

Realities of Sufism
and
Courtesies of the Ṭarīq



compiled by
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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Dedication

For Shaykh al-Jayli and all the students of Abuna Shaykh. This book was translated for the English-speaking students of the glorious and rich path to Allah.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Preface

The first thing that the hearts have been tied to, the tongues of eloquence have spoken of, and the pens of finger tips have written about is the praise of Allah, the Victorious, the All-knowing, the Generous, the Bestower. Praise be to Allah who fills the hearts of His awliyā with His love, bestows upon their souls (arwāh) the beholding of His greatness, and prepares their secrets (asrār) to carry the heavy burden of His gnosis (maʿrifah). Thus, their hearts delight in meadows of His gnosis, their spirits (arwāh) stroll through the gardens of His malakut (spiritual world), and their secrets swim in the ocean of His jabarut (imaginal world). As a result, their thoughts extract rubies of knowledges and their tongues utter jewels of wisdom and understanding. Glory be to Him who chooses them for His presence, and bestows upon them His love. Surely they are between sālik (spiritual traveler on the Path to Allah) and majdhūb (taken by spiritual attraction to Allah)—lover and beloved. He annihilates (gives fanāʾ to) them through love of His being (dhāt), and gives them going-on (baqāʾ) through beholding the traces (āthār) of His attributes (ṣifāt). Blessings and peace be upon our Liege-Lord and Master, Muhammad, the spring of knowledges (ʿulūm) and lights (anwār), the mine of gnosis and secrets (asrār). May Allah the High be pleased with his Companions, the righteous, and his Ahl al-Bayt (the people of his family), the pure.

Ṭaṣawwuf (Sufism) is the most sublime of sciences, the greatest in rank, and the brightest star. And why shouldn't it be? Since it is the essence of the Sharīʿah, the method of the tarīqah, and out of it burst forth the lights of Reality. The People have made clear to us the states, realities, and courtesies of the Path. From this clarification is what has been written by Sayyidi Ibn ʿAṭa Allah al-Sakandari, ʿAbd al-Wahāb al-Shaʿrānī and those who came later, among whom was Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿĪsa (may Allah have mercy upon them). In this book, *Realities of Sufism and Courtesies of the Ṭarīq*, we have collected their teachings. We ask Allah that it be useful. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, and abundant blessings and peace be upon our Master Muhammad and his Family and Companions.

Realities of Sufism

Tawbah

Tawbah is leaving what the Sharīʿah finds blameworthy for what it finds praiseworthy. It is the beginning of the path of the sālikīn (spiritual travelers), the key to the happiness of the murīdīn (spiritual aspirants), and the condition that makes the passage to Allah the Exalted sound.

In many ayats, Allah the Exalted orders the believers to perform tawbah, making it a means for success in both this world and the next. Allah says:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعاً أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

And turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful. (24:31)

أَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ

And ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him. (11:90)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحاً

O you who believe! Turn to Allah a sincere turning. (66:8)

The Messenger, the Faultless (Allah bless him and grant him peace), often renewed his tawbah, repeatedly asking Allah for forgiveness in order to teach the Ummah and establish the Sunnah. Al-Aghar ibn Yasar al-Muzni (may Allah be pleased with him) related that the Prophet of Allah said, “O mankind, make tawbah to Allah and ask him for forgiveness, for surely I make tawbah a hundred times each day.” Imam Nawawi (may Allah show him mercy) said:

Tawbah is required for every wrongdoing. If the tawbah is from a disobedience committed only between the slave and Allah the Exalted, the following three conditions must be met: the slave stops doing the disobedience, regrets having done it, and resolves to never do it again. If the disobedience is connected with another person then it has four conditions: the three conditions mentioned above, plus, the obligation of giving the wronged person his right. If this right is money or anything similar, it must be given back. If the wronged person was verbally or physically abused, then the slave seeking tawbah should submit himself to the right of the wronged person, or ask him for forgiveness. If the abuse is ghaybah (backbiting), then he should ask the wronged person to pardon him. He must turn away from all wrong actions.

Among the conditions of tawbah is leaving companions who encourage committing wrongs and discourage obedience to Allah, and joining the companionship of the good and truthful so that their companionship deters one from returning to one's old life of disobedience.

The Şufi does not look at the smallness of his sin; rather, he looks at the greatness of his Lord, following the example of the companions of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah be pleased with all of them). Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "You might do something that seems, in your opinion, to be smaller than a strand of hair; but in the time of the Messenger of Allah we considered it to be very big." Abu 'Abd Allah said, "He meant by this 'something' anything that leads to destruction."

The Şufi not only does tawbah for his outward disobedience, which, in his eyes, is the tawbah of the common people, but in addition, he performs tawbah from everything that busies his heart from Allah the Exalted. When Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked about tawbah he said, "Tawbah of the common is from wrong actions while tawbah of the elite is from heedlessness."

