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## **Signs, Symptoms and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart**

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

*by Hamza Yusuf*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On the Day of Judgment no one is safe save the one who returns to God with a pure heart. (QURAN)

Surely in the breasts of humanity is a lump of flesh, if sound then the whole body is sound, and if corrupt then the whole body is corrupt. Is it not the heart? (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ)

Blessed are the pure at heart, for they shall see God. (Jesus عليه السلام)

"Whoever has not thanked people, has not thanked God," said the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This work is the result of the collaboration of many people. I am honored to have studied the meanings of this poem with my friend and pure-hearted teacher Abdallah ould Ahmadna. I also thank the eminent scholar and spiritual master, Shaykh Muhammad Hasan ould al-Khadim, for giving me license to teach and translate the poem and whose outstanding commentary on it was my constant companion during the classes and remains so today. Thank you, Feraidoon Mojadedi, for your continued love and support and for having the zeal to organize the classes and the small, blessed school that would become Zaytuna. More gratitude than can be expressed goes to Doctor Hisham al-Alusi, who humbly sat on the floor against the window to attend the original classes that would become this text. He saw from the start the importance of this work and, through his extraordinary efforts, helped realize more than I had hoped to with the Zaytuna Institute. I also thank my sister Nabila, who has worked tirelessly through her Alhambra Productions to spread this message. I'm grateful to Hisham Mahmoud for his careful editing of the translation of the poem, and to my friend and artist Abdullateef Whiteman for his beautiful design of the cover. Special thanks and appreciation to Ibrahim Abusharif, whose editing makes the book as much his as it is mine. Great thanks also to Osama Osman, who saw the importance of a book on this topic and took the work to its completion. Finally, my immense gratitude goes to the mother of my children, Liliana, whose pure heart is fortunate enough not to need the contents of this book.

## E-Book Acknowledgements

This ebook was created manually after hundreds of hours of digitizing and proofreading. It is important to be mindful of the flaws and be cautious of any words or phrases that seem off. Some special characters are missing, which may alter the pronunciation of certain Arabic words. Characters such as ħ, ā, ū, and ʔ did not properly translate into this PDF, although we are working on fixing these minor details in future revisions inshaAllah. As a result the transliteration key is not entirely helpful for some words that use these special characters. Secondly, the book contains an appendix, a Quranic index, and a subject index, all of which are not included in this PDF unfortunately. If you find any errors, please email [admin@mylifeisislam.com](mailto:admin@mylifeisislam.com) and we will do our best to correct them immediately.

# TRANSLITERATION KEY

ء	, (1)	ر	r <sup>(6)</sup>	ف	f
ا	ā, a	ز	z	ق	q <sup>(13)</sup>
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th <sup>(2)</sup>	ص	ṣ <sup>(7)</sup>	م	m
ج	j	ض	ḍ <sup>(8)</sup>	ن	n
ح	ḥ <sup>(3)</sup>	ط	ṭ <sup>(9)</sup>	ه	h <sup>(14)</sup>
خ	kh <sup>(4)</sup>	ظ	ẓ <sup>(10)</sup>	و	ū, u, w
د	d	ع	ʿ <sup>(11)</sup>	ي	ī, i, y
ذ	dh <sup>(5)</sup>	غ	gh <sup>(12)</sup>		



Mentioned after the Prophet Muḥammad's ﷺ name and is translated as "God bless him and grant him peace."



Mentioned after the names of the Prophets and is translated as "peace be upon him."

1. A distinctive glottal stop made at the bottom of the throat. It is also used to indicate the running of two words into one, e.g. *bismi'Llāh*.
2. Pronounced like the *th* in think.
3. Hard *h* sound made at the Adam's apple in the middle of the throat.
4. Pronounced like the *ch* in Scottish *loch*.
5. Pronounced like the *th* in *this*.
6. A slightly trilled *r* made behind the front teeth which is trilled not more than once or twice.
7. An emphatic *s* pronounced behind the upper front teeth.
8. An emphatic *d*-like sound made by pressing the entire tongue against the upper palate.
9. An emphatic *t* sound produced behind the front teeth.
10. An emphatic *th* sound, like the *th* in *this*, made behind the front teeth.
11. A distinctive Semitic sound made in the middle throat and sounding to a Western ear more like a vowel than a consonant.
12. A guttural sound made at the top of the throat resembling the untrilled German and French *r*.
13. A hard *k* sound produced at the back of the palate.
14. This sound is like the English *h* but has more body. It is made at the very bottom of the throat and pronounced at the beginning, middle, and ends of words.

## Translator's Introduction

Almost universally, religious traditions have stressed the importance of the condition of the heart. In the Muslim scripture, the Day of Judgment is described as *a day in which neither wealth nor children shall be of any benefit [to anyone], except one who comes to God with a sound heart* (QURAN, 26:88-89). The sound heart is understood to be free of character defects and spiritual blemishes. This “heart” is actually the spiritual heart and not the physical organ per se, although in Islamic tradition the spiritual heart is centered in the physical. One of the extraordinary aspects of the modern era is that we are discovering aspects about the heart unknown in previous times, although there were remarkable insights in ancient traditions. For instance, according to traditional Chinese medicine, the heart houses what is known as *shen*, which is *spirit*. The Chinese characters for thinking, thought, love, the intention to listen, and virtue all contain the ideogram for the heart.

In nearly every culture in the world, people use metaphors that directly or indirectly allude to the heart. We call certain types of people “hard-hearted,” usually because they show no mercy and kindness. Likewise, people are said to have “cold hearts” and others yet who are “warm-hearted.” We speak of people as wearing their “hearts on their sleeves” because they do not (or cannot) conceal their emotions from others. When someone’s words or actions penetrate our souls and affect us profoundly, we say that this person “touched my heart” or “touched the core of my being.” The Arabic equivalent for the English word *core* (which originally in Latin meant *heart*) is known as *lubb*, which also refers to the heart, as well as the intellect and the essence of something.

The most ancient Indo-European word for heart means “that which leaps,” which is consonant with the idea of the beating heart that leaps in the breast of man. People speak of their hearts as “leaping for joy.” People also say that their heart “skipped a beat” when they come upon something startling that elicited from them a very strong emotional response. When people fall in love, they speak of “stealing one’s heart.” There are many other metaphors involving the human heart, owing to its centrality in life. These phrases – however casually we may utter them today – have roots in ancient concepts.

The ancients were aware of spiritual diseases of the heart. And this understanding is certainly at the essence of Islamic teachings. The Quran defines three types of people: *al-mu'minūn* (believers), *al-kāfirūn* (scoffers or atheists), and *al-munāfiqūn* (hypocrites). The believers are described as people whose hearts are alive and full of light, while the scoffers are in darkness: *Is one who was dead and then We revived [with faith] and made for him a light by which to walk among the people like one who is in darkness from which he cannot exit?* (QURAN, 6:122). According to commentators of the Quran, *the one who was dead* refers to having a dead heart, which God revived with the light of guidance that one may walk straight and honorably among human beings. Also, the prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “The difference between the one who remembers God and one who does not is like the difference between the living and the dead.” In essence, the believer is someone whose heart is alive, while the disbeliever is someone whose heart is spiritually dead. The hypocrite, however, is somebody whose heart is diseased. The Quran speaks of certain people with diseased hearts (self-inflicted, we understand) and, as a result, they were increased in their disease (QURAN, 2:10).

The heart is centered slightly to the left of our bodies. Two sacred languages of Arabic and Hebrew are written from right to left, toward the heart, which, as some have noted, mirrors the purpose of writing, namely to affect the heart. One should also consider the ritual of circumambulation or circling around the Ancient House (or Ka'ba) in Makkah during the Pilgrimage. It is performed in a counterclockwise fashion, with the left side of the

worshipper facing the House – with the heart inclined towards it to remind us of God and His presence in the life of humanity.

The physical heart, which houses the spiritual heart, beats about 100,000 times a day, pumping two gallons of blood per minute and over 100 gallons per hour. If one were to attempt to carry 100 gallons of water (whose density is lighter than blood) from one place to another, it would be an exhausting task. Yet the human heart does this every hour of every day for an entire lifetime without respite. The vascular system transporting life-giving blood is over 60,000 miles long – more than two times the circumference of the earth. So when we conceive of our blood being pumped throughout our bodies, know that this means that it travels through 60,000 miles of a closed vascular system that connects all the parts of the body – all the vital organs and living tissues – to this incredible heart.

We now know that the heart starts beating before the brain is fully fashioned, that is, without the benefit of a fully formed central nervous system. The dominant theory states that the central nervous system is what controls the entire human being, with the brain at its center. Yet we also know that the nervous system does not initiate the beat of the heart, but that it is actually self-initiated, or, as we would say, initiated by God. We also know that the heart, should all of its connections to the brain be severed (as they are during a heart transplant), continues to beat.

Many in the West have long proffered that the brain is the center of consciousness. But in traditional Islamic thought – as in other traditions – the heart is viewed as the center of our being. The Quran, for example, speaks of wayward people who have hearts *with which they do not understand* (7:179). Also the Quran mentions people who mocked the prophet ﷺ and were entirely insincere in listening to his message, so God *placed over their hearts a covering that they may not understand it and in their ears [He placed] acute deafness* (6:25). Their inability to understand is a deviation from the spiritual function of a sound heart, just as their ears have been afflicted with a spiritual *deafness*. So we understand from this that the center of the intellect, the center of human consciousness and conscience, is actually the heart and not the brain. Only recently have we discovered that there are over 40,000 neurons in the heart. In other words, there are cells in the heart that are communicating with the brain. While the brain sends messages to the heart, the heart also sends messages to the brain.

Two physiologists in the 1970s, John and Beatrice Lacey, conducted a study and found that the brain sent messages to the heart, but that the heart did not automatically obey the messages. Sometimes the heart sped up, while at other times it slowed down, indicating that the heart itself has its own type of intelligence. The brain receives signals from the heart through the brain's amygdala, thalamus, and cortex. The amygdala relates to emotions, while the cortex or the neocortex relates to learning and reasoning. Although this interaction is something that is not fully understood from a physiological point of view, we do know that the heart is an extremely sophisticated organ with secrets still veiled from us.

The Prophet of Islam ﷺ spoke of the heart as a repository of knowledge and a vessel sensitive to the deeds of the body. He said, for example, that wrongdoing irritates the heart. So the heart actually perceives wrong action. In fact, when people do terrible things, the core of their humanity is injured. Fyodor Dostoyevsky expresses brilliantly in *Crime and Punishment* that the crime itself is the punishment because human beings ultimately have to live with the painful consequences of their deeds. When someone commits a crime, he does so first against his own heart, which then affects the whole human being. The person enters a state of spiritual agitation and often tries to suppress it. The root meaning of the word *kufir* (disbelief) is *to cover* something up. As it relates to this discussion, the problems we see in our society come down to covering up or suppressing the symptoms of its troubles. The agents used to do this include alcohol, drugs, sexual experimentation and deviance, power grabs, wealth, arrogance,

pursuit of fame, and the like. These enable people to submerge themselves into a state of heedlessness concerning their essential nature. People work very hard to cut themselves off from their hearts and the natural feelings found there. The pressures to do this are very strong in our modern culture.

One of the major drawbacks of being severed from the heart is that the more one is severed, the sicker the heart becomes, for the heart needs nourishment. Heedlessness starves the heart, robs it of its spiritual manna. One enters into a state of unawareness – a debilitating lack of awareness of God and an acute neglect of humanity’s ultimate destination: the infinite world of the Hereafter. When one peers into the limitless world through remembrance of God and increases in beneficial knowledge, one’s concerns become more focused on the infinite world, not the finite one that is disappearing and ephemeral. When people are completely immersed in the material world, believing that this world is all that matters and all that exists and that they are not accountable for their actions, they effect a spiritual death of their hearts. Before the heart dies, however, it shows symptoms of affliction. These afflictions are the spiritual diseases of the heart (the center of our being) – the topic of this book.

In Islamic tradition, these diseases fall under two categories. The first is known as *shubuhāt* or *obfuscations*, diseases that relate to impaired understanding. For instance, if somebody is fearful that God will not provide for him or her, this is considered a disease of the heart because a sound heart has knowledge and trust, not doubt and anxiety. *Shubuhāt* alludes to aspects closely connected to the heart: the soul, the ego, Satan’s whisperings and instigations, caprice, and the ardent love of this ephemeral world. The heart is an organ designed to be in a state of calm, which is achieved with the remembrance of God: *Most surely, in the remembrance of God do hearts find calm* (QURAN, 13:28). This calm is what the heart seeks out and gravitates to. It yearns always to remember God the Exalted. But when God is not remembered, when human beings forget God, then the heart falls into a state of agitation and turmoil. In this state it becomes vulnerable to diseases because it is undernourished and cut off. Cells require oxygen, so we breathe. If we stop breathing, we die. The heart also needs to breathe, and the breath of the heart is none other than the remembrance of God. Without it, the spiritual heart dies. The very purpose of revelation and of scripture is to remind us that our hearts need to be nourished.

We enter the world in a state the Quran calls *fiṭra*, our original state and inherent nature that is disposed to accept faith and prefer morality. But we soon learn anxiety mainly from our parents and then our societies. The heart is created vulnerable to anxiety and agitation (QURAN, 70:19). Those who are protected from this state are people of prayer, people who establish prayer and guard its performance with a humble and open heart connected with God, the Lord of all creation. The highest ranks among people are those who do not allow anything to divert them from the remembrance of God. They are the ones who remember God as they are *standing, sitting, and reclining on their sides* (QURAN, 3:191).

The second category of disease concerns the base desires of the self and is called *shahawāt*. This relates to our desires exceeding their natural state, as when people live merely to satisfy these urges and are led by them. Islam provides the method by which our hearts can become sound and safe again. This method has been the subject of brilliant and insightful scholarship for centuries in the Islamic tradition. One can say that Islam in essence is a program to restore purity and calm to the heart through the remembrance of God.

This present text is based on the poem known as *Maṭharat al-Qulūb* (literally, *Purification of the Hearts*), which offers the means by which purification can be achieved. It is a treatise on the “alchemy of the hearts,” namely, a manual on how to transform the heart. It was written by a great scholar and saint, Shaykh Muhammad Mawlud al-Ya’qubi al-Musawi al-Muratani. As his name indicates, he was from Mauritania in West Africa. He was a master



of all the Islamic sciences, including the inward sciences of the heart. He stated that he wrote this poem because he observed the prevalence of diseased hearts. He saw students of religion spending their time learning abstract sciences that people were not really in need of, to the neglect of those sciences that pertain to what people are accountable for in the next life, namely, the spiritual condition of the heart. In one of his most cited statements, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Actions are based upon intentions.” All deeds are thus valued according to the intentions behind them, and intentions emanate from the heart. So every action a person intends or performs is rooted in the heart.

Imam Mawlud realized that the weakness of society was a matter of weakness of character in the heart, Imam Mawlud based his text on many previous illustrious works, especially Imam al-Ghazali’s great *Ihya’ Ulum al-Din* (The Revivification of the Sciences of the Religion). Each of the 40 books of *Ihya’ Ulum al-Din* is basically about rectifying the human heart.

If we examine the trials and tribulations, wars and other conflicts, every act of injustice all over earth, we’ll find they are rooted in human hearts. Covetousness, the desire to aggress and exploit, the longing to pilfer natural resources, the inordinate love of wealth and position, and other maladies are manifestations of diseases found nowhere but in the heart. Every criminal, miser, abuser, scoffer, embezzler, and hateful person does what he or she does because of a diseased heart. If hearts were sound, these actions would no longer be a reality. So if we want to change our world, we do not begin by rectifying the outward. Instead, we must change the condition of our inward. Everything we see happening outside of us is in reality coming from the unseen world within. It is from the unseen world that the phenomenal world emerges, and it is from the unseen realm of our hearts that all actions spring.

The well-known civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. said that in order for people to condemn injustice, they must go through four stages. The first stage is that people must ascertain that indeed injustices are being perpetrated. In his case, it was injustices against African Americans in the United States. The second stage is to negotiate, that is, approach the oppressor and demand justice. If the oppressor refuses, King said that the third stage is self-purification, which starts with the question: “Are we ourselves wrongdoers? Are we ourselves oppressors?” The fourth stage, then, is to take action after true self-examination, after removing one’s own wrongs before demanding justice from others.

We of the modern world are reluctant to ask ourselves—when we look at the terrible things that are happening—“Why do they occur?” And if we ask that with all sincerity, the answer will come resoundingly: “All of this is from your own selves.” In so many ways, we have brought this upon ourselves. This is the only empowering position we can take. The Quran implies that if a people oppress others, God will send another people to oppress them: *We put some oppressors over other oppressors because of what their own hands have earned* (6:129), According to Fakhruddin al-Razi (a 12th century scholar of the Quran), the verse means that the existence of oppression on earth may be caused by previous oppression. By implication, often the victims of aggression were once aggressors themselves. This, however, is not the case with tribulations, for there are times in which people are indeed tried, but if they respond with patience and perseverance, God will always give them relief and victory. If we examine the life of the Prophet ﷺ in Makkah, it’s clear that he and the community of believers were being harmed and oppressed, but they were patient and God gave them victory. Within 23 years, the Prophet ﷺ was not only free of oppression, but became the leader of the entire Arabian Peninsula. Those people who once oppressed him now sought mercy from him; and he was most gracious and kind in his response. Despite their former brutality toward him, the Prophet ﷺ forgave them and admitted them into the brotherhood of faith.

This is the difference between someone whose heart is purified and sound and one whose heart is impure and corrupt. Impure people oppress, and the pure-hearted not only forgive their oppressors, but elevate them in status and character. In order to purify ourselves, we must begin to recognize this truth. This is what this book is all about—a book of self-purification and a manual of liberation. If we work on our hearts, if we actually implement what is suggested here, we'll begin to see changes in our lives, our condition, our society, and even within our own family dynamics. It is a blessing that we have this science of purification, a blessing that this teaching exists in the world today. What remains is for us to take these teachings seriously.

So let us go through what is explained here by this great scholar and learn of the diseases of the heart, examine their etiology (their causes), their signs and symptoms, and, finally, how to treat them. There are two types of treatments: the theoretical treatment, which is understanding the disease itself, and the practical treatment, which focuses on the prescriptions we must take in order to restore the heart's natural purity. If we apply the techniques that have been learned and transmitted by the great scholars of the vast tradition of Islam, we will see results. But just like medicinal prescriptions, the physician cannot force you to take it. The knowledgeable scholars of spiritual purification have given us the treatment, as they have gleaned it from the teachings of the Quran and the exemplary model of the Prophet ﷺ. The teachings are available. They are clear, and they work. It is then up to us to learn and apply them to ourselves and share them with others.

## **Translation & Commentary**

# Introduction to Purification

## POEM VERSES 1—8

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*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 respond to its desires.*

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## Courtesy: The Heart of Purification

Imam Mawlūd begins with a play on words that is lost in translation. The word for beginning in Arabic is *bad'u*, and the word for heart (*qalb*) also means to *reverse* something. If one were to literally reverse the word *bad'u* in Arabic, the word *adab* would result, which is the term for courtesy—where this treatise begins, since courtesy is the portal to the purification of the heart.

*Adab* in Arabic means a combination of things, in addition to courtesy. *Adib* (a derivative of *adab*), for example, has come to mean an erudite person, someone who is learned, for high manners and courtesy are associated with learning and erudition. But at the root of the word *adab*, the idea of *courtesy* is firmly established. 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*).

*Hayā'*, 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 *ḥayā'*,” an internal sense of shame, which includes *bashfulness* and *modesty*.

Most adults alive today have heard it said when they were children, “Shame on you!” Unfortunately, *shame* has come to be viewed as a negative word, as if it were a pejorative. Parents are now advised never to “shame a child,” never correct a child’s behavior by causing an emotional response. Instead, the current wisdom suggests that

people always make the child *feel good* regardless of his or her behavior. Eventually, what this does is disable naturally occurring deterrents to misbehavior.

Some anthropologists divide cultures into shame and guilt cultures. They say that guilt is an inward mechanism and shame an outward one. With regard to this discussion, guilt 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 shame-based, which is rooted in the fear of bringing shame upon oneself and the larger family. What Islam does is honor the concept of shame and take 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, or thinks, shame is elevated to a higher plane, to the unseen world from which there is no cover. In fact, one feels a sense of shame even before the angels. So while Muslims comprise a shame-based culture, this notion transcends 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 deters one from engaging in acts that are displeasing and vulgar. This is the essence of the noble prophetic teachings.

Imam Mawlood mentions that one should also have *dhul*, which literally refers to being lowly, abject, or humbled. The Quran mentions that people who incur the anger of God have this state of humiliation thrust upon them. But what is meant here is something different; it is humility or humbleness voluntarily assumed before God, which is required for courtesy.

Interestingly, the word *munkasiran* is translated as *dejected*, though literally it 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 one seriously reflects on God's perfect watch over His creation, the countless blessings He sends down, and then considers the kind of deeds one brings before Him—what possible feelings can one generate except humility and degrees of shame? With these strong feelings, one implores God to change one's state, make one's desires consonant with His pleasure—giving up one's 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,” 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. This 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. One seeks nothing from God's servants, that is, human beings. If one seeks something, he or she should seek it from God, the Sovereign of the heavens and the earth. The basic rule is: ask God and then work, that is, take the means (*asbab*) that one must use to achieve something in this world.

Imam Mawlood says 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.” A person can be so disconnected from prophetic teachings he or she may easily be careless about something that in reality invites great harm. It is comparable to a heedless person who finds himself in diplomatic circles laden with protocol,

though he makes horrendous breaches of protocol without realizing it. With regard to God, the matter is obviously much more serious, in which case one's soul may be harmed by one's own breaches. The protocol here involves knowledge of God and what He has enjoined and proscribed.

## ***Freedom and Purification***

Imam Mawlud 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 content. Freedom has real meaning, for example, when 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-Ghazali speaks at length about the stomach and the genitals as the two "dominant ones"; if they are under control, all other aspects of desire are kept in check. One may also include in this the tongue, which can be 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 in these qualities abjectness. Yet the Prophet ﷺ chose poverty over wealth: he did not have money in his home, and he slept on the floor upon a bed made out of leather stuffed with palm fibers; he did not have jewelry; he had two pillows in his room for guests. In much of today's culture, living this way would be considered extreme poverty. What Imam Mawlud stresses is the following: dignity with God comes to those who are humble before Him; 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: "[O God], You exalt whomever You will, and You debase whomever You will" (QURAN, 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, who then find themselves 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 adorned by its opposite. If one is humble before God, He will render him or her honorable. Conversely, God humbles and humiliates the haughty ones, those who arrogantly seek out rank and glory before the eyes of people. The Quran gives the examples of Pharaoh and Korah and their abject fall and disgrace.

Imam Mawlud says next that there is no salvation "like the heart's salvation, given that all the limbs respond to its desires," If one's heart is safe, so too are the limbs, for they carry out the deeds inspired by the heart, The limbs of the corrupt become instruments through which corruption is spread: *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* (QURAN, 36:65); *And spend [on the needy] in the way of God. And do not throw yourselves into ruin by your own hands* (QURAN, 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"* (QURAN, 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* (QURAN, 24:23-24).

A hadith implies that 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. According to a prophetic tradition, each morning, when the limbs awaken in the spiritual world, they shudder and say to the tongue, “Fear God concerning us! For if you are straight, then we are straight; 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.

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POEM VERSES 9—15

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*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-Ghazali, However, this does not  
apply to one who was already granted a sound heart,*

*as scholars other than al-Ghazali opine,  
for al-Ghazali 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 they have just been stated. Second, one must be aware of the diseases of the heart—aware of their existence, of their ailments, and of 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 Mawlud cites Imam al-Ghazali (an 11th-century master scholar of the science of purification), holding the position that it is indeed an obligation on everyone to learn of the ailments of the heart and their cures. Imam Mawlud 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-Ghazali 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 that states that people are corrupt by nature?

In short, though Muslim scholars of the caliber of Imam al-Ghazali do say that diseases of the heart are related to human nature, they would also say that this manifests itself as human *inclination*. Also, Muslims do not believe that this inclination is a result of Adam's wrongdoing or that Adam brought upon himself (and his children) a permanent state of sin that can only be lifted by sacrificial blood. Adam and Eve erred, but they also 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 Quran declares that no soul bears the burden of sin of another soul (6:564). But this fact does not negate the existence of base instincts among humans.

This whole matter points to the heart as a spiritual organ. The unseen aspect of the heart contains a 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. The analogy is 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 Quran says about successful people on the Day of Judgment that their *faces become white* (QURAN, 3:506). 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-Ghazali 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 Mawlud says it is impossible to rid oneself of these diseases completely. This implies that purification is a life-long 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 that states that every child is born in the state of *fitra*. For some reason, Muslims often translate this into English as, "Every child is born a *Muslim*," But the hadith says *fitra*, which means that people are born inclined to faith—born with an intuitive awareness of divine purpose and a nature built to receive the prophetic message. What remains then is to nurture one's *fitra* and cultivate this inclination to faith and purity of heart.



# Miserliness

## *POEM VERSES 16—25*

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*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, and 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.*

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## **Definition and Causes**

Imam Mawlud brings to the fore 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 characters but because of alphabetical ordering in Arabic.

He mentions two aspects of miserliness. One relates to the Sacred Law, *Sharia*, that is, rights due to God and to His creation. The other pertains to *murū'a*, 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'a*, 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 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. Miserliness, when it comes to the obligations of Sacred Law, 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.

It is an Islamic ethic that a wealthy person have magnanimity, generosity, and the demeanor of lenience. A hadith speaks of a wealthy man who 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 Mawlud. If a guest, for example, spills something on the carpet, the host should not display anger or, worse yet, scold the guest. It is far better humanity and valor to make one's guests feel no consternation at all. The Imam mentions buying a funeral shroud, saying there should be no haggling over the cost, for the funeral shroud should remind one of death and not worldly matters. Also, when buying livestock in order to give meat to the needy, one should not haggle over the price. (This applies to purchasing other goods that are intended for charity as well.)

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A person who doles out difficulty without cause strips away the veils of dignity; this is what the "wise guides" (that is, 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 the position to give charity and an honor to fulfill a divine obligation.

In Islam, it is an 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* (QURAN, 2:267); and *You will not attain to righteousness until you spend of what you love* (QURAN, 3:92).

Generosity is one of the highest virtues of Islam and one of the manifest qualities of the Prophet Muhammad who was known as the most generous of people. The word for generosity here is derived from *karam*, which also means *nobility*. In fact, one of the most excellent names of God is *al-Karim*, 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 comes down to loving the fleeting stuff of this world. The miser ardently *clings* to his wealth and hoards it up. 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 [dunya]." When one is hungry, he seeks out food, eats, and is pleased. But 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 someone's earning 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 Ali 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 living is not inspired by spiritual austerity. Rather, 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—refusing to purify his wealth and preventing 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. What is remarkable about this mind-set is that the miser never truly feels relieved of anxiety; a miser is constantly worried about money and devoted to servicing his worry. The Prophet once asked some clansmen about their leader. They mentioned his name and said, "But he is a bit of a miser." The Prophet said, "A leader should never be a miser." And then he added, "Do you know of any disease that is worse than miserliness?"

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#### 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.*

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### ***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 more's sake can occupy a person for an entire lifetime. And 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.

This is Imam Mawlud's counsel: reflect long and hard on the fact that just as people climb to 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 their disease.

# Wantonness

## POEM VERSES 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.*

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## Definition and Treatment

The next disease is *wantonness (batar)*, along with *excessiveness*, an unbridled desire to need and want more. The word *batar* has several meanings: the inability to bear blessings; bewilderment; dislike of something undeserving of dislike; and reckless extravagance. Imam Mawlud says that according to the people of knowledge, it is defined as *excessive mirth and exuberance*. He then says that its cure is intentionally engaging in hunger and reflecting on death.

