the appearance of affluence. This is a product of wantonness: willingly falling headlong into debt in order to achieve a certain material standard of living.

The Imam posits that the treatment of wantonness is to intentionally experience hunger and to reflect seriously on death and the Hereafter. Experiencing hunger can be achieved through voluntary fasting (*ṣawm*) or by simply reducing what one eats. One aspect of traditional medicine related to a spiritual cosmology—whether this tradition was Greek, Chinese, or Arab—is the belief that too much food harms the spiritual heart and, in fact, could kill it. It was commonly believed that people who eat in abundance become hardhearted.

Those who consume an abundance of rich foods may literally become “hardhearted” with arterial sclerosis, the hardening of the arteries. (“Sclerotic” means “hard, rigid, or stiff.”) Likewise, what happens to the physical heart may parallel what occurs to the spiritual heart.

Scholars of various religions often expounded on hunger as an important sensation that feeds spiritual growth. Feeling emptiness in the stomach, they said, is excellent for the body as well as the soul. According to Imam Mālik, fasting three days out of the month is the best way to maintain a regular engagement with hunger. The fasting regimen known as the Fast of David (Dāwūd) ﷺ consists of fasting every other day, with the exception of religious holidays. Fasting Mondays and Thursdays is also an excellent regimen. Whichever pattern of fasting one chooses, it is important to maintain it, for fasting is an excellent form of worship that is beloved by God and praised by the Prophet ﷺ. It also is a protective shield against wantonness.

The second aspect to the remedy is to remember death and the Hereafter. What is meant by “remember” here is not the common function of memory, in which one merely recalls a fact without any reflection. (In fact, no spiritual remedy mentioned in this book involves a flaccid process. Each requires exertion and a true desire to achieve success in its fullest sense.) Freeing the heart of diseases such as wantonness requires remembering the Hereafter and its various states and tumultuous scenes. For example, one should reflect on the state of the grave, which will be either a parcel of Paradise or a pit of Hell. Once a person dies, his journey in the Hereafter begins. Meditation on the Hereafter requires learning more about its various stations and passages, including the Traverse (Ṣirāṭ), over which people must cross and behold below the awesome inferno of the Hellfire. Consistent reflection of this nature lessens the apparent value of extravagance and, in general, all the fleeting enticements this world has to offer, whether it is wealth, prestige, fame, or the like.

The Imam cites the verse, “*God does not love those who exult*” (QUR’AN, 28:76), whether it is in their wealth, status, or anything else. Images glorifying wantonness are ubiquitous in our times. Even as one drives, he or she is accosted by billboard advertisements that show the faces of wantonness: people in ecstatic postures with exaggerated smiles and gaping mouths, showing off their supreme happiness because they own a particular type of car or smoke a certain brand of cigarettes or guzzle a special brand of beer—alcohol that destroys lives and minds. According to advertising theory, when people are constantly exposed to such images, they not only incline toward the product but desire the culture associated with it. Advertisers sell a lifestyle that glorifies wantonness and subtly dissuades reflection. All those smiling people on billboards and all those who aim their glances toward them will inevitably die someday and stand before their Maker. This is the ultimate destiny of all human beings. It is this realization that is the slayer of wantonness.

Hatred



POEM VERSES 32–33

*Another disease is hatred for other than the sake of [God,]
the Exalted. Its cure is to pray for the one despised.*

*This is with the understanding that you have not done
wrong if you are repulsed by the hatred you harbor and do
not act in accordance with it [to harm the person].*

Definition and Treatment

The next disease is hatred (*bughd*). In itself, hatred is not necessarily negative. It is commendable to hate corruption, evil, disbelief, murder, lewdness, and anything else that God has exposed as despicable. The Prophet ﷺ never disliked the essence of anything, but only what something manifested.

Hatred or strong dislike of a person for no legitimate reason is the disease of *bughd*. The Prophet ﷺ once said to his Companions, “Do you want to see a man of Paradise?” A man then passed by, and the Prophet ﷺ said, “That man is of the people of Paradise.” One of Companion of the Prophet ﷺ wanted to find out what it was about this man that earned him such a commendation from the Messenger of God ﷺ, so he decided to spend some time with this man and observe him closely. He noticed that this man did not perform the night prayer vigil (*tahajjud*) or do anything extraordinary. He appeared to be an average man of Medina. The Companion finally told the man what the Prophet ﷺ had said about him and asked if he did anything special. The man replied, “The only thing that I can think of, other than what everybody else does, is that I make sure that I never sleep with any rancor in my heart towards another.” That was his secret.