'Abd Allah al-Tamimi (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "A difference exists between those who make tawbah: one may be making tawbah from his wrong actions, while another may be making tawbah from his heedlessness, while still another may be making tawbah from seeing himself doing good and being obedient."

Know that whenever the Şufi corrects his knowledge of Allah the Exalted and increases his works, his tawbah becomes more precise. So, no blemishes can be hidden from the one whose heart has been purified from the filth of sin and has had the lights of imān shone upon it. He won't feel at ease when he tries to commit slips. Immediately, he will make tawbah from the shame he feels from the knowledge that Allah is seeing him. The Şufi has to increase in his asking for forgiveness night and day, thus making him feel both his actual slavery to Allah and his shortcomings in giving His Lord His rightful due. From this he acknowledges servitude ('ubudiya) and confirms lordship (rububiya). Allah the Exalted says:

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ، يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا ، وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ
وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا

Then I said, Ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is the Most Forgiving: He will send down upon you the cloud, pouring down abundance of rain: And help you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens, and make for you rivers. (71:10-12)

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ، ءَاخِذِينَ مَا ءَاتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَٰلِكَ مُحْسِنِينَ ،
كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ ، وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good. They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness. (51:15-18)

When the Şufi reads these verses and others like them, he sheds tears of regret for his shortcomings in his life and for his remissness in his relationship to Allah. He turns to his faults and shortcomings, correcting them before it is too late. Then he turns to his soul (nafs) and purifies it. He follows this with increased acts of obedience and goodness, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has said, "Performing acts of goodness (hasanah) immediately after wrong actions (sayyi'ah) erases wrong actions."

Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq (may Allah have mercy upon him) said in his book of rules:

The claim of the claimer is known by its result. If the claim manifests itself then it is correct; otherwise, the one who alleges his claim is a liar. Tawbah not followed by godfearingness (taqwā) is considered unaccepted. Taqwā not free of doing wrong actions (istiqāma) is admixed and imperfect. Istiqāma without scrupulousness (wara') is incomplete. Wara' that is not a result of zuhd is limited.

Zuhd that is not built upon trust in Allah (tawakkul) is dry and dead. Tawakkul whose fruits do not manifest by completely cutting off everything that does not lead to Allah and referring to Him, is a picture without truth in it (it is a form without reality). So, sound tawbah manifests through the slave turning away from the forbidden (ḥarām); perfection in taqwā manifests through the slave finding no observer except Allah; istiḳāmah exists through the slave taking precautions to perform his religious exercises (wird) without innovation (bid‘); and wara‘ exists when the slave, at the point of experiencing strong desires for something that may be unacceptable, leaves it.

Khawf

Imam al-Ghazali, the Proof of Islam (may Allah have mercy upon him), said, “Know that the reality of khawf is the heart’s suffering and its burning in expectation of something distasteful befalling it. This fear is due to one’s sins or knowledge of Allah’s qualities. No doubt, knowledge of Allah’s qualities will cause fear. How perfect! Because he who knows Allah, by necessity, fears him.” Allah says:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

Those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah. (35:28)

Allah calls upon his servants to fear Him only. He says:

وَإِيَّايَ فَارْهَبُونِ

So of Me alone should you be afraid. (16:51)

He praises the believers and describes them as having fear, saying:

يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ

They fear their Lord above them. (16:50)

Allah has made fear a condition for completeness of īmān, saying:

وَخَافُونَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

Fear Me if you are believers. (3:175)

He has promised the one who fears to stand before Allah two gardens: the garden of knowledges in this world, and the garden of adornments in the next world. He says:

وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّاتَانِ

And for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord is two gardens. (55:46)

Allah made the Jannah an abode for the one who fears to stand before his Lord. Allah also says:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ، فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ

And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and forbids the soul from low desires, then surely the garden—that is the abode. (79:40-41)

Shaykh Ahmad al-Zarruq (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his book of rules, “Among the motives for action is the presence of fear. It is magnifying Allah’s greatness accompanied by dread. Fear is the heart’s disturbance at the possibility of being the object of the Lord’s vengeance.”

Khawf is found in the one who is aware of the dangerous consequences of his actions. Therefore, he stops himself at the required (the wājib), neither turning his attention to deviation and sin, nor putting himself into situations that might cause him to fall into evil and corruption. Through fear, the Ṣufi ascends to adornment with nearness. The fear that manifested in the world of the body is transferred to the world of the spirit (rūh). The ‘ārif will have intimate feelings, achieved only by the people of purity.