The Quran 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 batara* [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* (QURAN, 8:46-47); *How many cities have We destroyed that exulted in their livelihood? Here are their homes now uninhabited after them except for a few* (QURAN, 28:58). The world of the classical 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. Visit these ruins and notice the utter silence of these towns. Each soul that lived there is now in another state, waiting 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 willfully experience hunger and to reflect seriously on death and the Hereafter. Hunger can be achieved through voluntary fasting (*sawm*) 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 held that people who eat in abundance become hard-hearted. Those who consume an abundance of rich foods literally do become hardhearted with arterial sclerosis, the *hardening* of the arteries. (Sclerotic means hard, rigid, or stiff.) Likewise, the spiritual heart may experience what occurs to the physical heart.

Scholars of religion often expounded on hunger as an important sensation that feeds spiritual growth. Feeling emptiness in the stomach, they say, is excellent for the body but also the soul. According to Imam Malik, fasting

three days out of the month is the best way to maintain a regular engagement with hunger. There is also a fasting regimen known as the Fast of David (Dawud ﷺ), which consists of fasting every other day, with the exception of religious holidays. Fasting Mondays and Thursdays is also excellent. 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 calls up a fact without reflection. (In fact, no 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 like wantonness requires the remembrance of 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 (sirat), over which people must cross and behold below the awesome inferno of Hellfire. Consistent reflection of this nature lessens the value of extravagance and, in general, all the fleeting things 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* (QURAN, 28:76), whether it is in their wealth, status, or anything else. Images of 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 and exaggerated smiles and gaping mouths—showing off their supreme happiness because they own a kind of car or smoke a certain brand of cigarettes or guzzle a special brand of beer—alcohol that destroys lives and minds. It is part of advertising theory that 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 these billboards and all those who aim their glances toward them will someday die and stand before their Maker. This is the ultimate destiny of all human beings. This realization 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].*

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## 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 things because of their essences, but because of what they manifested.

Hatred or strong dislike of a person for no legitimate reason is the disease of *bughd*. The Prophet 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 one of the people of Paradise." So a Companion of the Prophet decided to learn what it was about this man that earned him such a commendation from the Messenger of God ﷺ. He spent time with this man and observed him closely. He noticed that he did not perform the Night Prayer vigil (*Tahajjud*) or anything extraordinary. He appeared to be an average man of Madinah. The Companion finally told the man what the Prophet ﷺ had said about him and asked if he did anything special. And 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; make specific supplication mentioning 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 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 Quran is *al-Wadud*, the Loving one. Hate is the absence of love, and only through love can hatred be removed from the heart. In a profound and beautiful hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said, "None of you has achieved faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." The 13th-century scholar Imam al-Nawawi comments on this hadith saying:

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 benefit to come to others. This love is celestial or spiritual love and not earthly love 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]. But men must oppose their nature and pray for their brothers and desire for others what they desire for themselves. Moreover, whenever a man does not desire good for his brother, it is from envy. And envy is a rejection of God's

apportionment in the world. Thus, one is opposing how God meted out sustenance in concord 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.*

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## Definition and Treatment

Iniquity is defined, according to Shaykh Muhammad, the author of the book *The Opening of the Truth*, as harming anything in creation without just cause. The word is a translation of *baghi*, 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 the perpetrators: *O you people, surely your iniquity is but against your selves* (QURAN, 10:23). Imam Mawlud makes an analogy between iniquity and a powerfully intoxicating wine (called *qarqaf*) that makes one shudder when swallowed. This metaphorical wine is the "love of position," which is a major motivation that impels some 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.



But 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, they sought to be nearer to the Prophet ﷺ to learn more about their obligations and what would draw them closer to God. It was not a desire for illusory power. The believers around the Prophet ﷺ saw up close that God chose Muhammad ﷺ to be the conveyor and exemplar of the final message sent to humanity. Learning at the hand of the Prophet ﷺ provides meaning 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.

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. Even the illusory possessions and authority they do have, they will protect 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 Mutanabbi said, "Whenever you honor the honorable, you possess them. Whenever you honor the ignoble, they rebel." What is prohibited in seeking the pleasure of others is what is done through trickery, ostentatious display of 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 Ata'illah said, "If you desire immortal glory, seek glory in the Immortal."

The Imam speaks of *ummih*, which is another word for the world, although its original meaning is mother, the connection being that we are made from the material of this world. But the love of this world encrusts the heart. It is a 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. Keeping in mind the spectacle of standing in the Hereafter for judgment has the power to expose the utter waste of irrelevant

pursuits. The Prophet said, "Remember often the destroyer of pleasure," that is, death. Remembering death is a spiritual practice that cleanses the heart of frivolousness. The Prophet 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 A'isha, the Prophet's wife, about the most wondrous thing she observed about 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 tears dripped from his beard. The Prophet said, "Death is closer to any of you than the strap on your 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. 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* (QURAN, 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 Quran states. When one is confronted with eternity and its iron-clad reality, this world will seem like the most ephemeral of existences. This once overwhelmingly alluring life will be of no value to anyone.

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.*

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## 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.

Love of this world falls under the five categories of classical legal rulings. Depending on the designs of the person, the love of this world can either be obligatory (wajib) recommended (mandub) permissible (mubah), reprehensible (makruh), or forbidden (haram). We should love, for example, the things of this world that help us achieve felicity in the Hereafter, such as love of the Quran, of the Ka'ba, of the Prophet ﷺ, of parents, of godly people, of books of knowledge, of children, and of brothers and sisters who help us in our religious affairs, as well as love of wealth in order to give to the needy.

The Prophet Muhammad 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." *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* (QURAN, 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 as God says: He created every-thing 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.

So the Imam holds 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—this is beneficial and is not considered "worldly" per se. Attaining wealth and position for the benefit of the needy, this too is not considered blameworthy. What scholars traditionally have warned against, with regard to attaining wealth, is the danger of transgression. The more wealth one acquires, the higher the probability 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. And let the cause of praise 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 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 to convey to someone that he or she has done good, this is expressing gratitude. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever is not thankful to people will not be thankful to God." The issue here is being disingenuous with praise. People often praise others because they want something from them. What is particularly offensive 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* (QURAN, 3:188). In the university, 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.

# Envy

## POEM VERSES 54-58

*If you were to describe your desire that someone lose his blessing as "envy," then your description will be accurate.*

*In other words, if you yourself were able, through some ruse, to eliminate [someone's blessing], you would utilize that ruse to do so.*

*But if the fear of [God], the Eternally Besought, prevents you from doing so, then you are not an envious person.*

*This is what the Proof of Islam [al-Ghazali] expected with hope from the bounty of the Possessor of Majesty and Generosity.*

*He said that whoever despises envy such that he loathes it in himself, then he is safeguarded from fulfilling what it customarily necessitates.*

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## DEFINITION

Envy (*hasad*) is a severe disease of the heart that some scholars hold to be the root of all diseases, while others opine that the parent disease goes back to covetousness (*tama'a*).

Whatever rank envy occupies in the hierarchy of diseases, most scholars will agree that it is the first manifestation of wrongdoing and the first cause of disobedience against God, when Satan (Iblis) refused to obey God when commanded to bow down before the new creation, Adam, the first human being. Nothing prevented Iblis from bowing down except his envy of Adam, for God chose Adam to be His vicegerent on earth instead of Iblis. Iblis grew arrogant and objected to the command that he show Adam any honor, for Iblis saw himself, a creation from fire, superior to this clay creature. When confronted with his disobedience, Satan did not seek forgiveness from God. Envious develop a mindset that makes it impossible for them to admit they are wrong. To manifest envy is to manifest one of the characteristics of the most wretched creature, Satan.

In Arabic, *hasud* (or *hasid*) is the person who carries and emanates this envy, and his object of envy is called *mahsud*. The Quran teaches us to seek refuge in God from the evil of the envier [*hasid*] when he envies (QURAN, 113:5). The Prophet ﷺ said that envy consumes good deeds the way fire devours dry wood. The Prophet also said, "Every possessor of any blessing is envied." Someone of means will have someone who envies him for what he possesses. Even two street-sweepers will envy one another. The one who pulls his cart on his own will envy the sweeper who has a donkey.

While it is believed that envy can bring about harm to the one envied, ultimately it is the envier who is harmed the most. The evil eye is generally related to envy, though not necessarily so. Some people simply have the eye, some type of psychic power that does not require envy. Every culture has a concept of the evil eye. In some cultures, parents used to pierce the ears of their firstborn males and dress them as little girls for the first five years, since firstborn males were so coveted. Many Chinese conduct rituals to prevent the evil eye from afflicting their homes by placing mirrors on walls to reflect evil looks. (The word *invidious* means envy, and it originally meant to look at something with a malevolent or evil eye.)

The Prophet ﷺ said, "The evil eye is true." The evil eye is different from superstition, which the Prophet ﷺ worked to eradicate from the minds of people. The Arabs believed, for example, that when the moon eclipsed it meant that a great person died. And it so happened that the moon eclipsed the day the Prophet's infant son Ibrahim died. Many of the Arabs were actually impressed that the moon eclipsed for his son. A charlatan would have seized the moment to get mileage out of such an event. But the Prophet ﷺ announced to the people, "The moon is a sign of God; the sun is a sign of God. They do not eclipse for anyone."

Imam Mawlud explains that envy is exhibited when one desires that another person lose a blessing he or she has. This loss could be anything big or small—a house, a car, or a job. An envious person can become resentful that a co-worker was promoted, to the point that he wishes that the person lose the position. A woman may envy another woman because of her husband such that she hopes that a marital crisis separate the couple. A man grows envious of another man's wife. There are endless variations of envy, but a common thread is the desire that someone lose a blessing. In sum, envy arises over what one perceives to be a blessing in someone else's possession. As the Imam says, it reaches the point that an envier would himself remove the blessing if he were able to do so through some kind of ruse. But what is perceived as a blessing could be based on a completely false notion. One may desire something that in reality is nothing but trouble and difficulty. Conversely, there could be a blessing hidden in something difficult.

A blessing (ni3ma) is something that God bestows. One of God's names is al-Mun3im, the Giver of Blessing. Envy, then, is desiring that a person lose what God has given him or her. It is tantamount to saying that God should not have given this person a blessing or, worse yet, that He was wrong to do so "because I deserve it more."

There is a well-known story about al-Asma3i, the famous Arab philologist and anthologer of poetry, when he once came upon a Bedouin and was invited to enter his tent. In Bedouin culture, the women serve guests in the presence of their husbands. This Bedouin happened to have had a very beautiful wife, though he himself was quite unattractive. And when the men went out to prepare a lamb for a meal, the guest couldn't resist saying to this woman, "How did such a beautiful woman like you marry such an ugly man like that?" The woman said, "Fear God! Perhaps he had done good works accepted by his Lord and I am his reward."

God is all-wise in what He gives to people. If one questions the blessing a person has received, then he or she is actually questioning the Giver. This makes envy reprehensible and forbidden.

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#### POEM VERSES 59-62

*As for the cure, it is to act contrary to (one's) caprice.*

*For example, being beneficent to a person when it seems  
appealing to harm him or praising him when you desire to find  
fault in him.*

*Also [the cure is in] knowing that envy only harms the envier;  
it causes him to be grievously preoccupied [with his object of  
envy] today, and tomorrow he is thereby punished.*

*Moreover, [envy] never benefits [the envier], nor does it  
remove from the one envied the blessing he has been given.*

## ***Treatment***

Imam Mawlud prescribes two cures for envy. The first is to consciously oppose one's caprice. The Arabic term here for caprice (*hawa*) is derived from the Arabic word that means to fall. It is also related to the Arabic word for wind. One's passion is like the wind, in that it comes, stirs up emotion, and then dies down. One cannot really see it, only its effect.

More often than not, following one's whims takes a person away from the truth. The history of humanity is replete with false notions that have come and gone. The truth, however, is something that is fixed and that can be recognized as the truth, if one is truly objective. As for caprice, it has no foundation. For this reason, Imam Mawlud says one must resist his caprice. The Quran repeatedly warns against following one's caprice. It speaks of bygone communities who grew arrogant when God's messengers came to them with admonitions and teachings that did not agree with their souls' caprice. So they rejected the message and even killed the messengers (QURAN, 5:70). Also, God praises those who resist the caprices of their souls and promises them Paradise (QURAN, 79:40). One of the names of Hell mentioned in the Quran is *hawiya* (QURAN, 101:9), which is derived from the same root as *hawa*. Perhaps the connection is that a person enslaved to his whims descends into the depths of depravity in this life, and, as a consequence, he faces perdition in the Hereafter. As a remedy to the type of envy that prods one to bring about harm to another person, Imam Mawlud suggests that one contradict his temptation, that is, do something that will benefit the person who is envied. For example, give that person a gift or do a favor. This defies the commands of one's whims, gains the pleasure of God, and protects against envy. The Imam suggests also that one may praise the person toward whom one feels the urge to slander. There is no hypocrisy in this recommendation. The purpose is to starve envy of the negative thoughts it requires to thrive. Being beneficent to a person against whom one feels envy often makes that person incline towards the envier. In general, good people are inclined to love those who show them good.

Another treatment is to know with certainty that holding envy against another person brings harm to oneself. Human nature's most primordial instinct is to avoid harm. It is easier for a person to repel negative feelings when he or she realizes these feelings hurt the soul. A disgruntled worker passed over for a promotion becomes anxious and angry—two related emotions that harm his soul, mind, and body, and yield nothing for his future. The worker complains at length and within his own soul he becomes obsessed with the object of his envy, the person to whom the promotion was granted. He permits the disease to fester in his heart and cause grief. These cascading feelings will neither help him ascend in his profession nor alter the past. It is an entirely demoralizing exercise that can magnify the original injury he feels. Envy, in fact, can actually damage one's sanity. Resentment obviates one from accomplishing significant achievements. A person who shuns envy, even when others around him seem to be passing him by, is motivated to excel. He is not slumped over in depression and resentment.

One of the interesting things about the Muslim world now is that it is filled with envy. When Muslims, for example, look at Americans and Europeans, they hurl criticisms, applying all kinds of rhetoric. Ostensibly, one hears moral outrage. But the root of much of this rhetoric is envy: "They have worldly possessions, and we do not." When Muslims glance toward the Gulf nations that have great stores of oil, they cannot resist passing judgment about how the Gulf Arabs squander "Muslim money." This is a dialogue of envy. The issue is comparing what one has with what another has, and that only fuels envy and brings about no positive impact. This does not mean that one should not criticize; the point here is doing so with the purpose of construction and not destruction.

One can also look back at the Communist revolution, which was largely a manifestation of envy. It is apparent in his writings that Karl Marx was filled with resentment. Much of his theory is founded on observing the wealthy and desiring that they lose what they have. This is not to say that when the wealthy are unjust to the poor and to the working class they should not be censured, but from the point of view of Sacred Law, both the affluent and the needy have obligations. One obligation of the poor is not to envy the rich and harbor resentment toward them; and the obligation of the rich is not to belittle the indigent, grow arrogant, hoard wealth, or work to keep others in need.

The imam says that one way to uproot envy is to realize with solemn reflection that envy can never benefit its holder. One should also realize what people attain in terms of material wealth or prestige is from God. He is all-knowing; we are not.

The basis of the remedy for envy is *taqwa* or the awe of God or having an active awareness of Him as the ultimate power over all creation. This defuses false notions of misappropriated blessings. A hadith states, “If you have envy, do not wrong [others].” If one does not work to remove another person’s blessings, then his or her envy is in check and is not the kind that necessarily devours one’s good deeds. Envy that devours righteous deeds is envy which impels someone to wrong others. Imam al-Ghazali makes a distinction between various strains of envy. He states that if one hates envy and is ashamed that he or she harbors it, the person is not essentially an envious person. It is important to be aware of the feelings that reside in one’s heart. This self-awareness is essential for the purpose of purification.

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*POEM VERSES 63—66*

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*Its etiology includes animosity, vying for the love of others, arrogance, poor self-worth, vanity,*

*Love of leadership, and avaricious cupidity [for things]. These [seven] causes engender envy.*

*As for a blessing that a disbeliever or corrupt Muslim has that enables them to harm others or show aggression*

*Because of it then the “malady of second wives” is in such instances permissible.*

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## ***Etiology***

Now the Imam delves into the etiology of the disease, for without discovering the causes of envy, it would be difficult to excise it. He mentions first enmity (*‘adawa*). Harboring feelings of animosity toward another makes one prime for envy. Another cause of envy is vying for another’s affection or love, which can become vicious; and its effect can linger in a person for a very long time, which is often the case when siblings compete for parental love. (on this topic, one may read Frank J. Sulloway’s *Born to Rebel*, a book with a complex statistical study about birth order and how children are affected by it—how competition for parental love and attention informs a child’s personality.)

The Imam next mentions arrogance (*takabbur*), a major cause of envy. An arrogant man who sees someone advancing ahead of him will feel that this person is not worthy of such advancement. The pre-Islamic Arabs



exhibited this when the Prophet ﷺ preached. The disbelievers among the Quraysh, like Abu Jahl, Umayya ibn Khalaf, and al-Walid ibn al-Mughira, waxed arrogant that this man among them, their own kin, Muhammad ﷺ, received revelation from God. The Quran exposes their feelings, informing us that each of them secretly wished to receive a revelation from Heaven the way the Prophet ﷺ did (QURAN, 74:52). This was flagrant envy aimed at the Prophet ﷺ. When all is the same between people, arrogance does not show itself. But when someone is suddenly elevated in rank, the dynamic changes. Pharaoh grew arrogant and envious when Moses came to him with God's message. Part of Pharaoh's problem was seeing a prophet chosen from among people that Pharaoh enslaved and deemed less than the Egyptians.

Imam Mawlad mentions low self-esteem (ta'azzuz), the feeling that one's worth is compromised by the fact that another person has gained more. This also was a pathology found in the days of the Prophet ﷺ when the disbelievers of Quraysh protested aloud, "If only this Quran had been sent down to a great man of either of the two cities! (QURAN, 43:31). In other words, they were so entrenched in their mode of tribalism, they could not accept that Muhammad was a true prophet since he was not one of the elite of the two cities, that is, Makkah and Ta'if. The Prophet ﷺ was too ordinary for them, too much like them, to have been chosen for such a lofty station. This is like saying, "How can he be a prophet, while he is like us and we are not prophets?"

Love of leadership is another cause of envy. People in leadership often resent others achieving something significant, fearing a change in the equilibrium of power. The envious leader desires that others are deprived of accomplishment and authority. This is akin to covetousness, which the Imam mentions in the same line. There is, though, a distinction between covetousness and love of leadership. The latter afflicts those who have position already, while covetousness relates to those who do not have it but desire it avariciously. This type of covetousness is called shuhh in Arabic, a desire to have what is in possession of another person. God says, *Whoever is safe from the covetousness of his own soul, he is truly successful* (QURAN, 59:9).

Al-Ghazali mentions that because these diseases are common to human nature, the objective should be to transform them into something beneficial—transform a disability into an advantage, which is what successful people tend to do. The Prophet said, "There is no [acceptable] envy except of two people." One of them is a person who has been given wealth and spends it toward good causes. Envy of such a person is permissible because one's desire is to have wealth in order to do the righteous deed of giving to the needy. One may envy such a person, but not in the sense of hoping that he lose his wealth. The other person is one who has "been given wisdom and teaches it to people. A person may envy the wise because he or she wishes to be imbued with some of that wisdom in order to teach others. If one has envy, let it not be of fleeting things, like worldly assets that are usually hoarded and displayed for show. Desire, instead, what will serve one's Hereafter. This is how to convert negative feelings into positive ones.

# Blameworthy Modesty

## POEM VERSES 67-72

*As for blameworthy modesty, it is that which prevents one from denouncing the condemnable or from asking a question concerning*

*a matter relating to religion and the like. For this reason, it is considered a harmful quality.*

*As for noble modesty, such as the Chosen One's [ﷺ] behavior the night he married Zaynab,*

*when he fed his company to their full from his wedding feast, and they all left except for three.*

*They lingered and yet he did not request that they leave. Such modesty is a most excellent virtue.*

*Had modesty been a person, it would have been a righteous one and would do nothing but good in whatever it did.*

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## Definition

In general, modesty is something praised in Islam and is considered virtuous. What is blameworthy is modesty that prevents one from denouncing what clearly should be denounced, such as tyranny or corruption. This form of modesty results in meekness at a time when one needs to be forthright and courageous. Something condemnable (*munkar*) is condemnable regardless of the status of the person who is engaged in it—whether he or she is a close relative or a person of status, wealth, or authority.

There must be agreement, however, among scholars on what is condemnable. One cannot, for example, declare decisively that something is considered condemnable if there is a difference of opinion about it among the scholars. Scholars knowledgeable of juristic differences rarely condemn others. They refrain from such condemnation not because of modesty, but because of their extensive knowledge and scholarship. Unfortunately, too many people today are swift to condemn; which creates another disease—self-righteousness. At issue here is blameworthy modesty that results in timid failure to denounce what unequivocally deserves denouncement and to ask about important matters from those who know. The Prophet's wife A'isha once said, "The best women were the women of the Ansar because modesty did not prevent them from learning the religion." A woman once came up to the Prophet ﷺ asking a specific question about menstruation. The Prophet answered her, but the woman persisted in asking for more detail. The Prophet then asked A'isha to show the woman what he meant, for it was a bit awkward for him. Some women even sent the cloth used for their menstrual protection to seek out with certainty what constitutes the beginning and the end of the menses, which determines whether or not certain rites of worship may be resumed. Most women would not feel comfortable with that, but the modesty of these women did not prevent them from seeking out knowledge about their religious affairs.

The Imam speaks next of modesty rooted in generosity and kindness, which is an acceptable kind of modesty. He gives the example of what happened when the Prophet ﷺ married Zaynab. The Prophet invited people for a wedding ceremony and meal. The guests came but lingered in his presence much longer than necessary. In fact, three of them remained late into the evening. The Prophet being as generous as he was, stayed with them and patiently waited for his guests to complete their visit. The guests, however, tarried with the Prophet ﷺ because they loved his company. At one point, the Prophet stood up and left the room and came back, hinting as gently as possible that they should depart. But still they lingered. He did this again, until the verse was revealed with regard to the etiquette of being in another's home—an admonition that the Prophet himself was too shy and generous to deliver: *[Believers], when you are invited, then enter. And when you have completed the meal, disperse, and do not linger on for conversation. This used to hurt the Prophet, but he shied away from [telling] you. But God is not shy of the truth* (QURAN, 33:53). This verse applies to visiting such people as statesmen and scholars whose obligations and time constraints are greater than others. They too may feel shy about cutting visits short when they are the hosts.

The Prophet was too modest to tell his guests that it was time to leave. It was out of his generosity and benevolence that he did not address his guests this way. There are, of course, people who would feel no consternation at all in asking their guests to leave, and they would do so in unambiguous terms. Imagine then how pure and wonderful was the Prophet ﷺ, the final Messenger sent to humanity, a man of great authority from God Himself, but a man nonetheless too shy to request his loitering guests to leave on his wedding night.

The Imam then said that had modesty been a man, he would have been a righteous man whose actions would always be virtuous.

# Fantasizing

POEM VERSES 73 - 74

*The heart's engagement in matters that do not concern it is  
only forbidden when it pertains to the prohibited,*

*such as fantasizing about the beautiful qualities of a woman or  
[dwelling] on the faults of Muslims, even in their absence.*

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## ***Discussion***

The next disease is when one is engaged in matters that are of no concern to him. For example, reflecting on things that are prohibited, such as lustful fantasizing about the beauty of a person one is not married to. In essence, what is forbidden *to do* is likewise forbidden as an object *of reflection*. Included in this is thinking about the weaknesses or faults of others, whether they are present or not. The Prophet said, "There is a tree in Paradise reserved for one whose own faults preoccupied him from considering the faults of others." Spending time thinking or talking about other people's faults is foolish. Time is short and is better invested in recognizing one's own shortcomings and then working consistently to eradicate them.

It is also prohibited, according to scholars, to reflect on the nature of God's essence. This does not mean that one should not reflect on His attributes revealed in the Quran. Rather, trying to conceive of the very essence of God is so beyond our capability, our conclusions will always be wrong. Being wrong about something like this is not inconsequential. Many religious communities before Islam and after indulged in this activity and have come up with terribly erroneous theologies regarding God. For this reason, we are told to stay away from that kind of internal or external dialogue and reflect instead on what God has revealed about Himself and His awesome majesty, knowledge, and power. Let that kind of reflection deepen our love of Him and our desire to follow His commandments and thus prepare for the Hereafter, a momentous time when the veils will be removed from our eyes and when our understanding of God will reach beyond what is possible in this world.

# Fear of Poverty

POEM VERSES 75-77

*Fear of poverty originates in having a bad opinion of [God]  
the Exalted, and its cure is in having a good opinion*

*and knowing that what God possesses is never diminished in  
the least and that what has been apportioned to you will reach  
you inevitably.*

*One who uses his religion as a means of benefiting his worldly  
condition is a sycophantic hypocrite in his transaction, and he  
ultimately shall be the one defrauded.*

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## Discussion

Fear of poverty is counted as one of the diseases of the heart. For the reasons that follow, scholars have said that nurturing this fear is tantamount to harboring a negative opinion about God the Exalted, who has revealed, *Satan threatens you with poverty and he commands you to immorality. But God promises you His forgiveness and bounty* (QURAN, 2:268). One of Satan's tactics is to keep people so occupied with the fear of losing their wealth they end up desperately clinging to their money and depriving the needy—and themselves—of the goodness of giving for the sake of God. A person under the spell of irrational fear is more vulnerable to transgress laws, even to the point of indulging in lewdness, for the purpose of gaining profit and wealth.

God is the Provider and source of all wealth and comfort. He has promised that those who believe in Him and expend on behalf of the indigent shall receive a far more valuable return than the measure of what they spend. If one is to have fear, let it be of God, who has revealed: *And whoever fears God, He will make for him a way out. And He will provide for him in a way he never expected. And whoever trusts in God, He is sufficient for him* (QURAN, 65:2-3).

There is a stipulation in receiving this provision, namely, that one have true taqwa (or awe of God) and is nurturing of the condition that permits him or her to walk the earth with dignity.

The fear of poverty is an instrument of deception and common cause of misguidance. The American humorist Mark Twain once remarked, "Most of my problems, I never actually encountered." A person can grieve over a plethora of concerns and problems that he or she may never have to face. These phantom concerns can be controlling. A person who has wealth is constantly worried about his estate and its potential loss. Often, wealthy people enjoy no peace of mind and their lives are rife with conflict, contention, and treachery. There is a hadith that states, "Anxiety is half of aging." And there is another hadith that states, "Righteousness will lengthen your life." One interpretation of this hadith is that people who are righteous do not suffer anxiety that tears down the body and mind. They are content to do good and trust in God. It is usually the irreligious who are in a state of turmoil, their hearts never at ease.

Imam Mawlud ties "fear of poverty" with a kindred illness whose carrier is called in Arabic *mudahin*, a person who uses his religion as a means of buttressing his worldly condition. He is a "sycophantic hypocrite in his transaction" and ends up cheated in the most debased way. He compromises his religion in order to achieve worldly gain, often out of fear of poverty or sheer greediness.

God exposed the disbelievers among the Quraysh who wanted to make deals and compromises with the Prophet ﷺ, such that religion would become a way to tend to their worldly affairs. God says about the disbelievers in Makkah, *They would love that you [O Muhammad] compromise so that they may compromise* (QURAN, 68:9). The Quraysh desired that the Prophet praise their gods and their rituals even though he does not believe in them, and they, in turn, would not oppress the Prophet and the Muslims. With this deal, the Makkans could keep their grip on the city and the trade caravans that come to it.

The great historian Ibn Khaldun quoted a poet's observation of the Muslim societies he came across: "We mend our livelihood with the cloth of our religion. In the end, nothing of the religion remains and our worldly condition goes unmended." God will never set aright one's worldly affairs when he or she destroys religion.