The cure for hatred is straightforward. One should pray for the person toward whom he feels hatred, making specific supplications that mention this person by name, asking God to give this person good things in this life and the next. When one does this with sincerity, hearts mend. If one truly wants to purify his or her heart and root out disease, there must be total sincerity in carrying out the treatments and conviction that these cures are effective.

Arguably, the disease of hatred is one of the most devastating forces in the world. But the force that is infinitely more powerful is love. Love is an attribute of God; hate is not. A name of God mentioned in the Qur'an is *al-Wadūd*, the Loving One. Hate is the absence of love, and only through love can hatred be removed from the heart. In a beautiful hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said, “None of you has achieved faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” The thirteenth century scholar Imam al-Nawawī comments on this hadith:

When the Prophet ﷺ says “brother,” we should interpret this as universal brotherhood, which includes Muslims and non-Muslims. For one should desire for his brother non-Muslim that he enter

into the state of submission with his Lord [Islam]. And for his brother Muslim, he should love for him the continuation of guidance and that he remain in submission. Because of this, it is considered highly recommended and divinely rewarding to pray for a non-Muslim's guidance. The word "love" here refers to a desire for good and for benefit to come to others. This love is celestial or spiritual love and not earthly or human love, for human nature causes people to desire harm to befall their enemies and to discriminate against those who are unlike them [in creed, color, or character]. However, men must oppose their nature, pray for their brothers, and desire for others what they desire for themselves. Moreover, whenever a man does not desire good for his brother, envy is the root cause. Envy is a rejection of God's apportionment in the world. Thus, one is opposing how God meted out sustenance in accord with His wisdom. Therefore, one must oppose his own ego's desires and seek treatment for this disease with the healing force of acceptance of the divine decree and prayer on behalf of one's enemies in a way that suppresses the ego [*nafs*].

Iniquity



POEM VERSES 34–42

[The disease of] iniquity, according to the book, Opening of the Truth, is defined as harming a fellow creature without right.

Its cause is the powerfully intoxicating wine, “love of [worldly] position.” So remember—if you wish to turn [this intoxicant] into useful vinegar—

How many a leader achieved his heart’s desire of rank and position, yet in the end, the devotee and his object of devotion were leveled to equal planes [by death].

Keep in mind that this desire is about turning away from your Master towards His impoverished and miserly servants.

Concern with the affections of others is exhausting, and though you may please some, others will flee from you, filled with anger.

Yet what is prohibited regarding the pleasure of others is what is procured by way of trickery, ostentatious display of religiosity, or hypocritical affectation.

[Know also] that the seeker of their pleasure cannot expect the pleasure of [God,] the Fashioner of creation, the Mighty, the Capable.

As for the one whose heart is encrusted with the love of this world, his only cure is having certainty [of his mortality].

Thus, if he keeps death constantly before his eyes, this acts as a cleanser for the soiled matter encrusting his heart.

Definition and Treatment

Iniquity is defined, according to Shaykh Muḥammad, the author of the book, *The Opening of the Truth*, as harming anything in creation without just cause. The word is a translation of *baghī*, which is derived from the Arabic word that denotes “desire.” In this context, the problem is desiring something to the point of transgressing the rights of others to attain it. The iniquity and injustice that people aim at others ultimately work against themselves: “*O you people, surely your iniquity is but against your selves*” (QUR’AN, 10:23). Imam Mawlūd describes the cause of iniquity using the metaphor of a powerfully intoxicating wine, called *qarqaf*, which makes one shudder when swallowed. This metaphorical wine is “love of position,” which is a major motivation that impels some people to wrong others. Even petty office managers oppress their subordinates for the purpose of marking their territory and securing their positions. Tyrants on corporate boards pull off power plays to acquire more authority or remove those whom they perceive to be potential challenges to their authority or position.

The Imam states that the desire for temporal power is a move away from God—besides whom there is no power or might—and a move toward His creation, that is, people who are by comparison impoverished. Those desiring temporal power protect whatever illusory possessions and authority they have like misers.