To describe the station of khawf, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Wahāb al-Sha‘rānī (may Allah be pleased with him) tells of how Sayyida Rābiyah al-‘Adawīya was given to so much weeping and sadness that whenever she heard the mention of the Hellfire she would faint, remaining unconscious for sometime. The place where she made sujūd would be wet from the tears she shed; it was as if the Hellfire had only been created for her sake. The

secret of this fear lies in the belief that every trial other than the Hellfire is easy to bear, and any misfortune other than remoteness from Allah is insignificant.

The Şufî understands that the lover will not drink the cup of love until fear has ripened his heart. He who does not have taqwā such as this will not know why he cries; and he who has not seen the beauty of Yūsuf will not know what caused Ya‘qub’s suffering. The one at the station of khawf does not weep and wipe his eyes; rather, he leaves that for which he fears being punished. Abu Sulayman al-Darāni (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Fear does not leave a heart but that it is ruined.”

Those who possess khawf are not of one rank. Ibn Ajiba (may Allah have mercy upon him) categorized them into three. He said, “Fear of the common is of punishment and of missing a reward; fear of the elect is of blame and of missing the opportunity of drawing closer; fear of the elect is of being veiled for displaying discourtesy.”

Şidq

The murīd, seeking the spiritual path of safety and arrival to Allah the Exalted, must be realized in three qualities: şidq, ikhlās (sincerity), and şabr (patience). Only when a man is described by these three qualities can he be adorned by all the qualities of perfection. Likewise, actions cannot be completed without them: without them actions are spoiled and rendered unaccepted.

Imam al-Ghazālî (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Know that şidq is used in six meanings: şidq in speech, şidq in intention and will, şidq in resolve, şidq in fulfilling the resolve, şidq in actions, and şidq in realizing all the maqāms of the Dīn. Whoever is described by şidq in all of these ways is a şiddīq.”

Şidq of the tongue concerns what is said and whether or not a promise is fulfilled. Şidq in intention and will returns to ikhlāş (sincerity and loyalty); that is, all motives for action and stillness are only for Allah. Şidq in resolve is to act only for Allah the High. Şidq in fulfilling the resolve is in overcoming obstacles. Şidq in actions means that the actions manifested outwardly are but a reflection of the inward. Şidq in the maqāms of the Dīn are khawf, rajā’, magnifying Allah, zuhd, ridā, tawakkul, and ḥubb. These are the stations of the Dīn.

The Judge, Zakariya al-Anşārî (may Allah have mercy upon him), said, “Şidq is judgment commensurate with reality. Its place is on the tongue, in the heart, and in actions. Each requires a separate description. Şidq on the tongue is telling about something as it truly is. Şidq in the heart is absolute resolve. Şidq in actions is the performance of those actions with energy and love. Its cause: depending upon what is being described. Its fruit: praising Allah and His qualities.”

Şidq is understood by the common Muslim to be only şidq of the tongue; however, Şufî masters intend by şidq, not only şidq of the tongue, but also şidq of the heart and şidq of actions and states. Now the first of the stages of şidq is the şidq of the slave in turning to his Lord with genuine repentance (al-tawbat al-naşūḥah), which is the basis of good actions (al-a‘māl al-şāliḥa) and the first of the degrees of perfection.

Şidq in rectifying the nafs al-amāra (the self commanding to evil) achieves big success in ridding the soul of its illnesses and its desires, and cleanses the heart of filth until it reaches the sweet taste of īmān. This is described by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) when he said, “He tasted the food of īmān.”

Şidq in fighting Shayṭan and freeing oneself from his whisperings makes the mu’min safe from his plots and his evil ways. It also makes the Shayṭan lose all hope of leading the believer astray or of seducing him.

Şidq in freeing the heart from the love of dunya induces man to be in continuous mujāhadah through şadaqah, self-sacrifice, and cooperation. Eventually, he frees himself from its love and its domination over his heart.

Şidq in seeking knowledge—ridding oneself of ignorance and correcting actions—encourages man to istiḳāmah and perseverance and kindles the desire for night vigil in order to obtain the greatest share of spiritual gifts. The scholars don’t reach excellence except by their şidq, ikhlāş, and şabr.

Şidq in action is the fruit of knowledge and its objective. By it the slave continuously ascends to completion. Though the sālik might encounter problems that hinder him, such as love of fame, sincerity (ikhlāş) in şidq will remove these obstacles. Then he will find the way to his aim, which is gaining Allah’s acceptance, obtaining knowledge of Him, and arriving at love for Him.

Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Şidq is the core of the matter and the means to its completion; it is the method, and it follows upon the rank of prophethood.”

Allah says:

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ
وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the good. (4:69)

Allah ordered the believers to be always with the people of ṣidq. He says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and be with the true ones. (9:119)

Allah describes the people of ṣidq as being few, and that they are the chosen group from the believers. He says:

مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ

Of the believers are men who are true to the covenant that they made with Allah. (33:23)

Ma‘ruf al-Karkhi indicated them by saying, “There are many ṣāliḥīn but among them there are few people of ṣidq.” O how great is the reward of the people of ṣidq on the day of rising!