Mudahana is from the root word duhun, which means to cover something up with paint or cosmetics. Shaykh Muhammad al-Yadali says that mudahana is when a man "gives up his religion in order to secure his wealth or his blood, and sitting with the people of disobedience and keeping their company and praising their actions and displaying pleasure at their condition without condemnation." In our modern context, mudahana may be applied to a conspiracy of silence when it comes to other people's transgressions and blatant deviations. It is turning one's eyes away from those who commit abominations.

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## ***Treatment***

The cure for fear of poverty is to have a good opinion of God, says the Imam. God states, *I do not desire from [people] any provision nor do I desire that they feed Me* (QURAN, 51:57). People who harbor good thoughts about their Provider deflect insidious whisperings about Him and the subtle provocations that create irrational fear. His dominion is never diminished in the least when He gives to His creation all that they need. And if someone is given more than another, one should not harbor bad thoughts toward that person. Wholesome thoughts about God express themselves in one's contentment with what he or she has, and not stretching one's eyes toward the assets of others. The Prophet said, "Contentment is a treasure that is never exhausted."

# Ostentation

## POEM VERSES 78 - 86

*Its root cause is covetousness and [doing good works for the sake of] showing off. The cure [for covetousness] is also my cure for the next disease [ostentation].*

*So roll up your sleeves if you want to set out and cure what is at the root of all of these diseases and what exacerbates them.*

*I mean that showing off is one of the calamities of the heart, [whose definition is] to perform an act of devotion for other than the Creator's sake.*

*Rather, it is for the purpose of seeking some worldly benefit or praise from His creation, or to protect oneself from the opposite, [that is, loss of wealth or dispraise].*

*The worst form is that which results in a sinful deed, such as pretentious display of virtue*

*so as to be entrusted with the wealth of an orphan\* The next degree is what is done for some worldly matter—using good deeds as a means to obtain it.*

*Finally, [showing off] is that which is done out of fear of the scornful gaze of people*

*[It is cured] by knowing that if all of creation were to join forces to oppose you or support you, they would not be able to do so*

*except by His permission. Indeed, He alone possesses rewards [for your actions] in both abodes, and He is All-Powerful, the Ever-Righteous, and Thankful.*

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## Definition

The next disease is *riya'* or *ostentation*, the most nefarious form of which is when a person performs rites of worship merely to obtain a place in the hearts of others. The Prophet referred to this behavior as "the lesser idolatry." He also said, "I do not fear that you will worship the sun, the stars, and the moon, but I fear you worshipping other than God through ostentation." He said, moreover, "What I most fear for my community is doing things for other than the sake of God."

Imam Mawlud outlines three signs of ostentation. The first two are laziness and lack of action for God's sake when one is alone and out of view of others. When alone, a person becomes lethargic, unable (or unwilling) to perform acts of devotion, like reading the Quran at home; but in the Mosque, in the presence of others, he finds the drive to recite. (This is not to suggest that one should not respond to the inspiration one receives when in the company of people who are doing good deeds. The point here is guarding the motivation behind one's acts, especially devotional ones, that they be for God and not for anyone else.) Another sign of ostentation is increasing

one's actions when praised and decreasing them in the absence of such praise. In Islamic Sacred Law, encouragement is not censured. When the Prophet saw somebody do something good, he would say, "You did well." He also said, "When a believer hears somebody praising him, his faith [iman] increases," not his pride. In this way he is encouraged to do more for the sake of God—not for the sake of praise. Scholars distinguish between this form of praise and the dishing out of empty flattery. One is encouraged to convey to someone that he has done a job well. This is especially true with young people.

The root source of ostentation is *desire*, wanting something from a source other than God. (The Arabic word for root here is *alwiya*, a derivative that also refers to one who carries the banner, the standard-bearer, who leads the way or commences an activity.) The Imam says that the cure for ostentation is the same as the cure for reckless compromise (*mudahana*). It is actively and sincerely seeking out purification of the heart by removing four things: love of praise; fear of blame; desire for worldly benefit from people; and fear of harm from people. This is accomplished by nurturing the certainty (*yaqin*) that only God can benefit or harm one. This is at the essence of the Islamic creed. The Prophet ﷺ said in one of his most celebrated statements:

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*Be mindful of God, and God will protect you. Be mindful of God, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of God. If you seek help, seek help from God. Know that if the whole world were to gather together to benefit you with anything, it would benefit you only with something that God had already prescribed for you. And if the whole world were to gather together to harm you, it would harm you only with something that God had already prescribed for you. The pens have been lifted and the ink has dried.*

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It is astonishing how much energy people expend seeking the pleasure of others, trying, for example, to seek prestige or promotion by pleasing someone in authority. Praise—especially as it is doled out to athletes, musicians, and actors—is almost always ephemeral. And as it is with the immutable nature of ephemeral existence, the culture of praise is utterly fickle and unworthy of the chase. When a person finds himself with great wealth and fame, friends start to appear everywhere. But if he were to lose his wealth and standing, those friends disappear. Traditionally in the Muslim world, knowledge was the spiritual wealth people wanted to be associated with, not material wealth. It is a remarkable fact about the Muslim world that there were impoverished scholars who achieved great status in the world solely because of their knowledge. Sadly, such is no longer the case.

Helen Keller once said that there is no slave in this world that didn't have a king somewhere in his ancestry; and there is no king that didn't have a slave somewhere in his ancestry. This world has peaks and valleys. Nothing in creation is permanent. To spend time and energy seeking permanence in the fleeting things of the world— like praise—and then neglect what lasts forever with our Maker is the summit of human folly.

So recognizing that there is no harm or benefit except with God purifies the heart of vain pursuits and ostentation.

The Imam then elaborates further concerning ostentation, namely, performing acts of worship in order to be entrusted with the wealth of an orphan and then misuse it for personal needs. This is hypocrisy, one of the most despised characteristics and most damnable. Another abuse involving ostentatious display of piety is desiring



worldly benefit. An example is taking abusive advantage of an endowment established for religious purposes. The same is true for any fund raising for religious objectives, which is diverted to other ends. The level of depravity in such fraud is staggering.

The least form of ostentation is displaying good works to keep the scorn and criticism of others at bay. This is cured by knowing that God's will cannot be thwarted. Only He possesses the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and only He recompenses people for their actions "in the two abodes," this world and the Hereafter.

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POEM VERSES 87 - 94

*[It is also cured] by being always conscious of its harm, which results in detesting it and thus warding it off.*

*That is its theoretical treatment. And veiling one's actions from the eyes of others is its practical treatment,*

*as is frequent recitation of Surat al-Ikhlās and the "master supplication for forgiveness."*

*As for the chronically diseased heart that results from showing off [one's good works], it too will find a cure in this, and what a cure!*

*As for a type of hypocrisy that involves concealing one's wrong actions or some sexual impropriety, this is in fact an obligation, as Ibn Zukri elucidated.*

*As for what relates to the permissible, adorning oneself with it falls between recommended and prohibited.*

*For the seeker of knowledge or someone desiring to show the blessings of wealth, it is recommended; included in this is someone visiting a brother for the sake of God,*

*or any other well intended deed for that matter—unless you desire thereby haughtiness or boastful competition. Then it would be considered prohibited.*

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## ***Treatment***

Being aware of the harm associated with ostentation is an effective treatment in itself, since it is human nature to avoid what invites harm. A show-off is invariably discovered, humiliated, and then scorned. And ultimately, he is bankrupt because insincerity is not acceptable to God. This is a "theoretical treatment" that staves off ostentation.

The "practical treatment" involves intentionally veiling one's actions from the eyes of people. This way, one's intentions are protected from vanity. This does not mean never do deeds in front of people; but do them also when others are not watching. Giving money toward charity, for example, should be done anonymously. But in order to encourage others, giving openly is not a problem: *Those who spend their wealth by night and by day, secretly and openly* (QURAN, 2:274). Each person is the shepherd of his or her own heart. The Night Prayer vigil

(Tahajjud), engaging in dhikr litanies (remembrance of God), reciting Quran, and the like are excellent works to do in privacy.

It is recommended to recite often Surat al-Ikhlās (the 112th sura of the Quran), which affirms the oneness of God and negates the possibility of there being anything comparable to Him. The Arabic word for sincerity, ikhlās, comes from the root khalasa, which means *to be pure*, as in pure honey or pure milk. As for one's piety, it can never be pure unless free of ostentation. In the Quran, there are two words that point to sincerity: mukhlās and mukhlis. The latter is the active participle, which indicates that the agent of purification is external; that is, it is a blessing from God. Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (a 13th-century scholar) said that it is possible for anyone to have sincerity in what they do and believe in, irrespective of creed. But being mukhlās, purified by God, is reserved for those who have a system of belief and deeds that are concordant with what God has revealed. God loves this kind of human being. Imam Abu l-Hasan al-Shadhili (a 13th-century scholar) once prayed, "O God, make my bad actions the bad actions of those whom You love, and do not make my good actions the good actions of those with whom You are displeased."

Imam Mawlud recommends that one repeat regularly a beautiful supplication of the Prophet ﷺ. Known as sayyid al-istighfar (the master supplication for forgiveness), it is translated as follows:

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*O God, You are my Lord, there is no God but You. You created me, and I am Your servant. I uphold Your covenant and Your promise to the best of my ability. I seek refuge in You from the faults of my own doings. I acknowledge the blessings You have showered upon me, and I acknowledge my shortcomings. So forgive me, for indeed, none forgives sins except You.*

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The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever says this when he arises in the morning and [again] in the evening and then dies either that day or that evening, he will enter the Garden."

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#### POEM VERSES 95 - 100

*Scholars are of two opinions about seeking some benefit in this life through worship, as opposed to seeking only the Hereafter, or even seeking the Hereafter or worship seeking its delights: Is it sincerity or showing off?*

*Some also consider that merely taking delight in people's awareness of one's actions is showing off, though the Star [Imam Malik] did not consider that harmful as long as the original intention was based on the foundation of sincerity.*

*In fact, deeds that are done while showing off are better than abandoning them out of the fear of [showing off]*

*Similarly, the scholars have preferred the remembrance of God on the tongue with a heedless heart over a heedless heart and tongue combined!*

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## Discussion

The Prophet said that whoever recites everyday the chapter of the Quran called al-Waqi3a (56) will be protected from financial calamity. One of the Prophet's Companions, Ibn Mas3ud, was once asked about what he left his daughters as inheritance, and his reply was that he left them the Chapter al-Waqi3a. Imam Mawlud mentions variant opinions about the issue this raises, namely, seeking worldly benefit through acts of worship, as opposed to exclusively seeking out benefit in the Hereafter. The example here is reciting the Chapter al-Waqi3a with the sole intention of not being impoverished in this world. The hadith is explicit in mentioning the benefit of reciting the sura every day. But what is the core intention behind this recitation? First, there is always something meritorious and faithful in doing anything related by the Messenger of God ﷺ. Second, reading this Chapter is not like investing in a worldly venture that more or less shows tangible benefit. Reciting al-Waqi3a is seeking benefit from God, the revealer of the Quran. Some have questioned, however, those whose relationship with reciting the Quran is simply seeking out some worldly benefit, without an eye toward the Hereafter, which the Chapter describes with chilling imagery. Some have gone even further, suggesting that worship even for the sake of reaping the delights of the Hereafter is imperfect worship, since the highest degree of faith entails worship that is solely for the pleasure of God.

Imam Malik said that to seek out Paradise is more than acceptable, though the motivation behind worship should eventually be solely for the sake of God and fulfillment of His commands. Some Sufis frown on the notion of devotions for the sake of worldly benefit, such as reciting Quran for the purpose of warding off poverty. It is their conviction that worship is a sacred activity done strictly in obedience to God's will.

While many Sufis hold this opinion, Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn al-3Arabi dissents. He says that if one reads the Quran and applies the intellect, he or she will readily see that God encourages His creation to strive for Paradise and deliverance from Hellfire. Regardless of such authoritative views, one will find ranging opinions. Rabi3a al-3Adawiyya once said, "Go after the gardener, not after the garden." She also said, "O God, if I worship You for Paradise, then put me in the Fire." But this was an extreme statement (shatha) said in a state of spiritual ecstasy. Qadi Abu Bakr and Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq say that in no way should anyone belittle the worship of God with the hope of admittance into the Gardens of Paradise, for this is not belittled in the Quran.

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Imam al-Ghazali says that there are three types of people: (i) People who worship God *freely* (ahrar), that is, they do so only for the sake of God and His pleasure—this includes those who are diligent in their worship to fulfill their covenant of obedience to God;

(2) people who worship like merchants (tujjar), looking to get something out of their worship (like praying a certain number of prayers in order to receive a known reward, like a palace in Heaven); and

(3) people who worship like slaves (3abid), who do it out of fear of the whip, specifically, fear of Hellfire. In the Quran, God encourages people to race for forgiveness, compete for Heaven, and the like. There are many verses that describe the terrors of Hellfire so that people will fear it and do all they can to be delivered from it. There are many verses that tell of the great beauties, rivers, and absolute peace of Paradise. This encourages people to be vigilant in their rites of worship and other obligations in order to reach the stations described so wonderfully in the Quran. Qadi

Abu Bakr says that having desire for the Garden in the Hereafter or fearing Hell is an expression of *akhlaq* toward God, that is, good, wholesome, and proper comportment with God, for people are responding to what God has revealed.

Scholars of Sacred Law say that it is perfectly acceptable to worship in order to seek out the pleasures of the Afterlife, since there is ample encouragement of this in the Quran. This is the strongest opinion. Those who proffer dissenting opinions about this matter are among the extremists in the realm of Sufism.

The Imam then speaks of a subtle matter involving people finding pleasure in worship, and how some people are motivated to worship for the purpose of seeking out this pleasure. It is true that when one engages in worship with an open heart and full presence of mind—over time—he or she discovers (or uncovers) joy and pleasure in the very act of worship. In fact, it is often described as more pleasurable than worldly pleasures that preoccupy others. Imam Abu Hanifa said, "If the kings knew the pleasure we are in, they would send their armies with swords to take it away from us." He was referring to the pleasure derived from the worship of God and gaining knowledge of His religion, and how the kings would leave their palaces to usurp what the scholars and great worshippers had.

There are people, however, who find this pleasure so compelling that they perform acts of worship for the sake of experiencing it. Some learned people warn against this. Nonetheless, a scholar once said, "Had it not been for these things, most people would have a difficult time worshipping consistently." God has placed such subtle pleasure in rites of worship as a reward for their constant practice, for there is a blessing in worship, and seeking it out should never be belittled, since it is from God Himself.

It is interesting that Imam Mawlud mentions these various opinions. He does so, perhaps, to alert the worshipper of what people might say to one who seriously treads the road to finer and more meaningful worship of God.

He then speaks of those who find themselves enjoying the fact that people become aware of their devotional acts of worship. In other words, a person performs an act of worship for the sake of God, but is pleased when others learn of it. Some scholars consider this ostentation. According to others, it is not ostentation as long as his intention when performing the act is sincerely for the sake of God. The fact that one likes it when people learn of his devotion is a separate matter from the actual intentions that propel him to worship in the first place. Scholars say that it is part of human nature to enjoy the good things one does and, in turn, to be pleased when others recognize it. However, if one performs acts of worship for the *purpose* of receiving praise and recognition, then it becomes blameworthy ostentation. Ahmad ibn Hawari said, "Whoever loves to do something and loves to be known for it has committed idolatry [shirk]."

Imam al-Jazuli said that a person can engage in blameworthy ostentation even if no one is there to notice. For instance, he warns that if a person reads something and comes across some abstruse matter, and thinking it would be good to mention in public, he writes it down or memorizes it, preparing for the grand moment to unleash this newfound knowledge before people—this is ostentation and different from learning something so that others may benefit.

People engaged in scholarship are in danger of this kind of ostentation. When scholars gather, there are certain expectations among them. Becoming preoccupied with this expectation and working to learn something for the sake of peer pressure, this can turn into a kind of ostentation. A great early scholar named Sa3d ibn Abdullah said, "Whoever desires people to know what is between him and his Lord is in the state of heedlessness." Of course, there are exceptions to this ethic. It could be that a worshipper sees that people have abandoned good actions, and so he

does them publicly as a way of admonition and as a reminder. For instance, Ibn Umar and Ibn Mas'ud were known to go to the mosque before dawn in order to pray the Night Prayer vigil (Tahajjud). They could have performed this voluntary worship in the privacy of their homes, but they did it in the mosque to encourage others to do the same.

Next, Imam Mawlood refers to Imam Malik as al-Najm or the Star; for his students used to say, "If we speak of scholars, Imam Malik is the Star." (Abu Hanifa is called al-Imam al-A'zam, the Greatest Imam.) Imam Malik didn't consider that epithet harmful, as long as the original intention was based on the foundation of sincerity. Imam Malik was once asked, "What do you say about a man who walks to the mosque for the sake of God, but then on the way there, he thinks to himself, 'I hope someone sees me walking to the mosque?'" Imam Malik did not see this as harmful as long as the man started out with sincerity and as long as he wards off such whisperings.

Imam Mawlood then says that abandoning a good act out of fear of ostentation is worse than engaging in ostentation itself. A person should not abandon, for example, going to the mosque because he fears ostentation as the motive. One should not submit to an irrational fear that is perhaps inspired by evil whisperings, and thus deprive himself of the blessing of congregational prayer in a mosque. It is better to continue with one's good deeds and to continue to keep one's intentions pure and sincere.

If there is an act of worship that one may do in private, then perhaps it is better to do so. As previously mentioned, it is an ethic of Islam that one perform some acts of worship privately in order to train the soul and purify one's intention and guard it from ostentation.

The Imam mentions an interesting fact. Scholars hold that to engage in *dhikr* (remembrance of God) with one's tongue, even if the heart is heedless, is better than abandoning it altogether. What a person repeats on his tongue might reach the heart, even if the heart is not engaged, for the heart of man lies under his tongue. (In Chinese medicine, there is a direct connection between the tongue and the heart. Even the movement of the tongue affects the heart.)

The essence of ostentation is being occupied with people instead of God. There is a hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ told A'isha that everybody will be naked on the Day of Resurrection. A'isha exclaimed, "Will they not look at each other?" The Prophet told her, "The Day of Resurrection will be immensely greater than that!" In other words, people will be in such a state of awe and trepidation, they will not care about seeing anyone. They will only concern themselves with their own souls and salvation.

The essential point about worship is that it be done purely for the sake of God. When one cleanses the soul of anything that tarnishes one's intentions, this person's knowledge of God will increase. As a consequence, everything else in the world will grow insignificant. Imagine how awestruck the Prophet was when he saw the Angel Gabriel (Jibril) in his true form, his majestic wings filling the horizon. Then imagine worshipping God, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Glorious. To worship God as if one sees Him is a characteristic of excellence in worship (ihsan) as the Prophet ﷺ taught. So seeking to impress humans is a pathetic exercise, an utter waste of time and life, for humanity is in constant and total need of God. If one wants to be close to power and authority, then do not chase men of position and station. Seek closeness with God, the Master of the universe, the Creator of all things. There is absolutely no power or might except with Him.

# Relying on Other than God

POEM VERSES 101-05

*Fear of and desire for other than my Lord contradicts  
absolute trust in Him. The origin of*

*both of them—and I seek refuge in the Mighty from every  
disease—is lack of certainty.*

*What is prohibited from the two is that which prevents an  
obligation from being fulfilled.*

*As for it leading to the neglect of that which is recommended,  
then it is considered reprehensible. In any case, flee in fear to  
your Lord from both of them.*

*The cure for both is to know that there is none who can bring  
benefit or harm other than Him alone.*

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## ***Definition and Treatment***

Fearing or desiring anything other than God runs contrary to trust and reliance on God (tawakkul). If one is obsessed with other mortals, his or her reliance on God is weak. This diminishes one's certainty in God (yaqin) and certainty that everything good—all that is worthy of pursuit and time—comes from none other than God. The cause of many diseases of the heart can be traced back to a lack of certainty and an impaired sense of faith and trust in God.

A person can be in pursuit of attaining benefit from people and fall into the trap of neglecting his obligations, as well as those meritorious acts that invite untold blessings and dimensions of realization to one's life. One needs to seek refuge in God from the kinds of fear and desire that divert one's attention and strivings away from God. The Imam's admonition is to keep always in mind that God alone holds all benefit, and that only God tests people and provides relief and provision.

# Displeasure with Divine Decree

POEM VERSES 106-107

*Displeasure with the Divine decree occurs when one resists  
God, the Majestic and Exalted, in what He has decreed.*

*For instance, saying, "I did not warrant this happening to  
me!" or "What did I do to deserve this suffering?"*

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## Discussion

The Imam speaks next of "displeasure with the Divine Decree," a phenomenon that should ring familiar. We have heard many times a person bemoan, "I do not deserve this!" or "Why me?" or similar declarations. Many people live with rancor in their hearts because of what they have been dealt with in life. This attitude toward trials stems from a denial of God's omnipotence and that God alone decrees all things. We cannot choose what befalls us, but we can choose our responses to the trials of life, which are inevitable. His decree is but a command from Him: "'Be and it is!" as repeated in the Quran. Imam Abu Hasan said that there is a quality in people that most are unaware of, yet it consumes good deeds—displeasure with God's Divine Decree (Qadar).

God-conscious people, when asked about what their Lord has given them, say that all of it is good. They say this out of knowledge of the nature of this world, as a temporary crucible of trial and purification. Because of this elevated understanding, they are patient with afflictions and trials. For worldly people, there is only this world, and this understanding creates a blind spot to the wondrousness of God's creation and the signs strewn throughout.

There are only four possible states in which the human being can live, according to revealed sources. A person is either receiving blessings (ni3ma) or tribulations (bala') from God; or is either living in obedience (taa3a) to God or in disobedience (ma3siya). Each condition invites a response. When God gives a person blessings, the response is gratitude in all of its manifestations. According to Sacred Law, gratitude is expressed first by performing what is obligatory (wajib), then going beyond that by performing virtuous, recommended acts (mandub). Gratitude is an awakening of appreciation in one's heart, an acknowledgement of what one has received. Abusing one's material assets (hoarding them without consideration of the needy or applying them toward forbidden matters) is a flagrant act of ingratitude. The response to tribulation is patience (sabr), as well as steadfastness and resolve. This is what God demands from people in times of trial—a *beautiful patience*, as close as possible to what Jacob عليه السلام exhibited in response to the disappearance of his beloved son Joseph عليه السلام and the machinations of his other sons (QURAN, 12:18), or the patience of Job عليه السلام during his afflictions.

As for obedience, one must recognize that obedience is a blessing from God. If a religious person starts to believe that he is better than other people—even if these "other" people are in the state of disobedience—he invites haughtiness. This is the danger of obedience and, in fact, the danger of religion—self-righteousness. Imam Ibn 3ata'illah said, "How many a wrong action that leads to a sense of shame and impoverishment before God is better than obedience that leads to sense of pride and arrogance!" In this is the secret of wrong actions. (The New Testament relates the story of the pride of the righteous Pharisee and the contrition of the humble tax collector. Jesus remarks, "Those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made

great.") Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq said that the goodness in obedience is in its essence and the evil in obedience is what it can result in. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq does not mean to say that there is evil in obedience and goodness in disobedience. Rather, he points out the danger of obedience leading to vanity in one's heart, an aura of sanctimony and condescension. On the other hand, when one indulges in wrongdoing and is overcome with feelings of shame, this can inspire him to hasten to repentance. The Prophet said that he feared for his people the vanity of self-righteousness.

The Prophet once said that whoever has a mustard seed of arrogance in his heart will not enter Heaven, a sentiment shared with Christianity. What God asks from obedient people is simply acknowledging that their obedience is a gift from God. The Prophet said, "Do not find fault in others. If you find fault in them, God may take their faults away and give them to you." It is unbecoming for a believer to look with scorn at those in tribulation, exhibiting a loathsome disdain toward others who seem unguided. It is better to come with compassion toward them and gratitude to God. When the Prophet ﷺ saw people severely tried, he made the supplication: "Praise be to [God] who has given me well-being such that I was not tried like these people. And He has preferred me over so much of his creation." Compassion for those in tribulation and gratitude for well-being is how the Prophet responded when he witnessed people in difficulty.

When it comes to disobedience (ma3siya), the response is repentance to God (tawba), seeking His forgiveness, pardon, and mercy, feeling remorse for the past, and having the resolve never to sink into disobedience again.

Everything that can happen to a person falls into one of these four categories, and each invites an appropriate response. What comes to a person in his or her life may help a person move closer to God when the response is right: *It may be that you dislike something, though it is good for you. And it may be that you love something, though it is bad for you. And God knows, and you do not know* (QURAN, 2:216). Ibn Abbas said that if a person is tested with a tribulation, he will find in it three blessings: first, the tribulation could have been worse; second, it was in worldly matters and not in spiritual ones; and third, it came in the finite world and not the infinite one. All three are reasons to thank God even for tribulations.

It is important to look at the life of the Prophet ﷺ and know that no one faced greater tribulation. The Prophet lived to see all of his children buried, except for Fatima. How many people experience that in their lifetime? Out of six children, he saw five of them perish. His father died before his birth. His mother died when he was just a boy. His guardian grandfather then died. When he received his calling, he saw his people turn against him with vehemence and brutality. People who had once honored him now slandered him, calling him a madman, liar, and sorcerer. They stalked him and threw stones at him until he bled. They boycotted him and composed stinging invectives against him. He lost his closest friends and relatives, like Hamza, who was killed on the battlefield. His beloved wife Khadija after 25 years of blissful marriage died during the Prophet's most difficult moment. Abu Talib, his protecting uncle, also died. The Prophet ﷺ was the target of 13 assassination attempts. How many people have faced all of that? Not once in a single hadith is there a complaint from him—except when beseeching his Lord.

To be displeased with God's divine decree is to plunge into heedlessness (ghafla). Imam al-Qarafi distinguishes in his book al-Furuq the difference between a divine decree and being content with the decree itself. Should people be happy with all that comes their way, even the bad things? God has decreed that evil exist in the world in order to test humankind and for reasons that accord with His wisdom. We should not be displeased with His choice in allowing this. But when one sees societies plunged into immorality, it is not something to be pleased



with or even feel indifferent. On the contrary, God requires that we dislike it. But never should we resent or be displeased with the fact that God has created a world wherein such things exist, however unpleasant they may be. As Ibn Abbas reminded, every trial could have been worse; it involved one's worldly affairs and not religion; and it came in this world and not the Hereafter, which lasts forever.

Imam al-Qarafi gives the example of a physician who amputates the arm of a patient who has gangrene spreading out of control. One day, the physician overhears the patient complaining that the physician was ignorant for amputating his arm. The physician is offended, for he saved the man's life. Had the physician heard the patient praising him—despite the fact that he lost an arm and is discomforted by pain—the physician would feel compassion for the man. So if one speaks about God's decree, saying, "God is testing me, but it is His will and there is wisdom in it," this differs greatly from the remarks of one who complains about the perceived injustices in the world.

# Seeking Reputation

POEM VERSES 108 - 16

*[The disease of] seeking reputation entails informing others of one's acts of obedience after they had been performed free of blemishes.*

*This results from some causes of showing off. A good deed becomes corrupted when telling others of it. But should you repent, [the deed's goodness] is restored.*

*Similar to this are deeds done so that others may hear about them. The one who does this is also considered a seeker of reputation, according to those with insight.*

*The great brigand [al-Shizaz] who robs all of these wayfarers is covetousness.*

*This is the cause of every iniquity, such as backbiting, lies, preoccupation of the heart during one's prayers, and insincere praise of others. Indeed, one will inevitably resort to hypocrisy as a result of it.*

*If you could ask desire itself about his trade, he would answer, "Earning humiliation!" or about his father, he would respond,*

*"Doubt concerning the divine apportioning [of provision]." Or about his objective, he would say, "Deprivation of the very thing one longs for."*

*Its definition is longing for some benefit from creation. But if one recognizes that [creatures] are incapable of benefiting anyone even themselves, then [covetousness] wanes.*

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## Discussion

Seeking reputation (sum3a) is a disease of the heart closely related to ostentation. It is desiring that people hear of one's goodness, an aural ostentation. It is seeking out renown: for example, a person wanting others to hear how much money he or she gave in charity. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever seeks out reputation, God will expose him on the Day of Judgment." Whomever God debases, none can elevate: "You exalt whomever You will; and You debase whomever You will. In Your Hand is all good. Indeed, You have power over all things" (QURAN, 3:26).