Vain pursuits wear out the soul. A person who endeavors to please people and gain their love, admiration, or approval will exhaust himself. In the end, his

pursuit may leave some people pleased and happy, but others displeased and resentful. It is said that if one honors a noble man, he reciprocates honorably, but if one honors a vile person, he responds with anger and resentment. The poet, al-Mutanabbī, said, “Whenever you honor the honorable, you possess them. Whenever you honor the ignoble, they rebel.”

It is prohibited to seek the pleasure of others through trickery, ostentatious religiosity, or hypocritical flattery. One should not expect the pleasure of God when pursuing the pleasure of His creatures. Scholars have pointed out that seeking the pleasure of God actually makes a person pleasing to good people. One should not be concerned with the commendation of the corrupt, the miserly, power-hungry, and their like. It is a tremendous waste of time seeking those whose commendations are of no real value. Honor and rank are forever linked with the status one has with God. The great Muslim scholar, Ibn ‘aṭā’allāh (d. 709/1309), said, “If you desire immortal glory, seek glory in the Immortal.”

The Imam uses the word *ummiḥ*, which, in this context, means “world,” though its dominant meaning is “mother” (the connection between the two definitions is that we are made from the material of this world). However, love of this ephemeral world encrusts the heart, as this type of love involves dedication to the material world at the expense of spiritual ascendancy. Love like this keeps a person’s eyes toward the earth—figuratively speaking—and makes one heedless of the ultimate return to God.

The cure for this is having certainty in the ultimate destiny of humanity. Envisioning standing in the Hereafter for judgment has the power to expose the utter waste of irrelevant pursuits. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Remember often the destroyer of pleasure,” that is, death. Remembering death is a spiritual practice that cleanses the heart of frivolousness. The Prophet ﷺ once passed by a group of Muslims who were laughing heartily, and he said to them, “Mix in your gatherings the remembrance of death.” This is not a prohibition against laughter but a reminder that prolonged amusement has the capacity to anesthetize the soul. Someone once asked ‘Ā’ishah j, the Prophet’s wife, about the most wondrous aspect she observed of the Prophet ﷺ. She said, “Everything about him was wondrous. But I will say this: when the veiling of the night came, and when every lover went to his lover, he went to be with God.” The Prophet ﷺ stood at night in prayer, remembering his Lord until his ankles swelled up and his tears dripped from his beard. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Death is closer to any of you than the strap on his sandals.” Somewhere on earth there is a door reserved for each soul, and one day each of us will walk through that door never to return to this life again. Where that door is and when we will walk through it are unknowns that we must live with and prepare for.

Upon death, suddenly all of this—this whole world and all of its charms and occupations—will become as if it were all a dream: “*And you will think that you tarried [on earth] only for a short while*” (QUR’AN, 17:52). Even those who are

spiritually blind will see in the new order of existence the ultimate truth about God and our purpose as His creation. And when we climb out of our graves for the mighty Gathering in the Hereafter, it will seem to us that we had stayed in our graves for only a day or part of a day, as the Qur'an states (10:45). When one is confronted with eternity and its ironclad reality, this world will seem like the most ephemeral of existences. This once overwhelmingly alluring life will be of no value to anyone.

Even the world's most powerful leaders, after finally achieving what they so badly coveted, taste death. All their power abruptly vanishes at death's door, the great leveler. Their minions die just the same, those who did whatever they could to move closer to people of authority. When one examines the conduct of the Companions, it is clear that they sought to be nearer to the Prophet ﷺ to learn more about their obligations and what would draw them closer to God. They did not desire illusory power. The believers around the Prophet ﷺ saw first hand that God chose him ﷺ to be the conveyor and exemplar of the final message sent to humanity. Learning at the hand of the Prophet ﷺ provides meanings and benefits that extend beyond this life. Attaining nearness to God does not involve wronging others. On the contrary, access to the source of all power requires a character that is selfless, compassionate, and sensitive to the rights of others.

It serves the soul to be actively aware that the door to death awaits each human being and that it can open at any time. For this reason, the Imam says that we must keep the spectacle of death before our eyes and realize its proximity.

Love of the World



POEM VERSES 43–53

Realize also that blameworthy love of this world is what is solely for the benefit of the self. It does not include desiring it so that others are not burdened

by your needs, and so that you are secure from dependence upon other people. Nor does it include desiring it as provision for the next world.