هَذَا يَوْمٌ يَنْفَعُ الصَّادِقِينَ صِدْقُهُمْ

This is the day when their ṣidq shall benefit the truthful ones. (5:119)

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) explained that just as ṣidq (and the one who possesses it is ṣādiq) is the means to piety that qualifies the slave to enter Paradise, so consistency of ṣidq is the key to the degree of ṣiddīq (a higher degree than ṣādiq; meaning, instant acceptance and recognition of the Truth). The Prophet said, “Surely the one possessing ṣidq is guided to piety and the pious one is guided to Paradise, and most surely the man will be truthful until it is written in Allah’s presence that he is a ṣiddīq.”

The Chosen One makes it clear that ṣidq will result in reassurance in the heart and peace of mind. Its absence will cause worry, agitation, doubt, and uncertainty. It has been narrated that Hasan ibn ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with them both) said, “I learned from the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), ‘Leave whatever you are doubtful about for whatever you are certain about, for surely ṣidq is confidence and peace of mind while lying is doubt.’”

Ṣidq is composed of degrees and levels. Ṣiddīq is the highest form of ṣidq but it also is composed of various levels. Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (may Allah be pleased with him) obtained the highest level of the quality of ṣiddīq. Allah the Exalted testifies to this when He says:

وَالَّذِي جَاءَ بِالصِّدْقِ وَصَدَّقَ بِهِ

And he who brings the truth and (he who) accepts it as the truth. (39:33)

The maqām of ṣiddīq is only surpassed by the maqām of prophethood. The maqām of ṣiddīq is the maqām of the greatest wilāya and the greatest khulafā’ in openings and manifestations.

Reaching Allah is achieved by ṣidq not by wishful thinking; therefore, it is said, “Arrival is not achieved by someone who has the wish for arrival in his heart; rather, it is achieved by hard work.”

Ṣabr

Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Ṣabr is keeping distant from disobedience, being undisturbed when a catastrophe befalls, and exhibiting self-sufficiency in earning one’s livelihood at the advent of poverty.”

Al-Raghi al-Isfahāni (may Allah have mercy upon him) mentioned in his list of terms: “Ṣabr is avoiding what is required to be avoided by intellect or law or both.”

Sayyid al-Jurjani (may Allah have mercy upon him) defines ṣabr as “ceasing to complain of the pain of disaster to other than Allah.” From this definition it is understood that complaining to Allah does not contradict ṣabr, but complaining about Allah to other than Him does.

Types of Ṣabr:

• Ṣabr with obedience to Allah

Ṣabr with obedience is holding fast to Allah's law. It is continual perseverance in the performance of 'ibādāt (acts of worship) that involve one's possessions, one's body, and one's heart; it is continuing to command to goodness and to prohibition of acts that are contrary to the commands of Allah. In addition, it is having patience with the consequential tests and difficulties that follow. Whoever inherits the message and struggles of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) must endure what befell him: being called a liar, being fought against, and being physically harmed. Allah relates in a story about Luqman who is advising his son:

يَا بُنَيَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَيَّ مَا أَصَابَكَ

O my son! Keep up prayer and enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and bear patiently that which befalls you. (31:17)

Allah swears that the ones who are saved are realized in four qualities: īmān, performing good actions, giving good advice to the nation, and then being patient with what may come from these. Allah the High says:

وَالْعَصْرِ ، إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ، إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

I swear by Time. Man is most surely in loss. Except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience. (103:1–3)

• Ṣabr with disobedience to Allah

It is struggling against the caprice and deviation of the lower self (nafs), correcting it, and uprooting evil impulses incited by the Shayṭan. Whoever fights the lower self, cleans it, and rescues it from error, will arrive at complete hidāyah (guidance according to what Allah has prescribed). Allah the High says:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways. (29:69)

And he becomes one of the successful with the good news from Allah. Allah says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى ، وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself, and magnifies the name of his Lord and prays. (87:14–15)

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَى ، فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى

And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and forbids the soul from low desires, then surely the garden—that is the abode. (79:40–41)

• Ṣabr in Misfortunes

The life of this world is a test and a trial. Allah examines the īmān of his slaves—and He knows them best—by means of various misfortunes. Thus He differentiates between the wholesome and the unwholesome, the believer and the hypocrite. Allah says:

لَمْ أَحْسِبِ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, We believe, and not be tried? (29:1–2)

Difficult tests could come to one through one's possessions, physical body, or close relatives. Allah says:

لَتُبْلَوْنَ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ

You shall certainly be tried respecting your wealth and your own selves. (3:186)

And Allah also says:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ،
الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ، أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ
وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

And We will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; and give good news to the patient, who say: Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course. (2:155–157)

The true believer meets difficulties with patience, acceptance, pleasure, and joy. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said:

Whenever fatigue, sickness, worry, sadness, anxiety, or harm befalls the Muslim, even the prick of a thorn, Allah covers some of his sins.