The Imam says that performing an act for the sake of God is ruined when one goes about informing people of it afterwards. Repentance restores the value of the good deed. Ibn Abd al-Salam states that there is no harm in informing others of one's works for the purpose of encouraging them to do good. But even in this case, one must tread carefully. The hadith says, "Whoever displays his good deeds to others, God will display his bad deeds on the Day of Judgment."

The Imam uses a word here that is taken from the name of a well-known brigand—Shizaz from Bani Dabbah—whose name the Arabs came to apply in a proverb. A notorious thief, for example, will be called Shizaz. Metaphorically, coveting renown is the brigand who robs people on the road to their Lord.

The spiritual sage Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi relates that he once was in the marketplace and saw someone he knew, a very righteous man known for his scholarship and spirituality, but who was also a merchant. Al-Mursi, as he tells us, thought to himself that if he were to go to this righteous person he could purchase his goods for a better price because the merchant was an exceptionally religious person and knew what a good man al-Mursi was. But then al-Mursi heard an inner voice admonishing him, "Make your religion sound, and do not desire benefit from created beings." The life-support for ostentation and reputation is covetousness. And the cause of this covetousness, according to Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq, is heedlessness (ghafla). A person permits himself to forget that blessings are from God alone. No good or harm can come to one except by God's leave. This level of heedlessness is not a casual lapse of memory. People can become so terribly preoccupied with seeking things from other people, they become heedless of God's power and ownership. When this happens, a person opens his or her heart to all kinds of spiritual diseases. God warns against heedlessness in the Quran. To ignore these warnings is the summit of carelessness. *And if God were to touch you with affliction, there is none who can relieve it save Him. And if He were to touch you with good fortune, then [know] He is powerful over all things* (QURAN, 6:17). The Prophet ﷺ said, "Know that if an entire nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, it would benefit you only with something that God had already prescribed for you. And if [an entire nation] were to gather together to harm you, it would harm you only with something that God had already prescribed for you."

When the topic of God's power is discussed, questions often arise about those who hold rancor in their hearts to the degree that they wish harm to come to others. There is real concern about the affliction these people can cause. It is necessary to remember that when a person is straight with God—observant of His commands, avoiding what He has prohibited, and going beyond the mere obligations and remembering Him often through litanies, voluntary acts of worship, and generosity in charity—the evil prayers of others will not prevail. But if one is oppressing people—depriving them of their rights—then one is justified in feeling some fear, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "Fear the supplication of the oppressed." If someone prays against another unjustly, then the iniquity will revert back to the wrongdoer. God never commanded people to supplicate against others, with the exception of the oppressors. God said, *Let there be no hostility except against oppressors* (QURAN, 2:193). The Prophet ﷺ said that supplication is "the weapon of the believer," a great blessing from God. In many circumstances we find people bereft of any means to defend themselves against wrongdoing and oppression and all they have is the power of supplication. But to say "that is all they have" is rather ironic, given that there is no power or might except with God. Sincere supplication is very powerful, and God answers the prayers of those who call on Him earnestly. When oppressed, the cries of even an atheist are answered, according to the sound hadith.

Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq holds that heedlessness is a blindness to the providential order that God has set in place and sustains every instant. A person may say, after recovering from an illness, "How wonderful this medication is! It saved my life." This is heedlessness of the fact that one of the attributes of God is the Healer. This is not to say that people should not take medicine, but people should know that it is God who has placed in this world remedies for our bodies, and that every bit of this world is in constant dependence on God. The properties of every chemical are in obedience; they do their work because of God's commands. The heedless forget that God truly holds the heavens and the earth, that He is the owner and sustainer of the universe—whatever is seen or unseen,

large or minute. The believer who recovers from an illness says, "All praise is for God who has healed me." The difference in responses is the difference between sentience and obliviousness.

Imam Mawlud holds that covetousness is the root cause of many iniquities, like slander. A person who slanders another does so for some perceived gain. He desires, for example, to instill negative thoughts in others toward the victim of his slander. Covetousness can be so overwhelming that it occupies one's mind during prayer (salat). It also leads to insincere praise of others in order to derive some benefit from them. Most salespeople, for example, will say just about anything (lies and flattery) to sell their wares. For this reason the "honest merchant will be raised with the martyrs on the Day of Judgment," as the tradition states. The honest merchant does not sacrifice his morality and ethics. If he is successful, he knows his success is from God.

It is interesting to observe in traditional cultures, especially in the Muslim world, that the marketplaces are comprised of rows of businesses dealing with the same product. In America, it would be considered foolish to open a business in proximity to a business already selling the same product. In Damascus, everyone knows where the marketplace for clothing is. There are dozens of stores strung together selling virtually the same material and fashions. Not only are the stores together, but when the time for prayer comes, the merchants pray together. They often attend the same study circles, have the same shaykhs, and are best friends. It used to be that when one person sold enough for the day, he would shut down and go home and allow others to get what they need. This is not make-believe or part of a Utopian world. It happened. It is hard to believe that there were people like that on the planet. And they exist to this day, but to a lesser extent. They are now old, and their sons have not embraced the beauty of that way of doing business. Today's business culture glorifies cut-throat strategies, in which it is not enough to do well; destroying the competition is encouraged and celebrated. This is covetousness puffed up to an obscene degree. As a result, whole societies are wounded spiritually; for the business culture is never contained among the merchants, but flows through the veins of a nation. The Imam says that for this reason we need to purify ourselves of these vile characteristics like covetousness. What makes the process difficult is living in a time when the abnormal is made to seem normal. The Quran warns that Satan seeks to adorn things before human eyes, so that we do not see things for what they are. As such, even covetousness is adorned. It is stripped of the stigma it so rightly deserves; it has now been placed under the rubric of "smart business." The terminology changes, though the essence survives shamelessly. The Prophet ﷺ said that "competition is the disease of civilizations." The propagation of the philosophy of "us against them" will spare no one, neither "us" nor "them." According to that world view, everyone is considered "them" to someone else. Unnecessary competition grows into animosity. That's how deep and insidious this disease is. Covetousness leaves one with the feeling of desiring more, which leads to a culture that can never be satisfied.

The Greeks differentiated between types of desire. They had a concept called eros, which is a longing for something which is never really fulfilled—wanting more and more. The Prophet said, "Nothing will fill the mouth of the son of Adam except the soil of his own grave. If he had one mountain of gold, he would only desire a second." The Prophet ﷺ also said, "Two people will never be satiated: seekers of knowledge and seekers of the world." Covetousness, if it is not for God and His religion, will be for worldly things.

Imam Mawlud next personifies desire and says, "If you could ask *desire* itself about his trade," it will answer, "Earning humiliation!" As for its father, it would say, "'Doubt concerning the divine apportioning [of provision],'" meaning being skeptical about how material provisions are allotted to different people.

The provision that one receives is called *rizq*. Rarely does God use two very similar names that evoke one attribute. When it comes to provision, God is al-Raziq and al-Razzaq, both names referring to Him as the Provider. We creatures are known as marzuq, that is, the beneficiaries of God's provision. Some scholars say that provision is anything from which a person derives benefit. Others say it refers to all the material possessions one has. The dominant opinion is the former, since God the Exalted says, *And there is not a creature treading the earth but that its provision depends upon God* (QURAN, 11:6).

God divides the provision of people into two kinds: inner (batini) and outer (zahiri). The outward provision includes such things as food, shelter, and well-being. Inner provision includes knowledge, good character, contentment, and similar qualities. Even the people in a person's life (friends, teachers, spouse, family, and so on) are considered provision.

Along with the provision that God gives, He also has given the means (asbab) by which one must seek out his provision. One person may be in possession of a meal that is meant for another, who then is invited to the former's home for that very meal. So a person never loses anything by feeding a guest. It is a provision already meant for that guest, decreed by God.

There should be no confusion about the means of attaining wealth and the wealth itself. When one starts to believe that his or her wealth is in the hands of another person, this creates a breeding ground for diseases, such as coveting what others have, doing whatever it takes to get it, and becoming angry when one does not receive what he or she expects. The Prophet said that the Angel Gabriel disclosed to him, "No soul will die until it completes the provision that was allotted to it." One must trust in God and seek refuge in Him from resorting to illicit livelihood out of fear of not having enough wealth.

# False Hope

POEM VERSES 117 - 20

*Its quick-acting poison is extended false hope, which is assuring yourself that death is a long way off*

*This generates hard-heartedness and indolence regarding obligations, which leads to inroads to the prohibited.*

*Regarding one who is engaged in preparing for tomorrow or writing works of knowledge, [extended hope] is not blameworthy.*

*As for foreboding its origin, it is ignorance of the fact that the entire affair [of this life] is God's alone.*

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## Discussion

Imam Mawlud speaks next of a "quick-acting poison" that produces an inordinate attachment to worldly concerns, which is a cause of so many diseases of the heart. This poison is *extended hope* (tatwil al-amal), that is, assuring oneself that death is a long way off—a mental environment that leads people to live their days as if a long life is guaranteed. The dangers of this delusion are self-evident.

But before speaking about the perils inherent in this malady, it must be said that in some ways extended hope is a necessary human condition. Scholars have said that if people did not have hope, no one would have ever bothered planting a single tree. If one was sure that he was going to die very soon, he would not have planted an orchard or had children. There would be no infrastructure for the next generation. But because human beings do have aspirations, they sow orchards and the like. A famous Persian story speaks of a Shah who passed by an old man planting an olive tree, which takes decades to produce good fruit. The Shah asked, "Do you believe this tree will be of any benefit to you, old man? You will die before it bears fruit." The old man replied, "Those before me planted and we benefited. We should plant so that others after us might benefit. The Shah was impressed with the old man's concern for the future generations, and then rewarded the old man with money. The old man then said to the Shah, "You see! The tree has brought me benefit already." The Shah smiled and rewarded him again. There is a similar Arab proverb that states, "Before us they planted, and now we eat what they have planted. We too must plant, so that those after us will likewise eat."

Extended hope definitely has its place; in fact, it's a mercy from God that we are capable of it, otherwise no one would embark on a course of education, for example, or undertake any endeavor that requires years before completion. Taking it a step further, one of the problems of modern society—and the apocalyptic nature of the age we live in—is that people are beginning to lose hope in the future. This is especially true among our youth, who are becoming nihilistic, taking a morbid perspective on the world. We live in a fast-food culture, in which we are led to believe that we need to have everything now; it is a culture that causes people to lose a sense of a future worth waiting for. Only recently have we seen the first generation in American history that in many ways will be materially worse off than their parents. Prior to this age, Americans were noted for their cheery optimism about the future.

The *extended hope* that Imam Mawlud calls a "poison" is akin to false hope that generates hard-heartedness and indolence due to heedlessness of the Hereafter. When one believes that he or she will live for a long time, what ensues is a diminution of pondering one's mortality and a sense of independence from God. Fudayl ibn 3iyad—a great early scholar and a man of asceticism—said that the world is divided into two types of people: felicitous (sa3id) and wretched (shaqi). No third category exists. Aristotle, an icon of Western civilization, wrote in his *Ethics* that the goal in life is leisure and happiness, a notion reflected in the Declaration of Independence, which states that people have inalienable rights from God, among them are life and liberty, which are enshrined in Islam's Sacred Law as well. Thomas Jefferson added "the pursuit of happiness," which implied leisure. What was originally meant by leisure was time to study and meditate on life and pursue true happiness.

For most today, however, happiness is pursued through the acquisition and enjoyment of material goods. The believer, though, finds happiness in genuine worship, a connection with other-worldliness. The human being is a creature that cannot pursue two things simultaneously, especially when they are on opposite poles of the universe. Islam connects the definition and understanding of happiness with what is permanent and real. According to most religious traditions, true happiness is happiness derived from one's relationship with God and happiness in the Hereafter. This includes living a life that prepares one for this destiny. If one is happy in the next world, this is the greatest possible achievement, regardless of one's material accomplishments in this life. Devotion to God includes the enjoyment of God's blessings, such as family, friends, and recreation.

The Prophet Muhammad made a spectacular supplication: "[O God], if You are not angry with me, then I do not care what You do with me." In other words, "If my life is toilsome and difficult, but I have not incurred Your wrath, then I am happy with that." He is happy because he knows that the real life—the everlasting existence—is in the Hereafter.

A wretched existence is plunging headlong into the worldly and having nothing good stored for the Hereafter. No matter how "well-off people appear in this world—regardless of the fine goods that surround them—if they have nothing good in the Hereafter, then they are essentially wretched. Fudayl ibn 3iyad said that there are well-known signs of wretchedness. The first is having a hard heart. A man saw the Prophet kiss a baby and asked him, "Do you kiss your children?" The Prophet said, "Indeed, I do." The man then said, "I have ten children, and I never kissed any of them," which said that if we were able to see the Muslims who fought at Badr, we would think that they were madmen because of their disregard of the world. "But if these Companions saw the best of you, they would say, "These people have no character." And if they saw the worst of you, they would say, "These people do not believe in the Day of Judgment."

There is a popular saying (often erroneously identified as a hadith of the Prophet "Act for your world as if you will live forever, and act for your Hereafter as if you are going to die tomorrow." Shaykh Bashir Uthman Bashir, a contemporary saint, said that people frequently misunderstand that saying and use it as a justification for working very hard for the world. Rather, the tradition states that we have forever to take care of our worldly affairs, but we must tend to the Hereafter as if death awaits tomorrow. This implies making even our worldly affairs for the sake of god. The point is not to suggest that a person neglect his work; rather, it speaks to one's intentions, such that one's work in the world does not detract from the Hereafter. The Quran says, *Do not forget your portion of this world* (QURAN, 28:77). There are two ways this can be interpreted. First, do not neglect what God has given you to expend for the Hereafter. Second, do not forget or neglect this world, even though the more important concern is the Hereafter. Both understandings are acceptable. Believers are not anti-worldly in a sense propagated by some

Christian theologies. The world is a place God made for us to enjoy, but not to the point that we forget our purpose and ultimate destiny.

The Quran speaks of certain people who after a long span of time became hard-hearted and ungodly (QURAN, 57:16). When a person suffers the passage of time without consistent and serious reflection about the Hereafter, the world takes hold of his heart more and more, which has a way of making it hard. Those who have hard hearts become corrupt. This dynamic applies to societies as it does for individuals.

Although extended hope can harden hearts, Imam Mawlood says there are exceptions, like one who is "engaged in preparing for tomorrow or writing works." One is not blameworthy for dedicating years of work for a single end product, like a scholarly work from which many people may benefit. It is one of the highest things a person can do. It is, in fact, a form of perpetual charity (*sadaqa jariya*) whose reward accrues in favor of its progenitor even after he or she has died. In cases like this, one is not censured for desiring a long life because one seeks to strive in ways that serve God, His religion, and humanity.

The Prophet warned against desiring death, for one "should desire life either to repent and make amends for past iniquities, or if one did much good, to increase his righteous deeds." There is so much optimism and hope in this statement of the Prophet ﷺ. If one's past has been marred with evil, then there is a new day and opportunity to turn things around. God says that *good deeds blot out the evil deeds* (QURAN, 11:114). People who recognize the urgency of the human condition and their own impending mortality do not squander their time. They set out doing positive deeds such as spreading knowledge, and this is entirely beneficial. God the Exalted says, *What benefits people shall continue on earth* (QURAN, 13:17). Once a great scholar who was a source of benefit for many people became very ill. A person came to him and asked him if he was fearful of dying. He said, "No! A verse of the Quran says that I will not die yet." The man asked, "Which verse?" He said, "What benefits people shall continue on earth." This kind of hope for a long life is a mercy from God, so that people who bring benefit to others will wish for more opportunity to taste the sweetness of being a harbinger of goodness.

It is no coincidence that those very people who do good and who hope to do more of it are in fact those who reflect on death and work for the Hereafter the most, so that the Day of Judgment will be a moment of joy and light for them. It is wise to meditate on death—its throes and the various states after it. For example, one should imagine, while he or she has life and is safe, the trial of the Traverse (Sirat) that every soul must pass over in the Hereafter, beneath which is the awesome inferno and the screams and anguish of those evildoers who already have been cast therein.

If athletes include as part of their training the visualization of their sport and mentally picture themselves going through all the steps required for success, how then can believers fail to visualize what is more important and consequential than sport? People of spiritual elevation prepare themselves psychologically for the ultimate journey. Although death is a sudden severance from this life, one remains conscious in a different way. In fact, the deceased is in a hyper-conscious state that makes this life appear like a dream. Ali ibn Abi Talib, may God be pleased with him, said, "People are asleep. When they die, they wake up."

Many of the righteous forebears of Muslim civilization stressed that one should visualize the states of death and the Afterlife: their bodies being washed and prepared for burial, being lowered into the grave, having soil cover them, being questioned by the angels, climbing out of the grave on the Day of Resurrection, and being called to stand in judgment before God the Exalted. In fact, some of them actually placed themselves in an open grave to feel with greater intensity what awaits them. This may seem like a morbid exercise, but it is effective training that adds



spring to one's life and enthusiasm to work for the Hereafter, its peace and bliss. Spiritual masters have long said that if a person is struggling with his appetites, this exercise is a good way of controlling them. Reflecting on death brings sobriety to one's state.

Imam al-Qarafi differentiates between the hope inherent in the Arabic word *raja* and the hope implied by *tatwil al-amal*. The Quran praises one who hopes for God and meeting Him in the Hereafter: *Say [O Muhammad], "I am but a man like yourselves, but to whom it is revealed that your God is but one God. So whoever hopes to meet his Lord, let him do righteous deeds and never associate anyone with the worship of his Lord"* (QURAN, 18:110). A famous hadith by A'isha relates that the Prophet said, "One who loves to meet God, God also loves to meet." And A'isha asked, "O Messenger of God, what about disliking death?" He replied, "It is natural to dislike death, but ultimately meeting God is something the believer seeks and looks forward to." This kind of hope is known as *raja'*. It is hope coupled with sincere effort to achieve what one hopes for.

It was common among Muslim scholars to discuss the delicate balance between hope and fear. If one is overwhelmed with fear, he enters a psychological state of terror that leads to despair (*ya's*)— that is, despair of God's mercy. In the past, this religious illness was common, although less so today because, ironically, people are not as religious as they used to be. But still, some of this is found among certain strains of evangelical Christianity that emphasize Hellfire and eternal damnation. One sect holds that only 144,000 people will be saved, based on its interpretation of a passage in the Book of Revelations.

But an overabundance of hope is a disease that leads to complacency and dampens the aspiration to do good, since salvation is something guaranteed (in one's mind, that is). Some Christian sects believe in this unconditional salvation, holding that one can do whatever one wills (although he or she is encouraged to do good and avoid evil) and still be saved from Hell and gain entrance to Paradise. They base this on the belief that once one accepts Jesus as a personal savior, there is nothing to fear about the Hereafter. Such religiosity can sow corruption because human beings simply cannot handle being assured of Paradise without deeds that warrant salvation. Too many will serve their passions like slaves and still consider themselves saved. In Islam, faith must be coupled with good works for one's religion to be complete. This does not contradict the sound Islamic doctrine that "God's grace alone saves us." There is yet another kind of hope called *umniyya*, which is blameworthy in Islam. Essentially it is having hope but neglecting the means to achieve what one hopes for, which is often referred to as an "empty wish." One hopes to become healthier, for example, but remains sedentary and is altogether careless about diet. To hope for the Hereafter but do nothing for it in terms of conduct and morality is also false hope.

A perennial teaching of revealed religion since Adam is that entry into Paradise is a matter of God's mercy, which is attained by combining faith with sincere deeds that confirm one's profession of faith. Unfortunately, on the Day of Judgment many Muslims may find themselves in Hell because of false hopes. All they have to show for their religiosity is the mere declaration of faith, a testimony unconfirmed by deeds, especially the rites of worship and charitable acts toward others.

Fear (*khawf*) treats or prevents two maladies: moral complacency and self-righteousness. Having a good measure of fear is necessary to stay on the path. But when one reaches his or her deathbed, one should have absolute hope in God, certain that God will offer forgiveness and allow him or her entrance into Paradise. This is having a good opinion of our Lord. The Prophet warned that no one should die except with "a good opinion of God."

Imam al-Haythami relates that having extended hope (*tatwil al-amal*) is founded on heedlessness of the reality of death, which, he said, is not wrong in and of itself. There is no commandment that obliges the

remembrance of death, although it is difficult to imagine a spiritual life without such reflection. But still, when the Prophet ﷺ said, "Remember death" and when he said, "I used to tell you do not visit graves, now I tell you to visit graves because it will remind you of the Hereafter," the command does not rise to the level of obligation. Rather, it is considered something highly recommended (mandub), the same way that the remembrance of God, beyond what is prescribed, is recommended, but not obligatory per se.

The Quran states that there are people who desire to continue in their wrongdoing throughout the entirety of their lives. They ask, "*When will this Day of Resurrection come?*" (QURAN, 75:6). One interpretation of this verse, according to scholars, is that although people may be aware of ultimate accountability, they put off repentance as if they are guaranteed a long life. This is an ethic exemplified by the saying, "Sow your wild oats," which advocates getting all the lewdness and sin out of one's life when one is young, and then later calming down and adopting religion. Besides the obvious error of this ethic, another terrible flaw is that people die at all ages and some never get the chance to repent and make amends. Moreover, what kind of repentance is this when people intentionally indulge in sin banking on the possibility that later on in life—after all the energy and drive diminishes—they will turn in penitence to God? We know that God loves those who spend their youth obedient to Him and His commandments.

Imam Mawlud mentions next the concept of divination and foreboding (tatayyur). When the pre-Islamic Arabs needed to decide upon something, they would run toward a flock of birds. If the flock veered to the left, they took this to be a bad omen; if to the right, it was a good omen.

Foreboding is blatant superstition. The word mutatayyur in the Arabic language refers to someone who is a pessimist, who always sees the worst in any given situation. Imam Mawlud says that superstition is lack of knowledge that everything belongs to God. All affairs are His. Having a good opinion of God produces a view of Him that is impregnable to negative thoughts and behaviors that thrive in the soil of disbelief. To hang on to superstitions is to have a negative understanding of the reality of God and His authority and presence.

There are two types of foreboding. One is based on normative experience: observing things that consistently happen. For example, getting near a cobra usually results in it striking its victims. So when you see a cobra, get out of the way. There is no superstition in that. But this differs completely from some practices like avoiding walking under a ladder, staying clear of a black cat, and the culture that has evolved around the number 13 and its association with bad luck. There is also a stigma connected with breaking a mirror. Even the seemingly harmless "knock on wood" originates from pagan practices of worshipping trees. These superstitions emanate from having a bad opinion of God, not recognizing His power and authority in the world, and attributing power to inanimate objects and delving into other similar practices. These superstitions are explicitly forbidden in Islam.

What the Sacred Law permits as a means to avoid calamities is not superstition. Saying certain prayers, reading certain passages of the Quran that ward off evil, giving extra charity, and the like are acts of worship. These are based on revelation from God Himself and, therefore, differ completely from pre-Islamic practices, for example, of avoiding coming between two sheep, which was considered bad luck.

The Prophet warned against superstition, no matter how widespread it may be in societies. Some people routinely read the astrology page of the newspaper before starting their day. Often people buy and sell stocks based on the advice of their astrologers. No matter how common this has become, it remains an offense against revealed religion and God Himself. It is founded on a completely absurd premise. While these practices have taken on an aura of innocence and light humor, they are nonetheless connected to their pagan and idolatrous ancestry.

Imam Mawlud proffers that the way to cure this trap of superstition is for one to simply persist in what he was doing when confronted with something viewed as a bad omen. Altering one's course of action because of some perceived omen is admitting that the superstition has power. It is important to note that if it is not one's habit to have such forebodings and one finds oneself with a bad feeling about a situation or person, it is prudent to "listen to the heart." This is known as *firasa* in Arabic, and in traditional theology, it is known simply as "discernment." It is an angelic agent that attempts to protect us from some imminent harm.

# Negative Thoughts

## POEM VERSES 121—24

*Some assumptions are not permissible, such as holding a bad opinion about someone who manifests righteous behavior.*

*This means that your heart is convinced and you have judged him based on your heart's suspicions without proof that warrants such an assumption.*

*There is nothing wrong with having doubts about someone or having a bad opinion of him if it is based on sound reasoning and is not arbitrary.*

*Thus our bad opinion of some profligate whose actions indicate his [corruption] is not prohibited.*

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## Discussion

Imam Mawlud speaks next of something that is very easy to have but is harmful to brotherhood and injurious to one's own spiritual growth. It is having a bad opinion about others, baseless assumptions and suspicion (*zann*). This is allowing conjecture into one's heart without having facts, which is especially harmful when one harbors a bad opinion about people who are outwardly righteous in appearance, which was something that the early Muslims considered important.

Scholars have advised that one should even beware of forming conclusions based on the bad appearances of people, for it could be that God veils their goodness from others. The Arabs traditionally were keen on having the ability to see a person's inner goodness. Once an Arab man came to the Prophet ﷺ to see who he was. When the man left, some men asked him about his opinion of the Prophet ﷺ, and he said, "His face isn't the face of the liar." This *firasa* is, again, having the intuitive ability to see in people signs of goodness or evil. The Prophet ﷺ had this ability to the utmost degree and said that believers possess it also, but to lesser extents. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq said that every believer has the power of *firasa* to variant degrees based on the strength of his or her faith.

But having a bad opinion of someone without cause is considered a malady of the heart: *O you who believe, avoid suspicion, for some suspicion is sinful* (QURAN, 49:12). Often associated with this disease is *backbiting* (*ghiba*), that is, speaking ill of another person behind his or her back. It is possible to backbite in an unspoken form, as when a person has unfounded negative thoughts against another person. Suspicion in the heart that affects one's thoughts and opinion of another person is considered backbiting of the heart (*ghibat'l-qalb*). This also is not permissible. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Beware of a bad opinion because it is the most false of speech." If someone says to you that a given person is bad, ask for proof. Without proof it is tantamount to a lie. The Sacred Law of Islam (*Sharia*) is based on proof and not conjecture.

Imam Mawlud says next that having doubts about someone's character is not forbidden if it is based on reason and observable evidence. This is different from suspicion that tends to be judgmental and, oftentimes, specious. God says, *O you who believe, if an ungodly person brings you some news, then seek out its veracity* (QURAN, 49:6). If someone known to openly indulge in major sins comes with some news, one should not accept it

without circumspection. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq gave good advice centuries ago that remains relevant: “Do not trust anyone with matters related to your religion, your family, or your wealth until you have tested him at least a thousand times.” According to this advice, one should test someone’s sincerity and trustworthiness before entrusting him with anything significant. If there is much corruption in a given generation, it is best to be wary of people until their goodness becomes manifest. This is the advice of scholars. There are many people who have no qualms in deceiving and cheating people. They will adorn their faces with smiles and communicate that they are wonderful people, but they will cheat a person when the opportunity arises.

Scholars also say that one should be circumspect with the dispensation of *Zakat* (Charity). In times in which goodness prevails over corruption, the default is to accept the word of people who claim they qualify for *Zakat* and ask for it. But when corruption and fraud are prevalent, then those responsible are obliged to be rigorous in their investigation. Unfortunately, some people will often present themselves as mired in poverty, though they are well-off. Charity is considered a trust from God, and its dispensation must be done with care.

Having doubts about people is different from decidedly judging them negatively. Concluding a bad opinion in the presence of ample evidence is common sense. But when people repent, they should not have their past held against them. There is a hadith that says, “There are two things that no believer has been given anything better: a good opinion of God and a good opinion of the servants of God.” According to Sacred Law, people are innocent until proven guilty. This relates to having a good opinion of God. A hadith *qudsi* says, “I am in the good opinion of My servant. If he things well of Me, he finds good, and if he thinks ill of Me, he finds evil.” Also, there is the hadith, “If [someone] finds good, let him thank God, and whoever finds other than that, let him blame only his own soul.” The Prophet ﷺ also said that the affair of believers is all good. Even if something unpleasant occurs, there is good in it.