Indeed, love of this world falls under [the five categories of] legal rulings, such that its [acceptability or detriment] is based on what it helps one to achieve. If the love of something of this world is for the purpose of helping one achieve something prohibited, then it is also prohibited.

As such, censuring the world is only for those things that do not advance [one's] salvation. Thus, for these reasons, censuring is restricted to its ardent love. Indeed, the best of creation [the Prophet ﷺ] prohibited cursing the world.

Things are praised or censured only by virtue of what results from them, like healing or disease. Therefore, what is obtained for [one's] physical necessities, by means of wealth or worldly position, is beneficial.

Still, some scholars scorn the accumulation of great wealth, fearing [the risk] of transgressing the bounds of permissibility.

One who earns wealth for the purpose of vainglorious competition is reckoned as among those who perpetrate enormities.

Love of praise for what one has not accomplished is caused by desiring other than [God,] the Exalted.

Definition and Treatment

An Islamic tradition attributed to Jesus ﷺ states, “The world is a bridge; so pass over it to the next world, but do not try to build on it.” Love of this world is considered blameworthy, though this does not include wanting things of this world in order to be free from burdening others with one's needs, nor does it include desiring provision from the world for the purpose of attaining the best of the Hereafter.

The five categories of classical legal rulings determine how love of something worldly is viewed. Depending on the intentions of the person, the love of this world can either be obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*mandūb*), permissible (*mubāḥ*), reprehensible (*makrūh*), or forbidden (*ḥarām*). For example, we should love aspects of this world that helps us achieve felicity in the Hereafter, such as the Qur'an, the Ka'ba, the Prophet ﷺ, our parents, godly people, books of knowledge, children, and others who help us in our religious affairs. As for wealth, we should love helping the needy with it.

The Prophet ﷺ prohibited vilification of the world. He said, “Do not curse the world, for God created the world, and the world is a means to reaching [knowledge of] God.” The Qur'an states, “*And He has subjugated for you what is in the heavens and what is on earth, all of it from Him. Indeed, therein are sure signs for a people who reflect*” (QUR'AN, 45:13). The world is the greatest sign of God, as is the cosmos. We do not accept the doctrine of condemning the world, which is

found in some religious traditions. We say that He created everything in the world and has subjugated its resources for our just and conscientious use. What is censured is loving those things that are sinful or that lead to sinful matters and loving the ephemeral aspects of the world to the point that it suppresses one's spiritual yearning.

The Imam says that love of the world is praised or blamed based on what good or harm it brings to a person. If it leads to a diseased heart—such as greediness and arrogance—then it is blameworthy. If it leads to spiritual elevation and healing of the heart, then it is praiseworthy. Anything that is obtained from the necessities of living on earth—food, housing, shelter, and the like—is beneficial and is not considered “worldly” per se. Attaining wealth and position for the benefit of the needy is not considered blameworthy. What scholars traditionally have warned against, with regard to attaining wealth, is the danger of eventual transgression. The more wealth one acquires, the higher the probability that one will become preoccupied with other than God. Also, vying for wealth can become an addiction and lead to ostentation, which is considered a disease of the heart.

Love of praise is another disease, particularly the love of praise for something one has not done. This is caused by desiring something from other than God. People naturally love praise, but it should be for something one has actually done. Furthermore, the cause of praise should be something that is praiseworthy in the sight of God. It is not necessarily wrong to want people to appreciate what one has done. When the Prophet ﷺ learned of the good that someone had done, he would say, “May God reward you with goodness.” One must make the distinction between flattery and appreciation. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Throw dirt in the faces of flatterers,” those who pour accolades upon others, worthy or not, like poets who compose appallingly obsequious poetry praising a tyrant. But praising or thanking someone for doing good is expressing gratitude. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever is not thankful to people will not be thankful to God.” Flatter, on the other hand, is being disingenuous with praise. People often praise others because they want something from them. What is particularly blameworthy is when people enjoy receiving praise for something they have not done. *“Do not think that those who rejoice in what they have done and who love to be praised for what they have not done—do not think that they will escape punishment. Theirs shall be a painful chastisement”* (Qur'an, 3:188). For example, in academia, some professors receive tribute for work their students actually did. In the corporate culture, it is not unheard of for managers to be credited for the accomplishment of a team of people, to whom the managers sometimes attribute nothing.

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