If he meets those difficulties with acceptance, he obtains high degrees and elevated stations with Allah, glorified and exalted be He. As stated by the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace):

If Allah destines for a slave a high position which he has not obtained by his good actions, He tests him in his body, his relatives, and his possessions. He then gives him the patience to endure these hardships so that he will get the destined position.

Ṣabr is half of īmān and the secret of man's happiness. It is his source of well-being in times of affliction. It is the believer's tool guiding him through trials and difficulties surrounding him. Allah orders us to patience by saying:

أَسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاصْبِرُوا

Ask help from Allah and be patient. (7:128)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا

O you who believe! Be patient and excel in patience. (3:200)

The patient one is Allah's beloved according to what He says:

وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ

And Allah loves the patient. (3:146)

The patient one is rewarded with Allah's company, protection, and support. He says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

Surely Allah is with the patient. (8:46)

The patient obtain the maqām of the rightly guided, and are granted His support. Allah says:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا

And We appointed from among them leaders, giving guidance under Our command, so long as they persevered with patience. (32:24)

The Master of Mankind's entire life was struggle and patience. Suhayb bin Sanan relates that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said:

How amazing is the affair of the believer! All of his affair is good for him—this is only for the believer. If good befalls him, he thanks Allah and that will be good for him; if harm befalls him, he is patient, and that will also be good for him.

Ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "It is as if I am looking at the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) when he told me of a prophet who had been beaten by his people until he was bleeding. Wiping the blood from his face, he said, 'O Allah! pardon my people, for surely they don't know.'"

The Prophet's companions inherited patience from him. They earnestly spread Islam with a belief that knew no desperation, with a resolve that never diminished, and with a firmness that was unaffected by weakness. The Ṣufis say amazing things about patience using interesting logic. When al-Shibli was asked about ṣabr he used the following illustration:

The patient one performs ṣabr, so the ṣabr sought his help (i.e., from the patient one) and the one in love cried out telling the ṣabr to be patient.

Allah has instructed us to endure the hardships of calling people to Him (da'wa) and the harm of the mushrikīn when delivering the message. He says:

وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَيْقٍ مِّمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ

And be patient and your patience is not but by (the assistance of) Allah, and grieve not for them, and do not distress yourself at what they plan. (16:127)

Conclusion

Surely ṣabr is an attribute of the prophets, an adornment of the purified, a key to all goodness, and a way that leads the sālikīn (spiritual aspirants) to Allah. Ibn Ajiba said, “Ṣabr is to keep the heart focused on the hukm (judgment) of the Lord.”

Ṣabr of the common is keeping the heart focused on enduring hardships that come from being obedient and rejecting disobediences. Ṣabr of the elite is devoting the nafs entirely to spiritual exercises and struggle and doing what is unimaginably difficult in order to travel the road of states while watching the heart in continuous presence. As for the patience of the elite of the elite, it is keeping the spirit (ruh) and the secret (sirr) in the presence of beholding or continuous vision and isolating oneself in the Presence.

Ṣabr along with the qualities of ṣidq and ikhlās are the main pillars of traveling to Allah.

Zuhd

Ibn al-Jallā' said, “Zuhd is looking at the world as something not lasting, something not to be considered important, and thus something easy to ignore.” It is said that zuhd is the nafs's abstaining from this world without affectation.

Imam al-Junayd (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Zuhd is belittling this world and erasing all its traces from the heart.”

Ibrahim ibn Adham (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Zuhd is emptying the heart from this world not emptying the hands.” This is the zuhd of the 'ārifīn (those who know Allah). Higher than this is the zuhd of those who draw close to Allah (al-muqarrabīn), leaving behind what is other than Allah in this world, in Paradise, and in other than them. The one with this level of zuhd has nothing but arrival to Allah and nearness to Him.

So, zuhd may be defined as emptying the heart of love of this world and its desires, and filling it with love of Allah and knowledge of Him. In the Qur'an, Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, announces the insignificance of this world and its ephemeral nature; thus, He encourages mankind to perform what they have been created to perform, that is, 'ibādah (worship). Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّبَكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّبَكُمُ بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ

Surely the promise of Allah is true, therefore let not this world's life deceive you, nor let the arch-deceiver deceive you in respect to Allah. (31:33)

And He also says:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوٌّ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

And this life of the world is nothing but sport and play; and as for the next abode, that surely is the life—did they but know! (29:64)

And:

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا

Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; and the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with your Lord in reward and better in expectation. (18:46)

The Messenger of Allah informs us that zuhd is a way to gain Allah's love. Sahl bin Sa'd (may Allah be pleased with him) is reported to have said that a man came to the Messenger of Allah and said, “O Messenger

of Allah, tell me to do an action which, if I do it, Allah and the people will love me.” He said to him, “Be abstinent (have zuhd) in this world and Allah will love you; do without (have zuhd with) what is in the hands of others and the people will love you.”