# Vanity

POEM VERSES 125—27

*Vanity is the aggrandizing of some blessing while forgetting that it came from God.*

*Treat it by realizing that the Exalted is the Fashioner and the Bestower of blessings,*

*[realizing] that because of your impotence, you can produce neither benefit nor harm. Indeed vanity originates from one's ignorance of these two matters.*

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## Definition and Treatment

The next disease of the heart is *vanity*, known in Arabic as 3ujb, which is related to arrogance. Imam al-Ghazali holds that arrogance requires two people for its outward manifestation: the arrogant one and the one to whom the arrogance is shown. But the possessor of vanity does not need a second person. He is impressed with himself, and so admires his talents, possessions, looks, and status, he considers himself better than others. He exults, for example, when looking at himself in the mirror or gazing upon his accomplishments or property. Imam Mawlud says 3ujb is a nefarious kind of vanity in which a person rejoices in the blessings he has but forgets the source of the blessings.

The fact that someone has talent and is able to develop it into a higher skill or craft and achieve remarkable things does nothing to diminish the obvious—that it still is a gift from God. It is part of the *sunna* of God in creation, that divine order woven in the fabric of existence, that one must toil to refine his or her skills or talent. A calligrapher, for example makes his craft appear easy to the onlooker, but one doesn't see the years of tireless preparation, perseverance, and repetition to master the curves of one letter of the Arabic alphabet and then whole words. Then consider the various styles of calligraphy that have developed over the centuries by the great Muslim calligraphers. There are plenty of talented and refined artisans of the world who deem their work astonishing and magnificent. They think only of their long training and deceive themselves into thinking, "I worked so hard, and I did this all by myself." Similarly, one often finds businessmen truly talented and bold in building businesses, but who admire themselves and extol their financial prowess. Undoubtedly, this invites illness to the heart, for it is God who is the bestower of success and talent.

Imam al-Bayhaqi relates a statement of the Prophet  $\text{ﷺ}$  in which he said, "God makes every maker and what he makes." In reality, God is the creator of the marvels that people admire and attribute to the glory of humankind, forgetting that it is God who created the ones who produced these marvels. Realizing that God is the source of all blessings prevents vanity from entering the heart.

A person will always find someone with more talent and more knowledge. And ultimately: *Above all those who have knowledge is the All-knowing*, that is, God (QURAN, 12:76). Moses  $\text{عليه السلام}$  was once asked if he was the most knowledgeable of people, and he answered "Yes." Moses  $\text{عليه السلام}$  was then told that there was a man who had knowledge that Moses  $\text{عليه السلام}$  did not have. This man was Khidr, who wasn't a prophet, but Moses  $\text{عليه السلام}$ , without a trace of vanity, became his student. (The story is told in Surat al-Kahf of the Quran.)

Vanity comes from the Latin word *vanus*, which means *empty*, implying that the source of our vanity is void of substance and will vanish. When the Roman Emperor triumphed in a battle, he put on a victory celebration in which the general of the battle paraded through the street. Behind him on his chariot a slave would hold a victory laurel and whisper in the general's ear, "All is vanity," thus reminding the general of the perils of vanity. It is part of ancient wisdom to remind people that all accomplishments people praise and admire will perish until no one remembers them. Charles Lindbergh, the first pilot to successfully fly across the Atlantic, was celebrated as a great hero for his famous flight. Within ten years, however, he was vilified as a criminal by the American press who falsely claimed that he was a Nazi sympathizer.

How many times have we seen major cities holding massive celebrations for the accomplishments of their sports teams, the huge parades and the hubris tradition of human glorification? How many of these celebrations end up in riots, vandalism, and even loss of life? What about the urban social morass that exists before, during, and after the celebrations? To celebrate in this way is vintage vanity.

There is foolishness in being vain about what one has accomplished, given its ephemeral nature. But when one is thankful to God and acknowledges and praises Him as the source of this goodness, then the accomplishment outlasts our earthly lives and the memories of people, for God preserves it.

Vanity originates from one's ignorance of two matters: God alone is the Fashioner and the Giver of Blessings and we human beings are incapable of accomplishing anything without God's will and blessings. If one accomplishes something, let him or her remember God and be grateful, and not swagger with haughtiness. For if we do not humble ourselves, God will humble us. When men and women are blessed with exceptional outward beauty, they introduce ugliness when they have vanity for it. When the Prophet ﷺ saw a reflection of himself—and he was a beautiful man—he would make the following supplication: "O God, as You have made my countenance most excellent, make my character most excellent. So Imam Mawlud says that to rid oneself of vanity (or prevent it from entering one's heart), reflect long and hard on the fact that all blessings are entirely from God and that we cannot produce any benefit or harm without His permission.

# Fraud

POEM VERSES 128-29

*Fraud is to conceal some fault or harm, either religious or worldly, even from one who is part of a protected minority*

*or someone who has a treaty with Muslims. Others have interpreted [fraud] to be the embellishment of something that lacks any real benefit.*

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## Discussion

The next disease is fraud (*ghish*). It is concealing from people some fault, blemish, or harm, either of a religious or worldly nature. Others have said that fraud is making something useless or defective seem useful and beneficial, or making something bad appear to be good. One of the most widely transmitted hadith in the Islamic tradition is the Prophet's saying, "Whoever defrauds us is not one of us. Sacred Law forbids selling something without pointing out its defects. If the seller conceals defects or fails to disclose them intentionally, this is fraud, whether its victim is a Muslim or not.

The Sophists of ancient Greece loved and practically worshipped rhetoric. They were the first historical relativists, in that they held the theory that right and wrong do not exist in an objective and transcending sense. Whoever makes the most skilled and persuasive argument is right. The sophists believed that the most important thing is to be convincing, whether one is telling the truth or lying, whether one is defending corruption or upholding justice. This is fraud of the tongue.

Rhetoric was also an art form in Islamic literary and oratorical history. But to the Muslim, rhetoric was the art of embellishing the truth and presenting it persuasively.



# Anger

## POEM VERSES 130-37

*As for the swelling ocean of all of these diseases, I mean anger; if you come to its shore, you'll see great astonishments.*

*Its waves and everything else about it are overflowing. So say of it what you will without constraint.*

*It has two treatments: one of them removes it altogether without trace. The other suppresses it should it manifest itself.*

*To be adorned with the ornament of its cure, remember the extensive praise lavished upon forbearance and humility*

*in Sacred Law, as well as in the poetry and prose of the wise. Indeed, remember that all of the prophets have been depicted as having both qualities.*

*Repel [anger] by perceiving at its onset that there is no one doing anything in reality except the Almighty;*

*also by performing ablution with cold water, keeping silent, lying down (if one is sitting)*

*and sitting (if one is standing). It will pass by doing these things, and also by seeking refuge in God as was mentioned in the tradition.*

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## Definition

Imam Mawlud says of the next disease that it is a "swelling ocean." He refers to *ghadab*, intense anger or wrath, which aptly compares with a swelling mass of emotion that is difficult to hold back once it is unleashed. Anger is truly an amazing phenomenon if one reflects on its nature and presence in human life and character, its peril and liability, as well as its utility and necessity. According to a hadith, a man asked the Prophet "What is the worst thing that one incurs concerning God?" And the Prophet said, "His wrath." The man asked, "How do we avoid it?" The Prophet ﷺ said, "Do not become angry." This statement reveals a fascinating reality in which we live and informs a good portion of the Muslim religious perspective: there is a correlation between what a person does and what he receives from God in kind—a correspondence that our all-wise Lord has placed in the workings of creation. If one wishes not to incur the wrath of God, then this person should not be wrathful or angry with people unjustly. Similarly, the Prophet said that whoever makes one's path to knowledge easy, God will make his or her path to Paradise easy. And whoever covers the shortcomings of his brother, God will cover his shortcomings in the Hereafter. God the All-Wise placed this special reciprocity in this world.

A man asked the Prophet ﷺ, "Give me advice." The Prophet ﷺ said, "Do not become angry." The man asked again, and the Prophet repeated his advice. For a third time, the man asked the question, and the Prophet ﷺ said again, "Do not become angry." The repetition of this counsel stresses the importance of the Prophet's admonition about anger. Scholars agree, however, that this hadith does not prohibit anger per se, for even the

Messenger of God became angry at times. He once said, "I am a human being and I become angry like you." The Prophet's anger could be seen on his face. But his anger was always in response to an aberration in human character and behavior offensive to God. So anger is not a negative emotion in and of itself. It is part of the human creation as our flesh and limbs are. Without anger, there are many things that would not have been achieved. Anger can be a positive motivator.

But there is another side to anger that we must guard against. If it is not guided to something useful, it can possess, consume, and ultimately destroy a person. How many times have we seen or heard of a person who ruined his or her life because of a rash act or statement made in a fit of rage? How many people do we know who are entirely estranged and avoided because of their inability to corral their anger? How many times have people been deeply offended and unjustly violated by the anger of another? How many people create oppressive environments because of the fear they instill in others because of irrational and feral anger? (Mawlana Jalaluddin al-Rumi locates the wisdom of the Islamic prohibition of alcohol in the peril of anger. When people drink, even if they are not visibly inebriated, they become easily angered and belligerent. What is mercifully veiled in human beings is exposed when alcohol enters the picture.)

According to scholars, like Imam al-Nawawi and others, when the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Do not become angry," he meant do not allow anger to lord over oneself and cause the loss of one's comportment. In other words, do not become anger, its embodiment, such that people only see your rage. Instead, control anger and never lose control. Scholars have likened anger to a hunting dog: without training, it will never retrieve what its owner needs nor will it point a person in the right direction. So anger is something that needs to be trained, not abolished, for if people completely suppressed their sense of anger, many of the injustices of the world would not have been opposed and tyranny would have gone unchecked. Without anger, people would go around with complete impunity and commit heinous acts without resistance from the people. Corruption would cover the face of the earth.

Muslim scholars have identified four essential qualities in human beings, which have been identified in earlier traditions as well. Imam al-Ghazali and Fakhruddin al-Razi adopted them, as did Imam Raghīb al-Isfahani in his book on ethics. The first of them, according to al-Ghazali, is *quwati'l ʿilm*, which is known in Western tradition as the rational soul, the human capacity to learn. The next is *quwati'l-ghadab*, which may be called the irascible soul, the capacity that relates to human emotion and anger. *Quwati'l-shahwa* is the third element, known as the concupiscent soul, which is related to appetite and desire. The fourth power is *quwati'l adl*, which harmonizes the previous three powers and keeps them in balance so that no one capacity overtakes and suppresses the others.

In Western tradition, these capacities correspond to what are known as cardinal virtues. Muslims call them *ummahat al-fada'il*. They are wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice (*hikma*, *shaja3a*, *'iffa* and *ʿadal*). When the rational soul is balanced, the result is wisdom. Whoever is given wisdom has been given much good (QURAN, 2:269). Wisdom, according to al-Ghazali, is found in one who is balanced, who is neither a simpleton nor a shrewd, tricky person. If there is a deficit in the rational soul, the result is foolishness. When the rational soul becomes excessive and inordinately dominant, the result is trickery and the employment of the intellect toward the exploitation of others.

Courage is when the irascible soul—anger—is under control, when a mean is struck between impetuosity (irrational behavior that people ultimately regret) and cowardice, which is marked by fear overriding the anger required to courageously respond to exploitation, oppression, personal threats, and wrongdoing. There is a middle path between these extremes, as the Prophet ﷺ said, namely, a middle way of wisdom and courage.

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Temperance (3iffa) is a balance within the concupiscent soul, which is related to appetite and desire. The ignorant, when they see the indigent believers, think they are rich because they have this 3iffa, this dignity in their soul (QURAN, 2:273), which causes them to abstain from trying to attain wealth through ruse and fraud, but also through begging. Attaining things through illicit means is working from a posture of imbalance with regard to one's desire. It is a suspension or retraction of balance resulting in defrauding people and, ultimately, one's own soul. This is the irony of giving in to one's base desires, which offers some immediate gratification but harms the soul and dampens its spirituality.

The topic of anger is usually treated as a matter of balance and is closely associated with those deeds and habits that either throw one's balance off or guard it. As it is traditionally understood, imbalance in one realm of life cannot help but touch other aspects of human behavior. The Prophet ﷺ said, for example, "The worst vessel the son of Adam fills is his stomach." We understand from this that there is a relationship between character and consumption, a dialogue that the modern marketing mentality desperately wants us to discount. It is oppressive to fill our stomachs for health considerations, but also because of the connection between excessiveness in one area and the corollary damage it brings about in others. Muslim scholars throughout our history have pointed this out and have relied on sound statements of the Prophet ﷺ for proof, for he prayed against a stomach that is not easily satisfied. He recommended that the stomach be filled one-third with food, one-third with water, and one-third free.

The same ethic applies with sexual appetite, which is required for a healthy state. It is discouraged to completely ignore one's desire. But if one transgresses and goes beyond what is permissible, this is oppression and wrongdoing. Popular culture has placed an emphasis on illicit sexual intimacy and recklessness, making it seem normal and acceptable. Sexual relationships between unmarried partners, who neither commit their lives to each other nor feel any necessary emotional ties, is made to seem the summit of sexual excitement.

According to Imam al-Ghazali, the one who perfected the balance between these forces was the Messenger of God for he was the most just of men. The more one emulates him in his behavior, the greater balance one will achieve. The way of the Prophet ﷺ was the middle way, the way of moderation.

With regard to anger, Imam al-Ghazali says that it is acceptable only at the right time, in the right place, for the right reasons, and with the right intensity. The Messenger of God never allowed his anger to get the best of him. He was in control of himself, secure, and always in the state of spiritual certainty. Out of the thousands of reports about the minutest details of the Prophet's life, never has anyone related that the Prophet ﷺ ever did anything imprudent or rash. Never did he apply his intellectual gifts and prophetic status for anything other than guiding humanity aright.

Al-Qadi Ibn al-Arabi, in speaking about courage and the larger issue of balance, said that after the Messenger of God ﷺ, no one was more courageous than Abu Bakr. If one were to ponder the events during the life of the Prophet it was Abu Bakr who continually showed up in the Prophet's defense and support. He was particularly firm and resolute, the one who did not waver when others wavered. He was the one who accompanied the Prophet ﷺ in his migration to Madinah. Each of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Khulafa' al-Rashidin) embodied one of the aforementioned virtues as his dominant character. Umar ibn al-Khattab is associated with being particularly sensitive to justice and fairness. Uthman ibn Affan's name is derived from the same Arabic root as 3iffa, which, according to al'Qamus of al-Fayruzabadi, refers not only to moderation but also to one who is abstinent and chaste, a

meaning that is fitting for Uthman. The Prophet once said that even the angels were shy before Uthman because of his modesty. In Ali ibn Abi Talib, there is extraordinary wisdom or hikma. It is true that these great heroes of Islamic civilization embodied in a particular way one of the four virtues, but they also kept a balance that enshrined the rest.

The phrase *sirat al-mustaqim*, the straight or upright path, is repeated many times each day by the Muslim worshipper. No phrase better epitomizes the way of life of the Muslim. The word *mustaqim* suggests balance. If one deviates from this balanced path, he does so in one of two ways: deficiency in fulfilling one's obligations and excessiveness therein. The concept of monkery, for example, does not receive approbation in Islam as a form of practice. The Quran states that the institution of monasticism was not prescribed by God (QURAN, 57:27). According to the commentators, the people of monasticism became immoderate in practices that originated from the desire to gain God's good pleasure. But they were unable to fulfill it, which is the nature of excess and its main defect. A person cannot keep up with it and becomes either worn out or altogether jaded, which is antithetical to the path of religion, the straight path of Islam. Balance, then, is not merely a merciful device for adherents, but the shortest distance between a person and his or her spiritual objectives.

The objectives of the rites of worship cannot exceed what is natural. Sexual attraction, like hunger, cannot be removed from the soul; nor is it to one's benefit to try to do so. Celibacy is not considered a virtue in Islam. Chastity and licit sexual intimacy are. Church history tells of the Puritans who went so far as to swear off normal desires, such that sexual relations were nearly tabooed between a man and his wife. It became an entirely perfunctory activity of marriage fleeced of the enjoyment that a husband and wife are not only entitled to have but are encouraged to experience.

The usual result of excessiveness is its antithesis. A society that starts out with extreme Puritanical ethics may turn into one of overindulgence and licentiousness. On an individual level, the experience is similar. It is a principal feature of the Islamic faith that the "middle way" be the path that Muslims adhere to. The Quran calls the believers a "middle nation," which commentators say includes moderation, which leads to a consistency of worship and conduct that one can carry on throughout his or her life. It is said that the Judaic legal tradition is based on stern justice, while at the foundation of the Christian phenomena is the idea of categorical mercy where everybody should be forgiven no matter what. With Islam, a balance is struck suitable for the complex societies that have spread across the face of the earth, a balance between *ghadab* (wrath and stern justice) and *rahma* (mercy). To take the straight way, one must have both, the law and the spirit of the law, the *Shari'a* and the *haqiqa*. The law consists of rules, and the spirit of the law is mercy. God sent down the *Shari'a* as a mercy, and the Prophet ﷺ himself is *the mercy to the worlds* (QURAN, 21:107).

There is an inward and outward state in every human soul, with the inward being *iman* (the condition of the faith) and the outward being *islam* (the manifestation or practice of the faith). When the two come together inwardly and outwardly, the resulting balance is a truly beautiful human being, one generally called a *muhsin*, one whose worship and character are excellent. This is the taker of the straight path and what we all strive for and petition God for each time we stand in prayer. According to Ibn al-Taymiyya, Muslims can deviate by way of *ghadab* or by way of *rahma*. They go the way of the hair-splitting, tyrannical scholar or the way of the ignorant worshipper, as in extreme Sufism, which concludes that all is one and that everybody is going to Paradise, regardless of one's creed, one's disfigurement of God's revelations, and one's outright fabrications about God and His nature.

The balance is to cling outwardly to the law and carry the spirit of Sufism inwardly, which is the advice of Imam al-Shafi'i. When Muslims deal with one another, they should incline toward clemency and mercy, not wrath and severity. God says that the former is closer to taqwa (God-consciousness) than the latter (QURAN, 5:8). It is a more elevated act to reprieve than it is to exact justice. Imam Raghib al-Isfahani said, "When love exists, there is no need for justice." What he meant by this is that when love is present and is allowed to override one's anger, the demand for retribution is quieted. If we were to look at the emotions behind the first major trial of the Islamic community after the passing away of the Prophet ﷺ, there was a deviation from the spirit of love and cooperation. Mu3awiya demanded justice for the murder of Uthman. But Ali ibn Abi Talib, who had great wisdom, demanded forgiveness because he saw that the demand for retribution would rip the nation apart. Muslims, however, maintain a good opinion of Mu3awiya, contrary to the Shiites. We believe his intentions—like those of A'isha and Zubayr—were purely for the attainment of justice. 'Ali's position, according to many Muslim historians and scholars, was actually the higher level of Islam, which is rahma or mercy and clemency. What we learn here is that there is a hidden hazard in inordinate demands for justice and retribution. We have seen how this extreme position can lead to injustice, as pointed out above. Extremism, in general, usually results in the opposite extreme. Our early history bears this out, for Ali was a victim of injustice by those who rebelled against him out of their sense of indignation.

The cardinal virtues originally stem from religion. A generous person gives from his wealth to others because he is not afraid of losing his power or wealth; he knows all power and wealth are with God. All further virtues emanate from the cardinal virtues (or matrices of virtues). Mercy, for example, issues from wisdom (hikma), since forgiving someone when you are wronged requires a recognition of the greater wisdom in remission and the greater good in clemency.

Anger (ghadab) remains an essential quality of the human creation. The human brain is said to be a triune brain because it has three dominant centers. This observation of the brain is not modern, for Imam al-Ghazali mentioned it. The lowest brain is known as the "R" brain (reptilian according to the evolutionary scheme of things), which is associated with appetite, mainly for food and sex. The midbrain is where the emotions are centered, which includes anger. The third portion of the brain is known as the new brain or the neocortex, which is where the rational faculty resides. When these three centers function properly in proportion to one another, the human being is said to be functioning in equilibrium. Such persons are stable and immediately likeable.

There are people who are entirely cerebral; everything is theoretical or abstract to them. Their rational center suppresses their emotions residing in the midbrain and the physical needs in the R-stem. And there are people who work mainly from their so-called reptilian centers, impervious to protocol, higher ethics, and a civil association with others. It is not unusual to hear someone likening another's behavior to that of a snake, a kind of slinking predator, entirely selfish and wholly tenacious in acquiring his desires. Then there are people who are overly emotional. They are either very happy or very angry, the latter of which is the more common emotion.

There are basically four reasons people get angry. One is related to primal needs, such as food, shelter, and life. When these are threatened, a normal person feels vulnerable and responds with anger. If someone threatens one's life or family, the person needs to respond. This anger is not blameworthy. If humans were incapable of a response, we would have a society indifferent to crime and transgression. This would spell doom for human civilization. This is part of the wisdom behind the Quranic commandment to enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil.

The second reason is related to position, dignity, and protecting one's honor. Human beings are born with sensors that detect when others try to belittle them or when they are the object of contempt and scorn. The other side of this is when people view themselves with hubris and manufacture delusions of grandeur. They grow angry when they interpret normal and acceptable behavior towards them as beneath their dignity.

The third cause of anger is related to specific people and their particular sense of values. If, for example, a scholar sees that a book is being abused, he will become angry. An illiterate farmhand may not be vexed about the abuse of a book, though he may curse a man who breaks a pitchfork.

Finally, the fourth cause is ghira, commonly translated as jealousy. The Prophet ﷺ said that he himself had jealousy in the sense of guarding and protecting something important to him. God has placed jealousy as part of human nature. If men did not have jealousy for their women, relationships would fall into dissolution. It is natural for a man to have this protective sense of jealousy regarding his wife, as long as it is not expressed in the form of oppressing her, which unfortunately happens frequently.

With regard to these causes of anger, Imam al-Ghazali says the first one (related to material needs) is healthy if it is not taken to an extreme, in which case a person steals from others in order to secure his food and shelter. The second one (related to dignity) is also healthy, with the similar caveat of avoiding two extremes, haughtiness and abject humiliation. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The believer does not humiliate himself."

According to Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq, if ignorant people say something disparaging that does not relate to religion, then ignore it. One should not grow angry when there is no benefit in doing so. God the Exalted commanded the Prophet when faced with the discourse of ignorant people, *Be patient with what they say, then part from them graciously* (QURAN, 73:10). The Prophet ﷺ praised a man named Abu Damdam who never became angry when people spoke ill of him, for when one speaks ill of another, the speaker not only acquires misdeeds, but his own good deeds transfer to the account of the victim.

## ***Treatment***

As for anger as a disease of the heart, Imam Mawlud says there are two cures. One of them removes anger when it comes, and the second suppresses or thwarts it. The first cure is to remember the extensive praise and goodness associated with forbearance and humility. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq contends that the main reason people become angry is because they are filled with themselves; their egos get in the way. In their persecution of the Prophet ﷺ, the Quraysh mocked him like children. But the Prophet did not become angry.

The ethic promoted here is simply letting go—not allowing insult to penetrate and manipulate one's emotion. It is about keeping control, feeling secure. One should remember how much humility and forbearance are praised by the Best of those who praise, that is, God the Exalted. When the Maker of the heavens and the earth commends a certain behavior or disposition, race to attain it.

Humility and forbearance are praised in poetry and by all the different sages, even outside the religion of Islam. The Prophet ﷺ said that God elevates a person who is humble for the sake of God, but whoever tries to exalt himself, God debases him. The Prophet ﷺ was the most forbearing and forgiving of people. All the prophets were characterized by these qualities. None was known to be arrogant or easily angered.

Imam Mawlud states next that one can control anger by recognizing that nothing takes place without God's leave: there is no power or might except with God, This life is a crucible of trial, and those who are heedless of this

react severely when trials come upon them. The Prophet ﷺ said the strong man is not one who can wrestle people, but the man who controls himself when he is angry.

The Prophet ﷺ also advised that if one becomes angry, he should sit down. And if one is sitting, then he should recline. If neither of these helps, then perform the ritual ablution (wudu) and then pray. The actual act of splashing water on the face can alter a person's mood. Anger often manifests itself in the face, which becomes red and warm. Once a person grew very angry before the Prophet ﷺ who then noticed how when the face shows extreme anger it resembles Satan, The Prophet then said, "I have a word, if spoken, will remove it from him. It is, 'I seek refuge in God from Satan the accursed.'"

We know how anger can escalate. When conflict fomented and becomes heated between two parties, they reflexively stand, which is the nature of rising tempers. It is important to make the parties sit, which lessens some of the anger. These simple remedies are not tricks; rather, they reveal how thin the veneer of anger can often be. Anger can be entirely irrational and require nothing more than a change of posture to reconstitute the mind. The Prophet's counsel is very telling of human nature; he reveals insights into the ebb and flow of human emotions and the ease with which we can alter our emotional condition. It is said that one of the ruses of Satan is to make what is easy appear difficult or even impossible; he whispers feelings of despair to make us grow despondent of God's mercy and thus surrender ourselves to the insidious view that we can never repent.

Umar ibn al-Khattab was known to grow angry. But if we look further at him over the course of his development in Islam, his anger no longer got the best of him. In fact, it was the opposite. He tended to be forgiving and compassionate—especially near the end of his life. But he was also known for being a lion. Once the Prophet ﷺ was teaching a group of Qurayshi women. When they noticed that Umar was coming, the women fled into another room. This was before the commandment for hijab was revealed. Umar came to the Prophet ﷺ and saw that he was amused. Umar asked the Prophet about what had amused him. The Prophet ﷺ said, "It is these Qurayshi women: when they see you, they flee." The Prophet ﷺ called back the women, whereupon Umar asked them, "How is it that you flee from me and you are not shy in front of the Messenger of God? He is more worthy of your shyness!" And they said, "You are harsher than the Messenger of God. He does not become angry." And the Prophet ﷺ laughed and said, "If you, Umar, went down one path, Satan would take another."

According to one Islamic model, the soul has three stages. In the first seven years, it is known as the appetitive soul. The primary concerns of children in this stage are eating and wanting attention. The second stage is the next seven years, the age of anger, when kids react strongly to stimuli and are annoyed easily. The third is the rational stage, when reasoning and discernment reach their full capacity. Ali ibn Abi Talib encouraged parents to play with their children during the first stage, to indulge them, for they are discovering the world. They had been in a spiritual realm and have entered the realm of the sensory. In the second stage, he counseled, parents should focus on training and discipline, for in this stage young people have a heightened capacity to receive and absorb information and thus learn new things. In the third stage, parents should befriend them, form a relationship that is amicable and full of kindness and companionship. After this, their children, now adults, are set free.

# Heedlessness

POEM VERSES 138-40

*Heedlessness is being careless concerning what God has commanded one to do and has prohibited.*

*Scholars of this science consider [heedlessness] to be the source of all wrongdoing. Its cure is to be found in four deeds, all of which possess rectifying qualities:*

*seek forgiveness from God; visit the righteous; invoke blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ and recite [God's] Book.*

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## Definition

*Heedlessness (ghafl)* is a terrible lack of attention to what is infinitely more important in one's life than material goods. Heedlessness is a key concept often discussed in Islamic spiritual treatises and is referred to in many passages of the Quran. Imam al-Junayd (a 9th-century scholar) said that heedlessness is the one pathogen that breeds all the diseases of the heart. His argument is compelling. The Arabic word for a *simpleton* is *mughaffal*, a person who is easily fooled. In our context, it is a person who is diverted away from what is essential and consequential toward what is ephemeral and ultimately pointless.

According to some linguists, the Arabic word for human being, *insan*, comes from the word *uns*, which refers to *intimacy*, for the human being needs close companionship. Other linguists, however, believe it comes from the Arabic word *nasya*, which means to forget, implying that one of the characteristics of human beings is forgetfulness, which further implies that we need to be reminded often, hence the centrality of repetition in spiritual practices.

The heedlessness that Imam Mawlud speaks of here is its most menacing form: being heedless of divine purpose, accountability, and the resurrection, ultimate standing, and judgment in the Hereafter. The full manifestation of these events are veiled to us now by the thin wall of death, the timing of which is the secret that hovers above the heads of all men and women. Even though the reality of these things is hidden in the realm of the unseen, what is expected of us is to receive and accept what the Prophet ﷺ came with.

This was the duty of all the prophets—to call people to believe in the unseen, to trust what they say, commit to their teachings. There is a well-known allegory of people in a cave, at the entrance of which was a lamp that cast shadows the people in the cave believed to be realities. When one person left the cave and saw the real world—the sun, the stars, and the trees—he raced back in the cave to tell the others that there was much more to their world than what they saw in their cave. But the people feared what he said, causing them to deny, ridicule, and then physically attack him. The prophets came to rouse people from their stupor, to take them from delusional lives and heedlessness to awareness. Many of the prophets were slain; all faced harsh opposition.

In the Quran, you will find *ghafla* mentioned several times in different forms, but almost invariably referring to unawareness. The Quran uses other words to refer to unawareness. Those who laugh at the Quran are *samidun* (QURAN, 53:61); they are so immersed in amusement they are oblivious of reality. On the Day of Reckoning, the heedless will be driven to their chastisement and be told along the way, *"You were once heedless of this. Now We*



*have removed your veil [ghita'] from you, so your sight this day is sharp!"* (QURAN, 50:22), God speaks of the disbelievers impervious to the message of the prophets as having a cover (ghishawa) over their eyes (QURAN, 2:7).

The ultimate trauma of heedlessness, then, is not seeing things the way they truly are. It is choosing a way of living that allows divine signs to pass one up without notice. The Prophet supplicated that God the Exalted show him things in their reality, distinguished and clear: "Show me the truth as truth and give me the ability to follow it; and show me falsehood as falsehood and give me the ability to avoid it." Imam Mawlud says ghafla is also heedlessness of what God has commanded and what He has prohibited, or seeing the difference between the two as irrelevant.

One of the cures for heedlessness is keeping good and sincere company. It is recognized in virtually all traditions and cultures that the company one keeps has inroads to one's heart and morality. When someone is surrounded by people who are sincere and trustworthy, he only stands to benefit from them. Even when a person errs, good companions remind the person and set him right.

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## ***Treatment***

The cure is in four things that possess authentic rectifying qualities. The first is repentance and seeking forgiveness. As a matter of regular worship, one should ask for forgiveness (istighfar) at least 70 or 100 times a day, according to the Prophet's teachings, which were closely followed by our righteous forebears (salaf). The practice is connected to accounting for one's deeds. At the end of the day, the merchant looks at his ledger to calculate his earnings, to see what "the scales say," so to speak. The moral scales are no less important, and each of us is a merchant with regard to what we lost or gained with respect to God's pleasure. When there is loss, which is a frequent occurrence, seeking God's forgiveness balances things out.

Second is visiting (ziyara) righteous people, who enjoy rank with God the Exalted. Classically, the ranking of humanity proceeds as follows, as evinced in the verse of the Quran (4:69): prophets (al-nabiyyin); truthful ones (al-siddiqin); martyrs (al-shuhada'); and the righteous (al-salihin). The word salih conveys the notion of soundness of heart and excellent character. More specifically, it refers to one who gives God His due right, who fulfills His commandments and avoids what is prohibited. This is haqq al-ibada, God's right to be worshipped, which includes rites of worship as well as excellent behavior towards other people. So a righteous person does not cheat or lie. He or she is the kind of person whom one should seek out as company. Scholars have always encouraged visiting righteous people as part of the protocol of the spiritual ascendancy. These people include the living as well as the dead. If one goes to Madinah, it is recommended to visit the graves of the great Muslims and convey salutations of peace to them. The Prophet visited the grave sites of his fallen Companions. (Early on, the Prophet forbade the visiting of graves but later encouraged it. In pre-Islamic times the visiting of graves was a kind of idolatry. When the young community was purged of that, the Prophet was permitted by God to abrogate the previous command.)

Visiting graves is a poignant reminder of death and the Hereafter. It is an armament against heedlessness. There is a hadith in which the Prophet passed by a grave and saw a woman there weeping. He said to her, "It is better to be patient." She replied, not recognizing the Prophet "You haven't been afflicted as I have." The Prophet ﷺ then left her. When someone had told her that she had spoken to the Prophet ﷺ, she went to the Prophet and explained that she did not realize who she had spoken to. The Prophet said that true patience (sabr) is the patience shown when a trial first afflicts one. If one shows patience a year after losing someone dear, that is not the patience the Quran praises. So visiting graves of righteous loved ones requires control over emotions.

It is excellent to visit the righteous among us who are alive— those who are truly righteous and knowledgeable. One cannot judge another person by title. In modern times in many Muslim countries, men are presented with the title of "shaykh" as inherited from the father. As a result, there are people with that title who are ignorant. There are charlatans in this world, and none is more dangerous than a religious charlatan.

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A learned man in Fez, Morocco, said, "God has made the ways of gaining lawful provision innumerable. Someone who uses religious pretension in order to profit is especially wicked." This is not to say that earning a living by teaching religion is wrong. This is entirely permissible, according to the scholars (although the very early forebears of Islam objected to this, a position that was changed later by scholars who saw that earning a living through teaching the Quran, for example, was honorable, especially as the demand for religious instruction grew exponentially and teachers, like anyone else, were in need of a livelihood). We know that Imam Malik was given a good sum of wealth, but he was also known to spend freely for the benefit of the needy. He was knowledgeable as well as judicious and generous with his wealth.

One must combine knowledge of the outward Islamic sciences with inward spiritual experience to be truly considered a teacher. Unfortunately in our age, we often impose a chasm between inward and outward aspects of Islam—two camps postured against one another. There is, though, the middle path of the Prophet ﷺ—the best one to take.

When visiting a righteous person, the discourse should be substantive and not one of idle talk. The benefits one should seek are gaining knowledge and the supplication of the righteous person. In fact, ask that they remember you in their prayers, for their prayers might be more acceptable to God than your own.

Just as one is recommended to visit the righteous, one should strive to be the righteous person that others seek out to visit. Imam Ibn Ata 'illah said, "If you do not believe that God can take you at this moment and make you one of His saintly believers (awliya), then you are ignorant of His power."

The third cure is to invoke benedictions on the Prophet ﷺ. This is, in fact, a command from God the Exalted Himself: *O you who believe, invoke benedictions upon [the Prophet] and salutations of peace* (QURAN, 33:56). The Companion Ubay ibn Ka'b once asked the Prophet how much of his litany of remembering God (dhikr) should be benedictions on the Prophet ﷺ. He said that a fourth would be good, and "If you add more, it is better." Ubay then asked, "And if I were to make it half?" The Prophet ﷺ said it was good, and "If you add more, it is better." Ubay then asked, "And if I were to make it three-quarters?" The Prophet ﷺ said it was good, and "If you add more, it is better." Ubay then declared that he would make all of his dhikr this way; the Prophet ﷺ said, "That is good." There is great light associated with invoking prayers of benediction upon the Prophet ﷺ. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq once said, "If you do not have a murabbi [a spiritual mentor], then say prayers of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ, which acts as a murabbi." Many scholars have attested to the fact that prayers of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ purify the soul. (Some recommend that one repeat it at least 500 times a day. Others themselves would repeat it 5,000 times a day.) Imam Malik was always making prayers of blessings for the Prophet ﷺ. The muhaddithin (scholars of prophetic traditions) are well known for this practice.

The fourth cure for heedlessness is the recitation of the Quran. Reciting it with *tadabbur* (reflection) awakens the heart. But plain recitation is beneficial as well. Learned Muslims have recommended that a person recite one-thirtieth of the Quran (juz') every day. If this is difficult, then reciting Surat Ya Sin (36) after Dawn Prayer, Surat al-Waqi'a (56) after Sunset Prayer, and Surat al-Mulk (68) after Evening Prayer would greatly benefit the soul. (New Muslims should strive with their utmost to learn how to read the text of the Quran. Meanwhile, one is advised to listen to the well-known Quran reciters on tape or read a good English translation until one is able to read the Arabic. It is important for one to be regularly engaged with the Book of God.) The actual sounds of the language of the Quran—the breathtaking rhythms and words—are like medicine. From the perspective of energy dynamics, every substance has a resonance at a specific wavelength. A medicine resonates in order to cure the disease. So too the sounds of the Quran: *O humankind, there has come to you from your Lord counsel and healing for what is in the breasts, and a guidance and a mercy to the believers* (QURAN, 10:57). When one recites the Quran, one moves his or her tongue pronouncing revealed words of the Lord of the heavens and the earth. And these words have a sound. People are often amazed when they hear the Quran for the first time—amazed at the sound. So it is important to know that the beauty of the Quran comprises the meanings as well as the sound.

These are the four cures that Imam Mawlud offers for heedlessness. God warns the Prophet ﷺ himself from conforming to those whose hearts are in the state of heedlessness (QURAN, 18:28). People who turn away from the truth, God increases their heedlessness.

What is interesting about heedlessness is that everyone will eventually be cured of it, no matter the extent of this disease. The challenge is to be cured in this life, when it counts—when our obedience in the arena of tests and trials holds out meaning. The moment a person dies, veils are let down. Even the denizens of Hellfire will no longer live in the Hell of heedlessness. We were created to remember God, and if it takes the heat of Hell to remind some, then so be it. We ask God to make us among those who remember Him in this life and among those who are saved in the Hereafter.

# Rancor

POEM VERSES 141—44

*Rancor—O you who seek its elucidation— is when the heart is bound to treachery,*

*betrayal, or some trickery. The knot binding it to the heart is resentful malice.*

*Show kindness toward the object of your rancor, and you will cause your enemies to despair. Keep also in mind the forgiveness, as mentioned in the sound tradition,*

*promised twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.*

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## Definition and Treatment

Ghill is a malady of the heart that is closely related to rancor, extreme anger, and malice. It comes from the same Arabic root from which the word aghlal originates, which is used in the Quran to mean yokes around the neck (QURAN, 36:8), as if to say that rancor dwells in a heart bound to rancor and treachery. Rancor is a pungent emotion that is rooted in being extremely angry at a person to the point that one wishes harm to come to him. But the ultimate victim of rancor is its carrier. For this reason believers pray, "Our Lord, forgive us and our brethren who came before us in faith, and do not place into our hearts rancor for those who believe! Our Lord, You are kind, compassionate" (QURAN, 59:10). One of the great blessings of Paradise is that God will completely remove any semblance of rancor from one's heart (QURAN, 7:43,15:47).

Imam Mawlud says that if a person feels rancor toward a particular person, he should show that person goodwill. By nature, people are naturally inclined to love those who do good to them. And if one shows a person good, feelings of rancor will fall to the wayside. Satan rejoices when believers fight with one another and bear negative thoughts. There is an authentic hadith about Mondays and Thursdays being special days on which God forgives people. When the angels come to God and say that two believers are wrangling with one another, God the Exalted says, "Leave them until they set things aright between themselves." The implication is that if a person has rancor toward another believer, God shall not forgive that person until he forgives his brother, for rancor is a serious affliction that festers in one's heart and blocks good things from coming to one.

# Boasting & Arrogance

POEM VERSES 145 - 49

*Boasting is counted among these peculiarities. It is defined as your praising yourself for good qualities.*

*You should deem its vertiginous mountain as insignificant—by which I mean, of course, arrogance. [Do this] if you desire it to collapse to the ground.*

*Do that by knowing your Lord and knowing yourself, for whoever knows these two is humbled and feels insignificant.*

*The station of arrogance negates the station of gratitude, just as humility, by its nature, engenders gratitude.*

*Avoid and beware of humiliation and lowliness; in fact, display pride with the affluent and arrogant one.*

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## Definition

Imam Mawlud speaks next about *fakhr*, which is the loathsome practice of *boasting*. Exceptionally odious is the practice of bragging about what one has not done or exerted any effort toward, like bragging about one's ancestry and borrowing from some past nobility. Boasting is a problematic behavior that universally evokes objection and is considered a spiritual disease. No one likes a boaster, the person who walks with a swank and swagger, the person who cannot be in the company of others without speaking about himself or drawing attention to what he has done. God Himself reveals His dislike of bragging: *God does not love the arrogant and boasting ones* (QURAN, 31:18, 57:23). The Arabs used to shout out, "I am the son of so and so!" claiming somehow that one's pedigree suffices as a mark of one's status and privilege, an ethic that loomed large in pre-Islamic Arab social structure. Mawlana al-Rumi composed the lines, "Be not content with stories of those who went before you. Go forth and create your own story." Strive to be among those whom others speak of with veneration.

Imam Mawlud mentions the force behind the culture of boasting, namely, arrogance (*kibr*). "Deem that mountain insignificant," he says, "if you desire to sink it to the ground." Arrogance comes from the same Arabic root that signifies growth, either in mass or age. With arrogance, what is alluded to is self-aggrandizing and the glorification of the self.

The most villainous beings in history were filled with arrogance and false pride: Satan, Pharaoh, the opponents of the Prophet and many nefarious tyrants since. The Prophet warned against arrogance: "No one will enter Paradise who has an atom's weight of arrogance in his heart." God said, *I will divert My signs from those who show arrogance without right* (QURAN, 7:146), that is, God recompenses the arrogant ones by turning them away from understanding His Book, His prophets, and His signs placed in the horizons and in one's own self. God also says that He *sets a seal upon the heart of every arrogant tyrant* (QURAN, 40:35); and, He *does not love those who wax arrogant* (QURAN, 16:23). One of the attributes of God the Exalted is *al-Mutakabhir* (the Proud), which is reserved for Himself. It is not becoming for anyone to have any of it in his or her heart.

Justice follows every vice. When it comes to arrogance, its possessors will end up being the most abject people in the Hereafter; they will envy those whom they once thought to be beneath them in honor and status, those who were patient, grateful, and humble in this life. There are many passages of the Quran and hadith that support this.

There are different qualities and kinds of arrogance. The first type is when a person deems himself superior to others. Imam al-Ghazali said, "People of knowledge are in greater danger of arrogance than anyone else" because the knowledge they have attained may lead them to feelings of superiority.

The second type is arrogance displayed in a person who shows contempt and scorn to others. Once a man saw an old woman calling to the Prophet ﷺ in a boisterous manner; the Prophet ﷺ stopped to speak with her, showing no sign of annoyance. When the man saw the Prophet's calm reaction, he said, "Muhammad ﷺ is a man unlike the kings of other lands." It is a marvel how some people act arrogantly because of their perceived piety, while the Prophet ﷺ himself—"the best of creation"—remained humble.

The third type of arrogance is related to lineage. In some cultures, if one is aware of his "high birth," he is obliged to behave nobly. The Arabs were that way. If a man was born into a clan known for generosity, it was mandatory for him to be generous. One of the blights of many societies is racism, when people feel and act superior simply because of their race. The Quran lays waste to false claims of superiority and states that the only rank that matters relates to one's relationship with God; *Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you. Surely, God is all-knowing, all-aware* (QURAN, 49:13).

Many people are honored by having lineage traceable to the Prophet and his family. While this is indeed an honor in itself, it is something to be venerated when one's actions are likewise honorable. It is said, "If your actions hold you back, your lineage will not speed you up." Imam al-Haddad once said, "No person of any consequence should respect or praise an ignorant man, even if he is of noble birth and virtuous ancestry. For to respect and praise such a person in his presence may have an adverse effect on him. It may deceive him concerning God, render him neglectful of proper behavior, and distract him from gathering provision for the Hereafter."

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## ***Treatment***

As for the cure for arrogance, there are several aspects. First, we should remember our humble organic origins. As the Quran reminds us, we are created from a *drop of semen* (QURAN, 75:37). One of the righteous forebears, to dramatize our humbleness, said, "A man carries between his two sides feces." In other words, what is the source of a person's arrogance? God says, *Perished is man! How ungrateful he is! From what stuff did He create him? From a sperm drop He created him and proportioned him?* (QURAN, 80:16-19); *Let man reflect from what he was created. He was created from an ejected fluid that issues from between the loins and the ribs* (QURAN, 86:5-7); *Has there come over man a time when he was nothing remembered. We created man from a sperm drop mixed in order to try him* (QURAN, 76:1-2). These reminders suppress any uprisings of arrogance and conceit.

In Islam, we have religious heroes for a reason. To study the personalities of the Companions of the Prophet is to study incredibly great people who were *humble*. Abu Hurayrah—the illustrious repository of prophetic hadith—once sat in the company of another person who immediately moved his feet away from Abu Hurayrah out of respect for this august Companion of the Prophet. But Abu Hurayrah objected: "Why did you move your feet?"

The man said, "Out of deference to you." Abu Hurayrah replied, "For someone like me? I do not see anyone in this gathering worse than me."

A cousin of Ali ibn Abi Talib asked him, "Who is better, you or Abu Bakr?" Ali answered, "Abu Bakr." And when asked the same question about Umar, he answered, "Umar." He then asked him, "What rank do you have." Ali said, "I am a Muslim among many." It is astonishing to hear people nowadays, who do not come close to the stature, knowledge, wisdom, and piety of Ali, who nonetheless are so easily offended when they perceive others have slighted them. And acts we perceive as humble today are often attempts at attaining the mere appearance of humility.

Ibn Ata'illah said, "If you're aware of your humility, then you are arrogant." But scholars say the following, "If you are not like the real people, at least mimic them." It is better to simulate humility than to be an outright arrogant man. Imam al-Ghazali says, "If one wishes to master calligraphy, then he must go to a master calligrapher and repeat what he does."

The fourth aspect is arrogance owing to beauty. The cure is to realize that beauty can be the most illusory of things. Social conditioning impacts our sense of beauty more that we would admit. But even if we were to ignore this, why should beauty ever be a cause of arrogance, that obnoxious sense of superiority for something one had nothing to do with? First of all, God is the Fashioner; it is He who gives all things their shapes and forms. Second, beauty wanes, as the pressures of age and stress tear down flesh. And what we are left with is what we should have focused on in the first place, the content of our character, our beliefs, and our deeds.

The fifth is arrogance due to wealth. The affluent are notorious for showing contempt to those of lesser means. This is not to say that all wealthy people exhibit this. There are generous men and women who recognize the source and responsibility of wealth. But they tend to be the exception.

The sixth is arrogance based on strength. A man once came up to the Prophet ﷺ and challenged him to wrestle. The Prophet ﷺ agreed, and twice the Prophet ﷺ threw him to the ground. The man was astounded that the Prophet ﷺ was able to do that. "I've never been thrown to the ground," he said. The man's arrogance was rooted in his personal strength, which he thought none could match.

The seventh is arrogance for having a lot of something, like a teacher having many students and then seeing himself as being better than another teacher. The same is true with those who boast of having many friends, especially those in so-called high places.

The eighth is arrogance for having knowledge. This is particularly insidious, given that knowledge is an honorable matter. A knowledgeable person may believe himself to be superior to others due to the veneration shown to him.

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These are the various causes that sow the seeds of arrogance. God created humanity and has given it what He has not given to much of His creation. The intellectual and volitional capacities of humankind are great responsibilities. Ironically, these capacities have the potential of causing people to forget that every blessing we have is a gift from God and something that we are responsible for. The Quran states, *[God] has created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deed* (QURAN, 67:2); Have We not given [man] two eyes, a tongue, and two lips, and shown him the two highways [of good and evil]? Yet he does not attempt the steep road [of good]

(QURAN, 90:8-11). The *steep road* here is spending on the orphan, relieving the distressed, and all good acts that are difficult for the arrogant ones, who feel their wealth, strength, and prestige are born out of their own devices. People rejected the Prophet's message not because they were not convinced. They knew that what the Prophet ﷺ brought was the truth from God Himself. But they rejected him out of arrogance. Many find the Muslim prayer objectionable because of its postures of humility and awe before God. What they struggle with is not merely the postures but their aversion to submit to God, being His servant. People have a problem with that, claiming that they are "free." Astonishingly, these same "free" people are in bondage to their whims and passions.

Imam Mawlud says that the key to avoiding or removing this disease is to know yourself, your origins, and your ultimate return. The Prophet said, "I am the best of the children of Adam and I am not boasting." His honor was entirely based on his servitude to God the Exalted—not wealth, lineage, power, or authority. Whoever is humbled for the sake of God, God elevates in rank. Haughtiness and gratitude cannot coexist in one vessel. Those who are grateful, God increases in goodness. The station of arrogance invites only humiliation.

Imam Mawlud says humility, by nature, leads to gratitude, for when one is humble before God the Exalted, only then does one see the vast mercy God bestows upon His creation, even upon liars and disbelievers.

Imam Mawlud's conclusion to this discussion touches upon the Islamic ethic of *wasata*, that is, moderation. In itself, humility is a praiseworthy virtue, but when carried out excessively it results in abasement. According to some classical Christian theological paradigms, abasement is praised. But in Islam, it is not. Imam Mawlud calls it *dhul*, not in the sense in which he starts his poem, where he speaks of *dhul* as *humility* required for proper courtesy with God. In this context, it is abject abasement before people. It is similar to the abasement that God the Exalted afflicted upon past communities because of their flagrant rejection of God, their derision of His apostles, and their mockery of His laws. Abject humiliation is disapproved of even in the face of tribulation. Those who face tests with dignity and patience are praised. A hadith states, "A believer never humiliates himself." Being humble is different from humiliation.

Having *dhul* with respect to God is different from *dhul* with respect to creation. Imam Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani once said, "All the doors to God are crowded except for one: the door of humility and humbleness." Having humbleness is one of the secrets of success, although it is hard on the soul. It is said, "Among the most noble things of this world is a rich man who is humble."



# Displeasure with Blame

POEM VERSES 150-54

*Displeasure with blame is a well-known disease of the heart.  
Concern with people's opinions and desiring their praise and  
displeasure at their criticisms*

*are a barrier from achieving the station of excellence in  
worship. Overcoming that barrier is through the realization*

*that there is no benefit or harm unless it comes from [God],  
the Possessor of all dominion, Exalted and Majestic is He.*

*Furthermore, what is prohibited from this disease is what  
leads to the prohibited, just as Imam al-Ghazali has  
elaborated.*

*The perfection of sincerity is that you do not give notice to any  
praise or blame that emanates from people.*

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## Discussion

The next disease is the displeasure with blame. Blame is not something that we would naturally embrace. It runs against human nature to love it. But the problem is when the fear of blame is coupled with the urgent desire for praise and approval by others, which is often the case. Being concerned with "creation's opinion" places a barrier between a person and the station of ihsan, excellence in worship. ("Creation" here simply means other people, as opposed to being concerned with God's pleasure.) This is considered a disease because the result is guiding one's actions in deference to the praise of people or in an attempt to avoid their blame or disapproval, irrespective of the integrity and soundness of one's actions.

What we saw in the Companions of the Prophet was complete loyalty to the ethics of Islam. Many times they were confronted with decisions that would evoke displeasure among the people and tribes around Madinah; but they still made them in accordance to the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. The more that we worry about how our decisions will be received by men, the thicker the veil becomes with regard to God and His guidance.

*Thus have We made you a middle nation, so that you may be witnesses for humankind* (QURAN, 2:143), a nation that enjoins justice and reminds humanity of God's rights. When people give up enjoining what is right or even admitting that there are absolute and objective values that are not subject to the whims of mankind, then evil spreads. The best of witnesses was the Prophet ﷺ, then his Companions, and then their Successors. Each generation subsequently takes on this office of witnessing, although hardly to the degree exhibited in the early generations. At the end of earthly time, the world will virtually be without witnesses to truth, and truth itself will be scarce. No one will defend it. According to Imam al-Biq'a'i, one of the signs of the end of time is the giving of the world to the disbelievers, with Muslims abandoning Islam and its claim upon Muslims to defend the truth and censure what is wrong. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq once said, the truth has the power to penetrate the hearts of people—even those whose hearts have a seal. Humanity has the right to have witnesses living among them, those who are willing to defend the truth no matter how unpopular it may be.

Imam Mawlud says that overcoming this fear of blame is through the realization that there is no benefit or harm except by God's permission and plan. This sounds familiar, since it is the recommended cure for many of the diseases discussed so far. Two of God's most excellent names are al-Nafi and al-Darr, the Giver of Benefit and the Bringer of Harm. Those are attributes of God that no one else has in the least. It is only God who can benefit and only He who can permit harm. If a person is worried about how others receive him, then he or she is not aligned with reality.

The Prophet said to Ibn Abbas, "Be mindful of God, and God will protect you. Be mindful of God, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of God. If you seek help, seek help from God. Know that if the whole nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, it would benefit you only with something that God had already prescribed for you. And if [the whole nation] were to gather together to harm you, it would harm you only with something that God had already prescribed for you. The pens have been lifted and the ink has dried."

This does not mean that one should be reckless with his or her safety. Nor does it mean that one should not take precaution. The Prophet in the Battle of Uhud wore two coats of mail, and none knew more of God's power and authority than he. Being aware of God's attributes does not mean that people should stop using their intellect, for we live in a world of causes. There is room for diplomacy and discretion, particularly of knowing when it is best to say the truth. This discretion, however, is not informed by the fear of blame, but rather by clarity regarding one's objectives. Wisdom is completely different from seeking the approbation of others. The Prophet said that it is the highest form of struggle (jihad) to speak the truth in the face of a tyrant.

Imam Mawlud says that the inordinate fear of blame can lead a person to engage in prohibited matters or neglect obligations. If one worries about how people will receive him when he practices his faith, this can stop him from performing obligations. The fear of blame interferes with faith. Deeds that are done for the sake of God cannot share other intentions, namely, pleasing people or seeking their favor. Doing something for the sake of God is the manifestation of strong faith. Whether someone praises you or not is entirely inconsequential.

# Antipathy Toward Death

POEM VERSES 155-63

*Antipathy toward death is when one flees from it and becomes annoyed when it is even mentioned—*

*as if he is completely ignorant of [God's statement that] each soul shall taste death.*

*This is reckoned to be among the diseases of the heart. So be content with what God, the Exalted, has decreed.*

*But if one detests [death] not for its own sake, nor for the loss of pleasures that it entails,*

*but rather out of fear of being cut off from preparing for the Day of Judgment by obeying God more, [then it is not blameworthy].*

*Also, if one completely entrusts his affair to his Master, whatever He wills, either causing him to drop dead or giving him respite, it contents him.*

*Both of these attitudes towards death are commendable and praiseworthy. [Either way], disliking the reality of death in no way distances you from its proximity.*

*The one who constantly remembers death is ennobled with contentment, with his heart's activities directed toward obedience,*

*and with prompt repentance [when wrongs occur]. The one who is heedless of death is afflicted with the opposite of all three.*

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## Definition and Treatment

Antipathy toward death is considered a disease of the heart. It refers to strong aversion to death to the point that its mere mention causes consternation. Such a person, Imam Mawlud says, is in denial of the reality: *Every soul shall taste death* (QURAN, 3:185); Say, *"The death from which you flee will overtake you. Thereafter you will return to the Knower of the seen and unseen. He will then inform you of all that you had been doing"* (QURAN, 62:8). None of this suggests that one should leap into the throes of death. It merely disparages the ethic of chasing after the fleeting things of this world while rebuffing the imminence of death and what comes after. When death is mentioned, it is considered a morbid topic that is uncouth to discuss. And when it is discussed, it is turned into some deadline before which people are supposed to squeeze in all their life's pleasures. The Muslim view is completely different. To speak about death is to speak about life and the urgency to live a faithful and wholesome life before death overtakes us.