He (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “Surely this world is green and sweet. Allah placed you as a caretaker, and He is watching how you perform in it. So, guard yourself when dealing with this world and women.”

Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “The Messenger of Allah took me by the shoulders and said, ‘Be in this world as if you are a stranger or a wayfarer.’” Ibn ‘Umar used to say, “When it is evening don’t wait for the next morning, and when it is morning don’t wait for the evening. From your health take for your sickness, and from your life take for your death.”

The companions of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah be pleased with them) preferred zuhd over this world and what is in it. Abu Bakr al-Siddīq (may Allah be pleased with him) gave all his wealth for the sake of Allah. When the Messenger of Allah asked, “What have you left for your family?” he replied, “I have left them Allah and His Messenger.” As for ‘Uthman bin ‘Afan, he armed many in the Muslim army who were without weapons.

Rejecting zuhd, accusing it of being monkery, is unacceptable, for it is a fundamental element of the Dīn. Zuhd doesn’t mean that the believer withdraws from this world, from wealth, and from earning a living and therefore to depend on others. The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) explained the true purpose of zuhd, saying, “Zuhd in this world is neither forbidding oneself from the permissible nor wasting wealth; rather, zuhd is having a greater trust in what is in Allah’s hands than what is in your own.”

Zuhd is not to avoid having wealth altogether; rather, it is to be in a state that whether one has wealth or not is the same. The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) used to eat meat, sweets, and honey; and he loved women, perfume, and good clothing. The Şufi masters have understood that it is a state in the heart. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani said, “Take this world out of your heart and put it in your hand or your pocket so that it will not harm you.” Ibn Ajiba said about zuhd, “It is freeing the heart of connections with anything other than the Lord.”

Some of the so-called Şufis have worn patched clothes, eaten bad food, and left ḥalāl means of livelihood, while envying other people for the abundance that Allah had given them. They frowned before the rich, cut ties with their relatives, and openly made mistakes, all because they were concerned with outwardly manifesting zuhd while filling their hearts with the love of this world.

How astonishing! So many people who, while they occupy themselves with this world and its pleasures, holding its love in their hearts, and spending their time with its ephemeral things, assert that they are serious about zuhd of the heart and that they understand its reality! They don’t understand that the heart needs a doctor to cure it and a truthful mirror that will reflect its reality.

Some spiritual guides or doctors of the heart prescribe spiritual exercises to free the hearts of their murīdīn (murīds; students of the spiritual path) from worldly connections. It is a good, though temporary, cure and a means to reaching real zuhd of the heart. Shaykh al-Qadir al-Jilani (may Allah sanctify his secret) used to direct his students, at the beginning of their affair, to struggle against themselves. His aim was to train the nafs to accept hardships, to be patient, and to live with a minimum of necessities until taking and giving, poverty and wealth became equal, and the heart was empty of other than Allah.

Tawakkul

Sayyid said, “Tawakkul is trust in what Allah has, and complete hopelessness in what is in the hands of people.”

Ibn Ajiba (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Tawakkul is the confidence that the heart has in Allah so that it will not depend on anything except Him. Or, it is being connected with Allah and depending on Him for everything, knowing that Allah knows everything. It is being more confident with what is in Allah’s hands than what you have in your own hands.”

Some have said, “It is that you are satisfied with the fact that Allah knows you, without connecting your heart with other than Him, and referring to Him in all of your affairs.”

Abu Said al-Kharraz (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Tawakkul is believing in Allah, relying upon Him, finding peace and contentment with Him in everything, and freeing the heart from the worries of this world’s affairs which are Allah’s responsibility.”

Tawakkul in Allah is leaving everything for Allah, depending on Him in all states, while denying that any power and strength belong to anyone except Him. The above definitions and others that have not been mentioned demonstrate that tawakkul is a state that exists in the heart. There is no contradiction between depending on Allah and working and using means: the place of tawakkul is the heart, and the place of means is the body. How can a believer leave work after Allah through the Qur’an and the Messenger of Allah in hadiths have instructed us to do work.

A man came to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) riding a camel. He said to him, “O Messenger of Allah, should I leave my camel and depend on Allah.” He said, “Tie the camel and then depend on Allah.”

Scholars consider leaving means and avoiding effort to gain a livelihood, or being indifferent and lazy, a contradiction to the spirit of Islam. Likewise, the Şufis confirm this, correcting wrong ideas, giving evidence that Şufism is the true understanding of Islam. Shaykh al-Qushayri said:

The place of tawakkul is the heart. Activity in the outward doesn’t contradict tawakkul in the heart, since the slave realizes that whatever happens is by Allah. If something becomes difficult to achieve, it is from His decree; if something becomes easy to achieve, it is from Him making it easy to happen.

Imam al-Ghazali (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “The ignorant might think the condition for tawakkul is leaving earning a livelihood or leaving seeking a cure and surrendering to destructive characteristics. This is a mistake because it is *haram* in the Sharī’ah. The Sharī’ah praises and encourages tawakkul, so how can one get it by doing what it prohibits.”

The Şufi masters traveling the mystic path have called attention to something very specific in the heart about tawakkul: in every action one should perform the means that lead to its achievement, while neither depending completely on these means nor attaching one’s heart to them.

Qadi Ayyad said,

The realized among the Şufis believe in the unavoidable necessity of making an effort. But their tawakkul is not correct when there is dependence and contentment with the means. Using means is Allah’s Sunnah and His ruling and wisdom, while trusting in it neither brings good nor saves from harm, for everything is from Allah.

Allah has connected tawakkul with *īmān* (faith) saying:

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

And upon Allah should you rely if you are believers. (5:23)

and

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

And upon Allah should the believers rely. (14:11)

Trust in Allah creates a sense of stillness and tranquility in the heart, especially in times of difficulty and disaster. It is related that Ibn ‘Abbas said:

When Ibrahim (upon him be peace) was thrown into the fire he said *hasbuna Allahu wa ni‘ma al-wakīl* (Allah is sufficient for us and the best of protectors).

In fact, whoever depends on Allah is satisfied with His decree, surrenders to His actions, and is content with His ruling. Bishr al-Hafi said, “Someone may say, ‘I depend upon Allah,’ while he is lying to Allah. If he were trusting in Allah, he would be pleased with whatever Allah does with him.”

The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “If you truly depend upon Allah, He will provide you with rizq just as He provides the birds with their rizq. They fly into the morning with stomachs empty, returning in the evening with stomachs full.” That is, they start the day in the early morning hungry, searching for their provisions, depending upon Allah with full confidence in Him, and in the evening they return satisfied.

Degrees of Tawakkul

The first and lowest degree is to be with Allah as though one is in the hands of a kind and gentle guardian.

The second degree is to be with Allah as a child is with its mother. One refers to his mother for all his needs and requirements.

The third and highest degree is to be with Allah like the patient who is in the hands of his doctor.

The differences between these degrees is that in the first, doubt might come to one's mind; in the second, one has no doubt but one relies upon his mother only when necessary; however, in the third, one neither doubts nor depends, one is annihilated from himself, always looking to what Allah may do with him.

Muḥāsabah

Muḥāsabah is the religious power within oneself that stops one from wrongdoing. It causes the growth of inner reproach, which removes hindrances from the self experiencing ease, love, selflessness, and loyalty. The Ṣufis stand firmly in this maqām and their self-struggle is appreciated. They follow the tradition and guidance of the Messenger (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) when he said:

The intelligent one controls himself and acts according to what is coming after death; while he who is weak and unable to control himself allows himself to indulge in his lower desires, asking Allah to fulfill his wishes.

Whoever takes account of himself cannot be occupied with the futile and false. If the self is occupied with obedience and self-blame because of deficiencies towards Allah, in fear of Him, how can it find a way to futility and falseness?

Sayyid Ahmad al-Rafa'i (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Muḥāsabah is from fear of Allah. Muḥāsabah leads to murāqabah (vigilance) which in turn leads to continuous occupation with Allah the Exalted."

By implanting self-reproach within their souls, the Ṣufis follow the same methods that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) used to bring his companions into pure spirituality. It has been narrated that one day the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) left his house hungry, whereupon he met his two close companions, Abu Bakr and 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with them). The Prophet knew that they, like himself, had had nothing to eat and were hungry. While they were together they met one of the ansār. He was not fooled by their cheerfulness; he knew their condition and invited them for a meal. When they arrived to his house they found dates, cold water, and pleasant shade. After they had eaten a few dates and drunk some water, the Prophet said, "This is from (Allah's) blessings which you asked about." What a wonder! Some dates and water are from the blessings being asked about.

Muḥāsabah brings about feelings of responsibility toward Allah, His created beings, and the soul, which is responsible for adhering to the orders and prohibitions of the Shari'ah. By means of muḥāsabah, man comes to understand that he is created with a purpose, and that he must return to Allah the Exalted. It is reported that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said:

There is not one among you with whom Allah will not speak; there will be no interpreter between him and Allah. When he looks to his right he will only see what he sent before him. When he looks to see if there is anyone more accursed than he, he won't see anything but what he has sent ahead him. When he looks forward he will see the Hellfire facing him. So, protect yourself from the Hellfire, even by giving a portion of a date. He who does not find a date let him give a kind word.