Shaykh Ibn al-Habib said, "In death there are 1,000 reposes for the Muslim. As long as you are in this world, there is not a cell in your body that does not experience pain and disease. Once you are out of this world, all

of that ends." For the believer, there is comfort in death. It is being taken from an abode of difficulty and trial to one of peace and unfathomable freedom. In Islam, the mourning period is short and should not be prolonged. The irony of extending the mourning period is that it is rooted in the excessive love of dunya (the world). The more one covets this world, the greater the sense of loss when a loved one dies.

Everyone will experience the loss of a loved one. When the Prophet ﷺ lost his son Ibrahim, he wept but also praised God, the source of life and death. People who believe in God and in the Afterlife handle death well. The same is true with calamities and tribulations. Maurice Bucaille, the well-known French physician, said that what attracted his interest in Islam was how North Africans in France faced death. As a physician exposed to disease and death, he observed many of his own countrymen not knowing how to die or handle death.

The fear of death is natural. Reflexively, one protects himself from it. When angels in the form of human beings visited Prophet Abraham he offered them food. When he saw that they did not reach for the food, he grew fearful. Scholars say that Abraham ﷺ thought they had come to take his life. The Prophet ﷺ encouraged believers to desire a long life for two reasons: to make up for past iniquities or to increase good deeds.

The one who remembers death is ennobled by certain characteristics. One of them is contentment and a lack of covetousness. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Contentment is a treasure that is never exhausted." He also prayed, "O God, provide for my family with what suffices them and grant them contentment with it." The wealthy soul is one that is content. This contentment is not the kind that originates from stupidity or not knowing any better. It is contentment that is informed by knowledge and by reflection on death and its meaning.

Second, the remembrance of death gives one energy to achieve good deeds: Wealth and sons are the ornaments of the life of this world, while enduring righteous deeds are better with your Lord in reward and better in hope (QURAN, 18:46).

Third, remembrance of death engenders seeking repentance when one slips or errs. Penitence rectifies wrong action, and that is the gift of remembering death. When one lives with this realization, he or she becomes prompt in seeking God's forgiveness. Those who are heedless of death have no compunction in doing wrong, since death is not a factor in their lives. They carelessly view the Day of Judgment as some distant event hardly worth worrying about or some ancient notion formed in a primordial epoch of human development.

# Obliviousness to Blessings

POEM VERSES 164—66

*Among the faults of the soul is obliviousness to blessings. Its root lies in inattentiveness to [the statement],*

*"Whatever blessings you have [it is from God]." By simply remembering this and keeping in mind other verses of admonition, such as,*

*"He does not change . . .", and "If you show gratitude . . .", then this chronic disease can be excised from you.*

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## Definition and Treatment

The next disease is obliviousness to blessings, a lack of understanding and acknowledgement, a noxious disregard that *whatever blessing you have, it is from God* (QURAN, 16:53). The blessings that come to us, night and day, are beyond numeration, as the Quran reminds. These blessings come in all forms—what we can see and touch (by way of material goods: food, clothing, shelter, wealth, and the like), as well as what we cannot see (like safety, friendship, love, health, and protection from harm and calamity).

The Quran begins with the phrase translated as, *In the name of God, the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving* (QURAN, 1:1). Some scholars have said that "Merciful" (Rahman) implies the giver of the major blessings, while "Mercy-Giving" (Rahim) implies the giver of subtle blessings that are not perceived until they are removed. We blink, for example, thousands of times a day without thought. There are people, however, who require artificial lubrication because their tear glands do not function. There are countless blessings related to the eye, let alone other aspects of our lives, like our ability to walk in balance without needing to consciously stimulate dozens of muscles required to take one step. Our thumbs permit us to do with our hands what most creatures cannot attempt. God has made food delicious instead of bland. And He has given us dignity in our nutrition, which is a tremendous blessing, especially when one considers the way carnivores devour their prey.

While we cannot count our blessings, we are charged to be grateful for having them: So let man reflect on the food he eats. Indeed, We have poured down water in showers. Then We split the land in clefts. Then We caused to grow grain therein, and grapes and fresh herbage, and olive trees and date-palms, and dense orchards and fruits and pasture—all provision for you and for your cattle (QURAN, 80:24-32). The fact that the Quran has been revealed to tell us to reflect on these blessings is in itself a great blessing, for the human being cannot on his or her own figure out how to live with guidance. To deny God's blessings can lead to outright disbelief and denial of God the Exalted.

*God never changes any blessing He has bestowed upon a people until they first change what is in themselves* (QURAN, 8:53). God will not take away a blessing unless people show ingratitude. A poet said, "If you are in a blessing, guard it, for disobedience shall snatch away." Gratitude to God protects one from having blessings removed.

There is an interesting concept called *istidraj*, in which God allows an ingrate to flaunt his blessings, while God does not diminish the ingrate's blessings in the least. In fact, He may increase them. The person then begins to think that God really loves him or her, and the only thing worse than a person who is misguided is the person who is

astray but believes himself to be favored by God. *As for man, whenever his Lord tries him by honoring him and bestowing favors on him, he says, "My Lord has honored me." And whenever He tries him by restricting his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me"* (QURAN, 89:15-16). Scholars of Quranic commentary say that this passage shows the confusion of people in the way people interpret the blessings they receive. When they are the recipients of great wealth, they see themselves as especially pleasing to God. And when their provision is restricted, they feel God is debasing them. But the reality people often miss is that wealth is a test: *Will its recipient be generous or miserly?* The same applies when wealth is restricted: *Will a person be patient and content, or feel despair and bitterness?*

There are things that benefit a person in the short and long term. Examples of this are knowledge and excellent character. There are also things that are harmful to a person immediately and in the long run, like ignorance and obnoxiousness. Then there are things that offer immediate gratification, but the long-term benefits are nil. Carnal desires (shahawat) are generally like this. If a person overeats, he experiences immediate gratification; but in the long term, it invites health problems. Things may be beneficial in the long term but somewhat uncomfortable in the short. It may be difficult for a person to stop himself from eating until he is filled, but the long-term benefits are obvious. This is also true with sexual intimacy: being patient until marriage may be uncomfortable and even frustrating, but its benefit is far greater than any temporary pleasure attained in falling into sin.

Ignorance urges people to see only short-term relief as a blessing and to ignore the benefits of patience and temporary discomfort. Knowledge opens the eyes to the long-term benefit, which lasts forever. In a study on children, researchers left cookies out on a table and told the children that they can have either one cookie now or two later. Consistently the children who scored better on intelligence tests waited for the two-cookie option. After following these children for 30 years, those who opted for the long-term gain were better adjusted, better educated, and more successful in their marriages.

There is a necessary link between intelligence and morality, the willingness to put off a short-term gain for a long-term benefit that ultimately is greater and everlasting\*. This kind of intelligence is conditioned by Islam. Umar said, "We are a people to whom God has given dignity with Islam; but if we seek dignity elsewhere, God will humiliate us."

Blessings are either roots or branches. The roots are things like iman, Islam, health, safety, and well-being. The branches are money, clothing, shelter, and so on. It is revealed in the Quran that the Children of Israel disputed with a prophet among them over the choice of Saul (Talut) as their king because he was not a man of great wealth. But their prophet told them that God has given Saul knowledge and strength (QURAN, 2:247), which are blessings greater than wealth.

Once the Prophet asked a man, "Do you know what the completion of a blessing is?" The Prophet ﷺ told him, "Entering Paradise." The best of blessings are those connected with entering Paradise. Faith, patience, good character, swiftness in doing good, and promptness in worship are blessings of God and they are everlasting. Islam itself is the completion of God's blessings upon humanity: *This day, I have perfected for you your religion, and I have completed My blessings upon you, and I have chosen Islam for you as your religion* (QURAN, 5:3).

The ornaments of this life are such things as a house, furnishings, and clothing. The more that one has of these blessings, the more he will be accountable for them. The Prophet said that the meat, the dates, and cool water that we consume are of those things we will be asked about, even the sandals on our feet.

To be zahid (ascetic) does not always mean a lack of material possession. There is asceticism of the heart, in which one is not attached to the material world and is indifferent to it. In other words, a person's character and level of faith will not change if he loses his wealth. That's the sign of a zahid. But if one falls apart and plunges into despondency when losing something valuable, it shows an inordinate attachment to worldly life.

# Derision

POEM VERSES 167-69

*As for derision, tend to it with the same treatment used for arrogance, and with the knowledge that one's purpose in [derision] is to humiliate someone.*

*Yet by doing that, a person actually humiliates himself with God and is recompensed with misfortune.*

*Also treat it by knowing the severe warning that has come in Sahib Muslim about showing contempt for any Muslim.*

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## Definition and Treatment

The next disease is derision, ridiculing people, making jest at their expense. Musa عليه السلام told his people that God had commanded them to sacrifice a cow. They replied, "Are you mocking us?" Musa then told them, "I seek refuge in God from being ignorant" (QURAN, 2:67). Mocking people is therefore a form of ignorance, whether it is lampooning, caricaturing, or name calling. Humor and levity are important in human life. But levity as a way of life harms the spiritual heart. And laughter and amusement at the expense of the dignity of others is wholly inappropriate, although it is the staple of the comedians of our day.

Imam Mawlud says that the cure for the psychology and practice of mockery is similar to that of arrogance, since a person who mocks another most likely sees himself as superior to his victim. Ali ibn Abi Talib said, "Do not belittle anyone, for he may be a saint of God." Even if one sees a man inebriated and bellicose, vomiting in the street, one should not ridicule him, for one does not know what his future holds. Imam al-Qurtubi once said, "When he was bowing down to idols in Makkah, Umar ibn al-Khattab was still beloved to God." Only God knows the seal of people and their destinies. Moroccan proverb says, "Never mock any creature of God, for it might be beloved to He who created it." In the Quran, it is said, *O you who believe, do not let people mock another people; for it may be that these are better than them; nor should women mock other women, for it may be that these are better than them. And do not taunt one another nor insult each other with nicknames* (QURAN, 49:11). God also commanded, *Do not revile those who call upon others apart from God, for they may then revile God out of ignorance* (QURAN, 6:108). This Quranic ethic guards against inciting people to do things that are sacrilegious and harmful to their own souls, for if people start to curse God the Exalted, they invite the worse kind of harm. Even in the context of triumph, being boastful and exulting is ignoble. The Prophet ﷺ in his victories was never boastful. He was completely magnanimous and grateful to God the Exalted. When he entered Makkah in the final conquest of his beloved city—whose people tortured, mocked, and reviled him—he entered with his head bowed and granted clemency to its inhabitants. He was entirely beautiful in character and compassion.

Supplicating God against one's enemies is not forbidden; in fact, it is recommended that people ask for victory when under attack, siege, aggression, or occupation. Regarding the situation in occupied Palestine, its people are under great stress and awful occupation. It is their right to ask God to relieve them of the tyranny that takes away their sons and daughters. But there is a problem in creating enmity with world Jewry and falling into the habit of cursing them outright and calling them names. In fact, many Jewish thinkers have condemned the occupation and are among the most vociferous critics of Israeli injustice.



The opponents of the Prophet were particularly vicious against Muslims. Hind bit into the liver of Hamza when he was martyred at the Battle of Badr. But she later became Muslim, a Companion of the Prophet—a member of that special generation of humanity. She, in fact, narrated hadith that can be found in the well-known compilations. Repentance is a recourse that the Lord of the Worlds has given humanity. Reflecting on the ethic that the Quran communicates to us in the aforementioned passages reveals that there is strength in dealing nobly with people. It is simply a better way to live. The treatment for derision is to realize that the essence of mockery is to humiliate people. Those who mock people in this life shall be mocked in the Hereafter, for it is a divine law that God recompenses people with the like of what they have done.

# Comprehensive Treatment for the Heart

POEM VERSES 170-75

*A comprehensive treatment plan for the heart's diseases is to deny the self of its desires,*

*enjoin hunger, keep worship vigilance in the night, silence and meditation in private;*

*also keeping company with good people who possess sincerity, those who are emulated in their states and statements;*

*and, finally, taking refuge in the One unto whom all affairs return. That is the most beneficial treatment for all of the previous diseases.*

*This must be to the point in which you are like a man drowning or someone lost in a barren desert and sees no source of succor*

*except from the Guardian, possessor of the greatest power. He is the One who responds to the call of the distressed.*

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## Discussion

Imam Mawlud's approach in offering the cures for these diseases is like the story of the Gordian Knot of the kingdom of Phrygia, whose king offered his dominion to whoever was able to unravel the knot. Many tried and failed. When Alexander the Great was shown the knot, he pulled out his sword and cut through it. Diseases of the heart are like the Gordian Knot, and the best way to treat them is to cut through them. Imam Mawlud completes his discussion on the various diseases and turns his attention to a comprehensive treatment plan for the heart, which focuses on curbing the soul from its own excessive desires. To accomplish this, he states that one must engage in hunger, vigilance during the nights, silence, and meditation in private. The Prophet said, "None of you [fully] believes until his desires are in accordance with what I have brought." So one's faith is not complete until his desires do not conflict with the message the Prophet ﷺ was given. The way to achieve this alignment is to prohibit the soul of all things that are not in accordance with Islam—its law or spirit. One persists in this until the desire is tamed and compliant with divine dictates: *As for he who transgresses and prefers the life of this world, Hell is [his] abode. And as for he who fears standing before his Lord and refrains his soul from passions, Paradise is [his] abode* (QURAN, 79:37-41). Severing the bonds of slavery to the whims of the soul leads to happiness.

A typical bookstore will have many volumes dealing with people's addictions and their inability to control themselves. This publishing phenomenon is a response to social realities. In Islam, prayer teaches how to become disciplined with our hours and days. It gives us cleanliness through ablution and a consciousness of the passing of hours. Fasting is a universe in itself, a realm in which we learn about discipline in the most direct way with regard to the tongue, stomach, genitals, and eyes. Islam places great emphasis on discipline because there is so much at stake. Without discipline, religion would be impossible.

In Christian tradition, there are "seven deadly sins": arrogance, anger, envy, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust. The last two relate to one's base desires, and they are the chief desires of the soul. Gluttony and lust are founded on natural inclinations of hunger and sexual attraction. The pathology related to them, however, pertains to excessiveness therein and satisfying one's urges in a forbidden manner. Imam al-Ghazali dealt with these impulses at great length in a section of his *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which has been masterfully translated by T.J. Winter: *Breaking the Two Desires* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995).

The stomach is the source of the key impulse of people. If a person can learn to control food, other issues of discipline follow, for gluttony is fuel for lust, and fasting breaks gluttony. The Prophet ﷺ advised that unmarried people fast frequently in order to keep their sexual desires in check. Imam al-Qushayri said, "For me to raise my hand from my plate while I am still hungry is better than the whole night in prayer."

Spiritual masters traditionally have focused on hunger. The goal is not to create a nation of anorexics but to cut the knot that binds self-discipline. We do things often out of blind conditioning. When it comes to food, we have been drilled that three meals are not only normal, but necessary for proper nutritional fulfillment. But this is not true. The caloric intake of an average American far exceeds what is physiologically needed. As a result, America is now recognized as the most obese nation on earth, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Once the Prophet served a guest from Yemen a bowl of milk. When he finished drinking it, the Prophet asked him if he wanted more. The man said he would. This went on until the man drank seven bowls of milk, which was far more than what he needed. But when this man became a Muslim, the Companions noticed that he drank only one bowl of milk. The Prophet ﷺ told them, "The disbeliever eats with seven intestines, while the believer eats with one."

People eat much more now than ever in history, especially when it comes to meat. In the past, meat was eaten infrequently even by people of means, who ate meat once or twice a week. The poor ate meat once or twice in a year, mainly around times of Eid celebrations. Also, snacking has become so common that many people do not go for more than a few hours without eating something. Convenience stores and vending machines are all over the place. This abundance was unheard of not too long ago. All of this has virtually turned people into grazing animals, which is anathema to spiritual wellness.

Sociologists, in studying eating habits, have said that the average American has 20 food contacts a day. In most traditional cultures, meals were set for specific times, and eating between meals was not acceptable. Nowadays, having a meal has been dispossessed of formality. Within the family, it no longer serves a social purpose. Individuals can live in the same home and be related as brothers, sisters, and parents, yet live virtually apart. There is now a callous relationship between human beings and their meals, an insensitivity to the flesh they eat and the source of their nutrition.

The combination of overeating and a breakdown of meal manners impairs a person's ability to build fortitude. A Muslim begins each meal *in the name of God*. The purpose of this, in addition to sanctifying a mundane act, is to consciously remember the source of the provision. And if one eats alone, he tries to find company to share the meal with. When the meal is complete, he praises God. If one is hosted, he thanks the host and offers prayers.

Ramadan is a time to experience hunger with good cheer and renewed gratitude. It is divorcing oneself from the world and being reminded of our spiritual soul. But a person can rob Ramadan of an important benefit by overeating at night in order to make up for what was missed during the day. The nights become night-long buffets and worship vigils become secondary (or ignored).

People who have a problem with eating should start at least by lessening the portion of what they normally eat, which is the beginning of discipline. It is also advised to eat with other people, for eating with guests would make a person conscious of being a glutton. Also, the more people that sit around a table, the greater the blessings (*baraka*). Finally, one should decrease the number of meals in a day.

It is not surprising that Imam Mawlud mentions hunger first among the comprehensive treatments for the heart. Eating is one of the most abused behaviors. We are conditioned to think that hunger is sated only when we feel full. One typical meal served in an average American restaurant can feed a family in West Africa.

Imam Mawlud mentions next the Night Prayer vigil. If one wishes to enliven the heart, then give it time with its Lord in the stillness of the dark, even if it is only two rak'at. Shaykh Maliki says never leave the Night Prayer vigil even for a little time. What is important about the Night Prayer is consistency (which is true about all good things). It is better to rise at night for ten minutes on a regular basis than to stay up for hours one night and the next night sleep. The performance of this prayer on a patchwork basis results in little benefit. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq said it is like "drilling here and there, never finding water anywhere."

The Prophet said, "Spread peace, feed needy people, and Pray at night when others sleep, and you will enter Paradise with ease." In the Quran, the Prophet's Night Prayer is associated with the elevated rank he shall be granted by God: *And in a portion of the night, rise therein for Night Prayer—an extra act of devotion for you. It may be that your Lord shall raise you to a praiseworthy station* (QURAN, 17:79). God the Exalted commends those who deprive their sides from their beds, resist sleep (which the body loves), and rise for prayer (QURAN, 32:16).

It is not our tradition to be excessive in our spiritual practices, such that we deprive ourselves of sleep to the point that we become psychotic or deprive ourselves of food to the point that we damage our health. What we do is learn to control our soul's desires and not be controlled by them. The Prophet ﷺ said that our bodies have rights over us: they are food, drink, and companionship.

Not all of the Companions performed the Night Prayer, but many did. For us, what is rational and reasonable is to have some steady practice. It is good to start with short suras of the Quran during the prayer. If one makes a habit of spending a portion of the night in prayer and happens to oversleep until the time of Dawn Prayer, then it is permissible to perform the Night Prayer vigil before the Dawn Prayer, as long as one has enough time to pray the Dawn Prayer comfortably. This is a valid opinion.

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There is a hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ said about Abdallah ibn Umar that he was an excellent man, "but if only he were to spend time in Night Prayer." Scholars take from this hadith that a person can be excellent even if he does not practice the Night Prayer, but that an excellent person would be *exceptional* if he or she prayed it. When Abdallah ibn Umar heard the Prophet's statement, he never once deserted the Night Prayer (Qiyam). Also there is the famous hadith of A'isha who said that the Prophet used to stand in prayer for so long that his feet would swell. She said to him, "O Messenger of God, why pray so long when God has forgiven everything you have done in the past and the future?" The Prophet said, "Should I not be the grateful servant?"

Scholars say that any time after Evening Prayers (Isha) is considered time for the Night Prayer vigil. Some say, however, that one should actually sleep then get up, while others say that sleep is not a requirement. People differ in what they are capable of doing. For physiological reasons, some have an especially difficult time waking up for Qiyam. For them, perhaps, it is better to pray Qiyam before they sleep. For other people, it is easy to rise an hour or

two before dawn. Right before dawn, sleep is the heaviest. Imam Ibn Ata'illah said there is great wisdom that God the Exalted obliges us to rouse ourselves from sleep when it is most difficult: mind over matter. The self-discipline gained from this practice is very important to us.

In an attempt to keep a worshipper in slumber, Satan ties three heavy knots on one's head. The Prophet ﷺ said that when one wakes up and says the supplication for awakening ("Praise be to God who has restored life to me after He has taken my soul, and to Him is the resurrection"), one knot is undone. When one makes ablution, the second knot is undone. And when one performs the prayer, the third knot is undone.

The Prophet ﷺ often recited the closing verses of the third sura of the Quran (Al Imran) and was very moved by them. The Prophet's Companion Bilal came to the Prophet's home to announce the coming of prayer. Bilal saw that the Prophet ﷺ had been weeping and asked him, "You weep while God has forgiven you for all of your past and your future?" The Prophet ﷺ said to him, "O Bilal! Shall I not be a grateful servant while God has revealed to me this night verses [of the Quran]," that is, the closing verses of Al Imran (3:190-200). "Woe to him who reads these verses and does not ponder them!"

The Night Prayer vigil, like other acts of worship, is a gift that can be taken away when, for example, the worshipper starts to backbite, gossip, slander, consume unlawful food, earn illicit wealth, and so on. A person who has established an excellent regimen of worship may suddenly find himself unable to continue because of something he had done. When this occurs, the worshipper makes repentance and restores his practice. A scholar said, "I once said something about someone I should not have said, and I was deprived of the Night Prayer for 40 days." A man said that at the end of his life he went bankrupt because decades before he called out to a man, "Ya muflis" or "O bankrupt one!"

It is recommended that the last prayer be the Witr Prayer (the final prayer of the evening). It is also preferred that the Witr Prayer be performed immediately before dawn breaks. This requires that a person get up for Night Prayer. But if a person does not have a Night Prayer regimen, then it is acceptable to pray the Witr before sleeping.

Shaykh Habib said, "Take the path of ease with yourself in order for you to progress in your yearnings." Do not push yourself to the point that you find your supererogatory vigils a chore instead of a delight. He then said, "A prayer performed with love is better than a thousand devoid of it." Moderation ensures consistency and, as a result, the reaching of one's destination.

Imam Mawlood mentions next the importance of silence. The Prophet ﷺ said, "If a person is given silence, he is given wisdom." The tongue is a great temptation. It is easy to say something that brings ruin upon its speaker. Learning how to control the tongue is an enormous discipline. Imam al-Shafi'i said that whenever he was in a gathering and wanted to say something, he would check his soul and be sure that his intentions were pure and were not to prove himself or flaunt his knowledge. Imam al-Shafi'i was a man of great intelligence and encyclopedic knowledge, yet he often enjoined silence upon himself. He once said, "I never had a debate with anyone except that I prayed to God that He make the truth appear on the tongue of my opponent so I could submit to it."

When the Prophet spoke, he always said the truth, even in levity. He disliked verbosity and cautioned his Companions about the tongue and what it earns. If it is words for the sake of words, it is a waste of time and a sign of bad character. Imam Malik said about one of his students, "He's a good man except he speaks a month's worth of words in a day."

Imam Mawlud mentions spiritual isolation for the purpose of reflection. Some remember death through visualization, using the puissance of imagination for visualizing their bodies washed, wrapped, and lowered in the grave. Others reflect on the attributes of God the Exalted by methodically pondering the meanings of each of His divine names that speak of God's awesome power, knowledge, clemency, mercy, creative powers, and more.

Next in the overall treatment for the heart, Imam Mawlud speaks of the importance of keeping the company of good people, which is God's command: *O you who believe, fear God and be among the truthful ones* (QURAN, 9:119). It is astonishing how people can influence others simply by being in each other's company. Imam al-Haddad said, "The company one keeps has major effects. It may lead to either benefit and improvement or harm and corruption, depending on whether the company is that of pure and eminent people or those who are immoral and evil. This effect does not appear suddenly, but is a gradual process that unfolds with time."

Imam Ibn Ata'illah said, "Do not take as a companion someone whose state will not elevate you and whose speech does not direct you to God." In the same vein, Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq said that one should befriend people who elevate one's station. Good company includes those who are in the state of gratitude; they are thankful for what they have and do not waste time complaining. One takes on their excellent characteristics. Sidi Abu'l-Hasan said, "Anyone who tells you to indulge in the world is defrauding you." Shaykh Ould al-Khadim says that when it comes to worldly possessions, it is good to associate with people who have lesser means. The company of wealthy people opens a person up to coveting what they have. When it comes to the Hereafter, it is better to associate with people who are superior to you in their desire for and understanding of it.

Companionship yields two kinds of impact: one that drags a person down to the compost of the world and the other that points toward God the Exalted and an existence that lasts forever. A companion who tries to sell the ephemeral stuff of this life and makes it the substance of conversation and pursuit is dragging the soul earthward. It is better, beyond compare, to seek out the company of those who help one achieve contentment with God. When one is content, little will suffice. But without contentment, nothing suffices.

Imam Mawlud says that seeking refuge with God is the most efficacious treatment for all diseases of the heart. Sidi Ibn Ashir says, "The only real cure for all these diseases is to go to God with complete unconditional imploring." What is meant here is urgently seeking refuge in God's protection and guidance, to seek this as if one were holding onto a thread over a canyon. It is begging, which before God is honorable. Most converts to Islam have said that before they became Muslims, they reached a point in their lives in which they petitioned with all their hearts and emotion that God guide them. In the haze of confusion and spiritual morass, they literally *begged* for it: "Just show me what to do!" And afterwards, it became easy and the path very clear. This is what Imam Mawlud is suggesting. There is nothing nonchalant in this act.

Imam Mawlud says that one should be like a person drowning in the sea or stranded in a desert without any provision. A moment of desperation can often be the best thing that ever happens to a person. Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens), the philanthropist and educator, tells in his story that he once was drowning in the Pacific Ocean near Malibu, California. In desperation he called out to God to save him, and if He would do so, he would seek out His guidance. The very waves and undercurrents of the ocean that nearly killed him were transformed into a force that propelled him back to shore. True to his word and promise, Yusuf indeed sought God's religion and embraced Islam.

Also Ibn Abi Jahl was on a boat with Abyssinian Christians. He fell into the water and was about to drown when he called upon the idol Hubal. The Christians on the boat said, "Are you calling on an idol in Makkah to help you?" Right then he realized how foolish it was. The truth about the oneness of God entered his heart.

# Beneficial Actions for Purifying the Heart

## POEM VERSES 176-79

*As for action that is beneficial in purifying the heart, none is more effective than what is consistent, even if it is slight.*

*Include also action that is done in the absence of witnesses, or action done purely for His love or out of awe of His majesty.*

*The purest deed is that done by someone free of worldly wants. The opposite of this is the deed of the covetous one whose endeavors are ultimately insignificant.*

*The actions of those who strive out of hope are more resplendent and exalted than one whose striving is compelled by fear.*

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## Discussion

When speaking of the purification of the heart, it is important to know that “purification” is not a state, but an ongoing process. Just as we go through a day careful about our bodily cleanliness, we must similarly tend to our spiritual purity, for purification and sincerity do not survive a passive relationship. They are not qualities that are ignited and glow on without attendance. For this reason Imam Mawlud states that what is most beneficial for the purification of the heart are those acts that are done with consistency, **even** if they are small. This is based on the statement of the Prophet ﷺ, “The best actions are continuous ones, even if they are slight.” It’s like silverware: one may polish it with a few hard strokes and then put it down; or one may gently polish it regularly so that its shimmer is maintained. Left unattended, the heart becomes encrusted. Unwholesome deeds accumulate and take away its purity. But with consistent work on self-purification, the heart becomes cleansed and is kept that way.

The Companions of the Prophet were consistent with their actions once they commenced them. Once a Companion asked the Prophet ﷺ to recommend a fast. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Fast three days out of the month,” which are the middle days of the month when the moon is the fullest. The first thing the Prophet ﷺ recommended was moderate, for the way of the Prophet ﷺ was moderation. The Companion said, “I can do more.” So the Prophet said, “Then fast Mondays and Thursdays.” The Companion indicated that he was able to fast even more. The Prophet then recommended, “Then fast every other day,” which is the Fast of Dawud (David). “And do not exceed this.” So the Companion started to fast every other day and kept it throughout his life. When he reached old age, the Companion said that he wished that he would have taken the Prophet’s first recommendation and only fasted three days a month. Scholars have commented that when the Prophet’s Companions took on supererogatory rites of worship (*nawafal*), they did so for the duration of their lives. It was something they embraced as a spiritual practice, and they did not abandon it. This is not to say that this is an obligation. But if people wish to climb straight and climb right in their spiritual journey, their acts of worship should be regular and consistent.

The Prophet ﷺ was a universal prophet, which means, among other things, that he was an example for all people. He fasted and broke his fasts. He prayed and he rested. The Prophet’s life example has something for people of diverse strengths and weaknesses. For some people, God will open their hearts to Night Prayer. For others, their

hearts will be open to recitation of the Quran. For others yet, it may be generosity in giving charity or making *dhikr* (the consistent remembrance of God). Fasting will be the love and passion of some people, while others will love and memorize hadith and teach it. There is much in Islam and in the beautiful model of the Prophet that one may take. Very rarely do we find a person who encompasses all (or even most) of the qualities. But if a person sees himself inclined to a certain supererogatory worship rite, then he should follow it and be consistent. Imam Malik said, "God has opened up for His servants doors of goodness: for some He opens doors of fasting; for others He opens doors of Charity; others yet, doors of knowledge and teaching; and for others, doors of abstinence and contentment. And I am pleased with what God has opened up for me in educating people."

Imam Mawlud says that one should consciously perform devotional deeds in the absence of witnesses. If one gives charity openly, his is good, but in secret it is better. This protects against ostentation. Fudayl ibn 'Iyad was once walking down a street and someone said, "There goes a man who spends the whole night in prayer." Fudayl began to weep: "I cannot remember spending one full night in prayer. How great God has honored me in making people think I am better than what I know myself to be."

An act of worship done for the love of God is a higher station than those acts done out of fear of Hellfire. This is a common understanding among scholars throughout the ages, including Imam al Ghazali. This view does not belittle the fear of punishment, but it does assign a higher station to guiding one's conduct out of awe of God and a heightened sense of His majesty and greatness.

The *zahid* (ascetic) does what he does for no other reason than his pleasure and love of God. This is the highest action. Asceticism in Islam differs from other traditions. In Islam, the essence of asceticism is a lack of want. The ascetic is the one who does not have attachment in his heart for material things. Many Companions of the Prophet were wealthy, but, like 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf, they were also considered *zahid* despite their wealth [sic].

Imam Mawlud says that striving with the energy of hope is more exalted than being compelled by fear. This is especially true when the benefits of one's acts touch the lives of others, which is the case with *sadaqa* (charity) for the needy. There is so much hope in Islam, its creed and ethos are rife with optimism and buoyancy.

Planting a tree from which birds eat reaps the planter reward so long as that tree stands. Hope is light: *Indeed, in the Messenger of God there is an excellent model for you—for whoever is hopeful of God and the Last Day and remembers God much* (QURAN, 33:21).

#### POEM VERSES 180-88

*Of particular benefit is that which extends beyond the individual or is difficult for the self—such as a glutton's fast,*

*or the years of youth spent in avoiding wrongs and in willing obedience, or the contributions of a miser from the best of his wealth when he is of sound mind, seeking thereby the pleasure of God with absolute sincerity.*

*All of these purify the heart. Moreover, doing a good deed which one conceals is also purifying; and the best of endeavors is one that purifies the heart.*

*Likewise, the most harmful of wrongs is what hardens the heart and was done with consistency or [the doer] taking joy in doing it. Sages have preferred a wrong that engenders*



*humility to a right that clothes one in a gown of self- righteous arrogance.*

*An atom's weight of exalted praiseworthy action from the heart—like contentment with what one has, detachment from worldly things, and reliance [upon God]—*

*is better in God's sight than high mountains of external actions [without sincerity].*

*Indeed, leaving a dollar because it is from a prohibited source is better than giving much in charity and [better than] several pilgrimages.*

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## Particular Acts

The Imam advises also to seek out acts that are trying to the soul. The example he gives is fasting for the glutton, one who has a difficult time controlling his or her food intake. The principle applies to the miser who is blessed enough to recognize his shortcoming, that he should battle his soul by giving charity, detaching himself from his want of wealth and its hoarding, no matter the internal resistance. The Prophet ﷺ said that the best charity is charity given when one is in good health and sound condition and fears poverty. So the miser should give to cleanse his heart of miserliness; and the fear of poverty should not prevent him from giving.

Imam Mawlud mentions this in combination with youth who spend their formative years in the shade of guidance. There are, of course, people who spend much of their lives doing things they shouldn't, but turn around when they grow old. Some will say that, in general, their station is not equal to those who were morally circumspect and diligent in their worship throughout their lives. Repentance is easier for older people who have lost something of their vigor. This is not to say that their penitence is not real.

An abominable attitude somehow survives in some quarters of the Muslim world. It basically states that the year of responsibility is age forty, and that before that age, one may do as he wills. This is based on the fact that the Prophet ﷺ received revelation at that age. But this ruling is entirely ignorant and vacuous. It is also morally and spiritually devastating. Who can guarantee lengthy life? And who can guarantee one will actually turn to repentance after years of disobedience? To intentionally wreak moral havoc in anticipation of repenting late is untenable.

The Imam says next that the worst things a person can do are those acts that harden the heart. One of them is speaking a lot without mentioning God. Jesus warned, "Do not sit in a gathering without mentioning God, for a gathering in which God is not mentioned will harden the heart." The more the tongue is occupied in remembering God, the softer the heart becomes—imbued with compassion, mercy, and love.

Imam Mawlud says next, "An atom's weight of high praiseworthy action from the heart is better than high mountains of external actions with no heart." He then paraphrases what Imam Sahnun said, "Leaving one penny from what God has made forbidden is better than going to pilgrimage 70,000 times."

# The Root of All Diseases of the Heart

POEM VERSES 189-96

*The root cause of all of these diseases is love of the temporal world. This is the opinion of both al-Hilali and Ibn 'Ashir.*

*Ibn 'Ata'illah, on the other hand, considered the root cause of every disease to be man's self-satisfaction.*

*Likewise, the root cause of all good qualities is the lack of self-satisfaction. And this conclusion is obvious*

*because being [dissatisfied with oneself] prompts you to seek virtuous character and to vigilantly avoid what is inappropriate.*

*The origin of either of these states relates to the company one keeps [from either camp], for a man's character is that of the company he keeps.*

*Thus, if a man achieves any state, inevitably his companions will be affected by it.*

*For this reason, Luqman, the full moon of wisdom, advised his son to keep close company with the people of knowledge.*

*He compared the effect of the reviving light of wisdom upon the heart to that of a lush downpour upon the barren earth.*

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## Discussion

The comprehensive *root* of the heart's diseases, according to Imam Mawlud, is the *love of the temporal world*, which he cites as the opinion of Imam al-Hilali and Imam Ibn 'Ashir. Ibn 'Abbas said that it was covetousness (*tama'a*). There are differences of opinion regarding the mother cause of diseases of the heart, but their differences are shades of understanding rather than alternate paradigms. When Imam Ibn 'Ashir says that it is the love of power and authority, it comes down to love of the world. What are power and authority other than branches of the world?

Imam Ibn 'Ata'illah (died in 709/1309), who is often quoted in this book and mentioned by name in this passage of Imam Mawlud's poem, was a master of the science of the heart. His book of aphorisms is one of the most highly regarded masterpieces in Islamic spiritual tradition. His 35th aphorism in that collection reads, "The source of every disobedience, indifference, and passion is self-satisfaction. The source of every obedience, vigilance, and virtue is dissatisfaction with one's self. It is better for you to keep company with an ignorant man dissatisfied with himself than to keep company with a learned man satisfied with himself. For what knowledge is there in a self-satisfied scholar? And what ignorance is there in an unlearned man dissatisfied with himself?"

In our day, there is an urgency to root out the feeling of shame. There are self-help books to show how to excise this out of the soul. But dissatisfaction with oneself is the very thing that causes people to reflect and re-evaluate, which is requisite for spiritual success. Shame and dissatisfaction can be moral lifesavers. (Shame is different from low self-esteem, in which one feels contempt for himself.)

Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq said that there are three signs being overly content with the soul. First is being sensitive to one's own rights and indifferent to the rights of others. In Islam, one's responsibilities preponderate over one's rights. The second sign is ignoring one's own faults, as if he has none, while being preoccupied with the faults of others. A poet once said, "A contented eye does not see faults." The third sign is giving oneself too much leniency.

Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq then said that there are three signs that someone is not content with himself. First is when a person checks himself, is self-accusing, and wary of his intentions. Joseph, who was known for his exceptional purity, said, "*I do not declare myself innocent, but the soul often commands evil, except upon one whom my Lord has mercy*" (QURAN, 12:53). One should ask himself, "Am I doing this for show or for the sake of God?"

Second is being careful of the blemishes of the soul. The Prophet ﷺ supplicated, "O God, do not leave me to the soul even for a blink of an eye."

Third is forcing the self to do difficult things, for example, eating less and spending money in charity. Abu 'Uthman said, "Whoever sees anything good about himself has not seen the faults of his soul." A'isha was honored in being the wife of the Prophet ﷺ. She was beautiful and one of the most brilliant women in history. She was from an excellent family. With all these assets, she said, "I deem myself so insignificant that I would never think Quran would be revealed about me." (This is in regard to the episode in which the hypocrites accused her of a sin. God the Exalted revealed her innocence in the Quran.) She was humble, but she wasn't a woman with low self-esteem. She obviously had striking self-confidence. She was regularly asked questions because of her knowledge of the Quran.

Being vigilant about one's own faults does not imply self-loathing or depletion of confidence. In fact, confidence gives one the course to find fault in oneself.

A poet once said, "I never saw a fault from among the faults of humanity / like the sloth of people capable of human perfection." The reason talented people become underachievers is that they are too satisfied with themselves. A master of any craft is not one who achieves a certain level of proficiency and stops, but one who is committed to constant improvement.

Imam Mawlud says that dissatisfaction is a motivator to seek our better character. A human being is spiritually stalled as long as he is content and smug with his state. The basis of achieving good is knowing yourself. When this happens, a person becomes aware of his imperfections, minor and major, and ashamed of them to the point he strives to replace them with generosity, agreeableness, honesty, reliability, dignity, and other noble traits.

When the mind is given the responsibility to decide upon right and wrong, it will usually base its judgment subjectively: what advances or thwarts one's whims? Our understanding of right and wrong, licit and illicit, needs a judge higher than ourselves and our whims. We are beings who have been created and, therefore, have a Creator who brought us into existence for a reason. It is His purpose and guidance that informs our sensitivity and response to right and wrong.

Imam Mawlud states that diseases and blessings are related to the company one keeps. The Prophet ﷺ said, "A man takes on the religion of his companion." The company of a person who delays or neglects prayer, or a person who abandons paying *Zakat*, or a person who is promiscuous drags others into his way of life. Conversely, the company of a righteous person will pull one upward. As it is said, "If you sit at the door of a tavern, you will either walk in and partake or merely smell the stench of alcohol and drunkards. But if you sit at the door of a perfumer, you will either walk in and wear the scent or at least enjoy the fragrance."

The learned are like rain that quickens a lifeless land. Sitting with esteemed company enlivens the heart and makes it more fertile for the growth of iman. It will take you from six things to six things: doubt to certainty; ostentation in your acts to sincerity; heedlessness to remembrance; desire for this world to desire for the Hereafter; arrogance to humbleness; and a bad internal nature to an excellent one. Imam Ibn ‘Ata’illah advised the same: "Do not take as a companion someone whose state will not elevate you and whose speech does not direct you to God.”

#### POEM VERSES 197-204

*Remember God much, and know that the Quran is the best of it. This rule excludes those times when other types [of remembrance] have been prescribed.*

*Begin by asking for forgiveness and benedictions upon [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ], our guide to all good things.*

*Have the same reverence [during remembrance] as you would during prayer and guard yourself from any mispronunciations, for that is among the prohibitions.*

*Whoever adds a long vowel, for instance, after the ha in ilaha when he is saying la ilaha ilia’Allah, or adds a vowel to the hamza at the onset of the word*

*has committed a wrong deed according to the consensus of the righteous people. Furthermore, he has worshipped God by being disobedient to Him.*

*This is what has been clearly stated in [the book] al-Khazina by one whose speech has been illuminated by serenity.*

*It is necessary when engaged in remembrance that every letter be pronounced with precision in terms of its origin and linguistic attributes.*

*The most virtuous form of devotion is contemplative reflection and the best of that is annihilation of the self, which is the supreme station.*

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#### Treatments

Imam Mawlud speaks next of the importance of *dhikr*, the remembrance of God, which is vital to the cure of each disease of the heart (and society). He mentions the exceptional excellence of reciting the Quran. For example, reciting Surat al-Ikhlās (the 112th sura of the Quran) along with the closing suras of the Quran (together known as *al-mu‘awwadhatan*, the "two suras of refuge"), three times each, is highly recommended. When one recites while reflecting deeply on the meaning of the words, doors of insight open and one’s *iman* grows stronger.

It is better to recite from the copy of the Quran itself than from memorization, since it involves the eyes, hands, and ears. (When driving a car, recitation by memorization is obviously the choice.) It is said that Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal had 99 dreams about God the Exalted. In one of them, he asked the Almighty about all the things that draw a worshipper near to Him: Which of them was the greatest? He was told it was the recitation of Quran. “With or

without comprehension?" he asked. The reply: "With or without comprehension." Not understanding the language of the Quran does not bar a person from receiving the blessings in this exalted practice. The authority of this position is not borrowed from the dream of a great man, but it is corroborated by proofs offered by many scholars throughout the ages. The only time when the Quran is not the preferred *dhikr* is when other obligations are immediately pressing.

Imam Mawlud states that the remembrance of God is essential in taking the spiritual path. The Messenger of God said, "The likeness of the one who remembers his Lord and one who doesn't remember his Lord is like the living and the dead." Someone who remembers God has a heart that is alive and busy with the best of deeds. There is also the hadith, "Make remembrance of God until they say, 'He is a mad man.'" If people come across a Muslim who moves his lips in God's remembrance (*dhikr*), the first thing that may come to their minds is that he is not altogether sane. The Prophet ﷺ said to his Companions, "Shall I not inform you of the best of your deeds and the purest of them in the sight of your Lord and the most exalted of them in rank, and what is better for you than sending gold and silver and better for you than encountering your enemy in battle, where you strike them and they strike you?" His Companions answered, "Yes, of course!" He told them, "It is the remembrance of God." Scholars explained how the remembrance God exceeds in merit even *jihad*, explaining that *dhikr* is an end, while *jihad* is a means to removing aggression. It is generally known that the ends are higher than the means, for we were created to remember God, and all else that we do is in order to establish the conditions that permit this remembrance.

God has said, *Remember Me; I will remember you* (QURAN, 2:152). There is also a hadith that states that whoever remembers his Lord, God remembers him, and whomever God remembers, he is enriched in this world and in the Hereafter and is in need of nothing. One of the great things about *dhikr* is that it is different from other acts of worship, like Pilgrimage and prayer. Remembrance is not time restricted; it is associated with all aspects of life, such as meals, getting dressed, traveling, retiring for sleep, even sexual intimacy (for which there is a known supplication), and the like. It is said that when one is in the state of remembrance, any affliction that comes to him or her raises that person's rank, and if one dies in the state of remembrance, that person dies as a martyr. Also, if one's last words are, "There is no God but Allah," he or she enters Heaven.

Imam Mawlud says that in making remembrance, one should start with seeking God's forgiveness (*istighfar*) for his or her neglect and misdeeds, past or immediate. *Istighfar* is the process of asking God to remit our sins and cleanse us of their ill-effects. One should say, for example, at least 100 times in a day *astaghfirullah*, which means, "I seek forgiveness from God." One should also begin with benedictions on the Prophet that is, asking God to bless him and grant him peace. Many scholars have specified benediction of the Prophet as particularly effective because it is a prayer that is guaranteed to be answered by God. In fact, we read, *Indeed, God and His angels bless the Prophet. Oh you who believe, bless him and salute him with a worthy salutation* (QURAN, 33:56). What is meant by the angels blessing the Prophet is their constant supplication to God to send His peace and blessings upon His beloved Messenger. And the command to believers also references their supplication to God that He send blessings to the Prophet ﷺ.

Whoever prays for the Prophet ﷺ one time, God prays on that person ten times. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Prayer on the Messenger of God is light in this world, light in the grave, and light on the Traverse [in the Hereafter]." The Prophet ﷺ was aware of his station as the Seal of the Prophets and he believed in what God has revealed to him, as the Quran states (2:285). He was unabashed in relating to his Companions (and all the generations after them) what will be of benefit to them in this life and the next, including invoking prayers of blessing upon him. Such prayers, as

he has said, shall be a light when we need light the most, in the dark grave and on the Traverse, the bridge that crosses over Hellfire, over which everyone must cross. It is also light in the heart.

When praying on the Prophet ﷺ one should have the same reverence and comportment that one has when performing other *dhikr*, like having ablution (*wudu*) and facing the direction of Makkah 'the *qibla*) when possible. What is recommended for prayer (*salat*) is recommended for *dhikr*: cleanliness, perfume, and cleaning the teeth with the *siwak*. When one says *la ilaha illa 'allah* ("there is no God but Allah"), he negates polytheism and idolatry. If one says *il-hamdulillah* ("all praise is for God"), he is reminded of the constant blessings that God has bestowed. When one says *la hawla wa a quwata illa billah* ("there is no might or power except with God"), he disengages himself of any illusion of having power, for all of it is with God. When one prays on the Prophet ﷺ, it is appropriate to imagine the Prophet teaching us guidance and the proper way to worship—essential teachings that we never would have learned had he not taught us. We must also remember God's love for him.

Imam Mawlud states that when engaged in remembrance it is important to pronounce the words well and to avoid incorrect pronunciation, to the best of one's ability. Some mispronunciation can change the meaning of a phrase. Sidi 'Abdallah Ould Hajj Ibrahim said in his book *Khazinat al-Asrar (Storehouse of Secrets)* that when one engages in remembrance he should do so with every letter. One should not drag his tongue lazily, especially in reciting the Quran. Proper pronunciation lends itself to deeper comprehension of what one is saying. For those who have difficulty in pronouncing some of the letters, they, of course, can still engage remembrance, doing their best with matters of pronunciation.

To reflect on God's creation is known as a great act of worship, a practice that helps a person see the signs—those glimpses of the unseen purposely placed in the physical world so that we may be increased in faith and certitude. This meditative contemplation, as Imam Mawlud states, is the most virtuous of devotions. Those inclined to reflection are known as people of understanding and are described as those who remember God while *standing or sitting or lying on their sides*. As they reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, they say, "*Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You!*" (QURAN, 3:191). This combines remembrance of God with a presence of heart and mind that augments the power of *remembrance*. There is a hadith that states, "To reflect for one hour is better than a year in worship."

The objects of reflection (*tafakkur*) are many. One may reflect on the verses of the Quran. Another may reflect on the signs of God in creation or reflect on the promise of God, the reward that He guarantees believers who are patient and obedient. Such reflection creates ardent desire and hope for Paradise with its unfathomable bliss, peace, provision, landscapes, and excellent company. Likewise, one reflects on the punishment God has promised those who choose wickedness over purity, misguidance over guidance, and corruption over wholesomeness. Reflecting on the terrors of the grave and the horrors of Hell instills the kind of dread that strengthens a person's resolve to never stray from the path of God. When we reflect on all that God has given us that infinitely exceeds the measure of what we deserve, and then reflect on what little is required from us, this extinguishes self-righteousness and arrogance and increases gratitude.

People ask about those who engage in a great deal of *remembrance* yet neglect or ignore the obligatory rites of worship as if they have transcended the need for these rites. This is unmitigated ignorance. The first and foremost obligation on every human being is to gain knowledge. A human being is nothing until he has learned what is obligatory on every individual (*fard 'ayn*). Without this, a person has no rank or standing with regard to God, and nothing is more consequential to a person other than his or her standing with God. When God created us, He gave us

accountability and the means and ability to carry out our responsibilities. Anyone who does not care to learn the first order of knowledge is living the life of a farm animal, a creature that does nothing but graze in this life, which is entirely insufficient in God's sight.

Shaykh Ould al-Khadim has mentioned the names of many renowned scholars of the past who were learned in the outward and inner sciences, the latter being *tasawwuf*. These scholars say that before *tasawwuf*, there must be Sacred Law. *Tasawwuf* without law will lead one astray.

There is a confused sense of spirituality in which one feels he or she can attain to the Reality without tending to the responsibilities and obligations of the *Sharia*. This is a misleading phenomenon that spreads because of its appeal: spiritual sensation without any moral obligation. A person on this path may do as he or she wills and take solace in pseudo-sensations. This virulent trend seizes people and whisks them away from the truth, although they feel quite content. Islam does not call people to unreasoned faith. It demands that a person learn authentic knowledge, which buttresses true spiritual growth. This real spirituality is protected by the *Sharia*, just as a shell protects its fruit. If one removes the husk, the ear is exposed and it begins to rot. A person who tries to attain spirituality without the *Sharia* will eventually destroy his soul and become, in essence, a false person. There are people who outwardly don the mantle and comportment of spiritual enlightenment, but who are filled with diseases of the heart.

We must remember that if a person has done wrong, the spiritual path is not severed. There is the recourse of seeking repentance from God. One should not confess or broadcast what he or she has done. If God has veiled one's wrongdoing, do not tear the veil down. There is a hadith in which a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "I committed a sin," and he meant adultery. "So punish me." But the Prophet turned and walked away. The man pursued the Prophet and told him again that he wanted to be punished for his sin. The Prophet finally looked at him and asked him if he made ablution and prayed. He was telling him that Islam purifies. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever does indecency, let him veil his acts with the veiling of God and let him make repentance." He also said, "Whoever comes to our faces and admits them, then we will punish them."

There is no better treatment for the diseases of the heart than *remembrance*. Most of the other recommended cures either touch upon or include the remembrance of God as essential. It has been said, "When we are ill, we treat ourselves with Your remembrance. And when we abandon Your remembrance, we relapse into illness."

The consultative body of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab included a man whose cousin insisted on meeting with 'Umar. When he was given the opportunity, he demanded from 'Umar, "Give me something from what God gave you [meaning money] because you're someone who hasn't given out much, and you do not judge with justice." When 'Umar heard this, he grew angry. But the man's cousin intervened and cited a verse to 'Umar, *Turn away from the ignorant* (QURAN, 7:199). 'Umar's anger immediately subsided, even though the man had insulted him, lied, and disrespected Islamic authority. Citing the verse was the remembrance of God, which calmed Umar down.

Many passages of the Quran encourage or command humanity to remember God as often as possible. The Quran says that in the Messenger of God ﷺ we have an excellent model (QURAN, 33:21). The people who benefit most from this model are those who engage in *remembrance* frequently, which was the way of the Prophet ﷺ. The word *tazkiya* in Arabic means to purify oneself, but it also means to grow. When God the Exalted says that had it not been for His favor upon us, not one of us would have become purified or would have enjoyed growth (QURAN, 24:21). So purification comes about as the result of the spiritual work that God the Exalted has graciously blessed humanity with, and *remembrance* plays a major role in that.

‘Umar once wrote to his governors: “I consider prayer to be the most important deed in your life. So whoever guards and is vigilant in his prayer, he has guarded his religion. And whoever is negligent about his prayer, he will neglect matters of lesser importance.” What is great about this counsel is that it offers clarity about priorities. Remembrance (*dhikr*) is a practice that is validated only by the performance of the obligatory rites of worship, including prayer (*salat*). If a person stays up all night thumbing his beads but sleeps past Dawn Prayer, he has done no service to himself. So the foremost thing a person needs to guard is the prayer and its requirements, like ablution or *wudu*.

A Muslim tradition reports that Prophet David saw a group of men remembering God and was impressed with them, but it was revealed to him that these men were of no worth in the sight of God because if a woman had come along and offered herself to any of them, they would have accepted her offer.

The best of worship occurs with the combination of speech and reflection. When practiced for a long time regularly, one achieves what is called *fana* in Sufi terminology. Imam al-Junayd is said to have coined the term, which literally means extinction. When it comes to the world of remembrance, it includes achieving supreme realizations about God the Exalted and His acts. When one reflects deeply, he separates himself from others and even from his own limitations.

Imam al-Junayd says that in spiritual practice there can be profound experiences. One is called a *hal*, which can be an overwhelming spiritual. The scholars of this science differentiate between *hell* and *maqam*. *Maqam* (station) is more or less a fixed condition or state, not a momentary burst of spiritual epiphany. For example, the *maqam* of *tawba* (station of repentance) is one in which one cannot willingly be disobedient to God. But the *hal* of repentance is when someone becomes so overwhelmed with remorse over what he had done wrong in the past, he rushes to God the Exalted and profoundly seeks His forgiveness with a powerful sense of God’s presence. It is an inrush that comes into the heart, filling it with light and spiritual expansion. It is highest when one is not aware of himself, only of God and His attributes. This kind of extinction of the soul is caused by one’s focus and heightened spiritual experience.

Our objective is not merely to go through these spiritual experiences, but to be firmly grounded in a path that takes us to the pleasure of God and salvation in the Hereafter. If one performs remembrance properly and often, things will happen to the inner self. These things are studied by scholars of the inner sciences. But we’re also aware that Satan can play games with those who engage in certain practices blindly and without knowledge and prioritization. That’s the peril of New Age practices and philosophies that can lead to sensations and experiences in which the one having them cannot distinguish between satanic influences, psychological phenomena, and true spiritual encounters.

What *fana* alludes to is altogether different. It is founded on the sources of Islam and the tutelage of learned people who have knowledge of both the *Sharia* and spiritual matters. The person who is doing *dhikr* with reflection loses awareness of himself. There are authentic reports of the Companions of the Prophet and other righteous people of later generations who, as they stood in prayer, were completely unaware of their surroundings. What Muslims recognize is that if a person is sincere in remembering God, then God may bless him or her with an “opening,” that is, a deeper witnessing of God Himself.

There is a hadith in which God says, “My servant does not draw near to Me by anything more beloved to Me than what is obligatory upon him, and he will continue to draw near to Me with the supererogatory acts of worship until I love him. And when I love him I become the eye with which he sees, the ear with which he hears, the tongue with which he speaks, and the hand with which he grasps, and if he seeks refuge in Me I give him refuge with Me, and if he asks of Me, I give him.” This hadith does not mean that God the Exalted takes on human qualities. We do not



believe in Divine incarnation or God becoming creation. But we do believe that the human being can be in a profound state of awareness of God's action in creation. The whole world is an act of God and people can go into a state of absolute witnessing where they see everything as being acts of God. They do not see otherness and thus they recognize the Reality behind it. For this reason, the believer sees good in all things, even in affliction and trial, in which there is wisdom: an opportunity to grow, purify oneself, learn patience, and draw near to God. *It may be that you dislike something, though it is good for you. And it may be that you love something, though it is bad for you* (QURAN, 2:216). Understanding this is the idea in witnessing God's wisdom in events of the world.

Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi said that Satan's foremost objective with the believer is to separate him from the remembrance of God the Exalted. But if Satan finds believers doing much remembrance, then he will try to turn them away from the remembrance of God that is taken from the Quran and the supplications and formulas stated by the Prophet ﷺ himself. Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq said that one should say the litany that the Prophet used to say, especially those that he said often. One should do this before these supplications composed from other people. It is permissible to read supplications of others as long as they are knowledgeable and known for their piety. Even here, preference (after the words of the Quran and the Prophet ﷺ) should be given to the words of the Companions and the Successors (*Tabi'un*).