So from his heart comes a true voluntary return to Allah by a sincere repentance. He leaves preoccupation with trivial matters which take him away from his Creator, the Exalted; he flees from everything to run to Allah. Allah says:

فَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللَّهِ إِنِّي لَكُم مِّنْهُ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ

Therefore flee to Allah, surely I am a plain warner to you from Him. (51:50)

So flee with Ṣufi believers in their journey to Allah the Exalted, answering the calls from the unseen:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and be with the true ones. (9:119)

The poet has said:

The people only travel In *caravan* to Truth's presence.

They spend the night in His great presence, which is an honor bestowed upon them by the Holy One and which is sought by everyone who loves Allah the Exalted. Allah says:

فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِيكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ

In the seat of honor with a most Powerful King. (54:55)

Shaykh Ahmad al-Zarruq (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

Being heedless of taking account of one's self leads the self to become hard and unresponsive by what it has been occupied with. Being remiss in self-dialog leads to being self-satisfied. Being hard on the self by self-examination will surely lead to the self's avoidance of what is wrong. Being lenient with one's self helps it become useless. Therefore, cling to continual muhāsabah by means of self-dialog. In matters that are clear, take correct action without accepting excuse; however, in matters that are not clear, do not demand to take action. Consider what to leave undone and what to do. Think about what they say: "He whose day is no better than his night has cheated himself; and he who is not in increase is in decrease. Being firm in action increases one." Shaykh al-Junayd said, "If one comes to Allah for a year, then turns away from Him, what he has lost will be greater than what he has obtained."

Rajā'

Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq (may Allah have mercy on him), in defining rajā', said, "Rajā' is being contented with His overflowing generosity. It should be witnessed in all (His) actions, otherwise, this hope is but self-deception."

Allah encourages us to have hope in Him, and forbids us from despairing of His mercy. He says:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ، إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Say: O my servants! Who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (39:53)

And He says, giving good news of his wide-spread mercy:

وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

And My mercy encompasses all things. (7:156)

The Exalted says in describing those who hope in His mercy:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَةَ اللَّهِ

Surely those who believed and those who fled (their home) and strove hard in the way of Allah, these hope for the mercy of Allah. (2:218)

Many sayings of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) encourage people to have hope in Allah's mercy. Abu Harayra narrates that the Prophet of Allah said, "By He who holds me in His hands, if you did not commit sins, Allah would remove you and replace you with another people who would commit sins and then ask for Allah's pardon so that Allah would pardon them."

Abu Musa al-Ash'arī (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates that the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "On the Yawm al-Qiyāmah some Muslims will come with sins like mountains. Allah will forgive them and put them upon the Jews and Christians."

It is recorded in Muslim in the Book of Tawbah that Ibn 'Umar heard the Prophet of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) say:

On the Yawm al-Qiyāmah the believer will approach his Lord until He makes him admit his sins. When Allah asks, "Do you know about such and such sins?" the believer will say, "My Lord, I know." Then Allah will say, "I overlooked those sins in the dunya and I forgive them today." And he will be given a page of his good actions.

Rajā' (placing one's hope in Allah) is different from wishful thinking. The one who places his hope in Allah takes action by means of obedience, seeking Allah's pleasure and acceptance. The one who entertains wishful thinking leaves out means and struggles and simply waits for Allah's reward. About such a person the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "The impotent one is he who lets himself follow his whims, hoping that Allah will fulfill his wishes."

Anyone who places his hopes in Allah and asks Him, must roll up his sleeves for sincere and hard effort so that he can get what he asks Allah for. In this regard Allah says, showing the way of asking Him:

فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Therefore whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not join anyone in the service of his Lord. (18:110)

If the slave of Allah is in the prime of his youth, if he is committing sins and obeying his lower self and desires, he has to make fear of Allah stronger than hope in Allah. However, if the slave of Allah is at the end of his life, he has to make hope stronger than fear. Allah says in a hadith qudsī recorded in Saḥīḥ al-Bukhari: "I am in the good opinion of my slave." The Prophet said in a hadith narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah, "One should not die until he has a good opinion of Allah" (Muslim, The Book of Jannah, "The Order to Have a Good Opinion of Allah").

If the slave approaches his Lord by following the path leading to His nearness, he must join the stations of fear and hope. He shouldn't let fear overtake hope so that he despairs of Allah's mercy and forgiveness, or let hope overtake fear so that he might fall into disobedience. Rather, he should fly with both, soaring into rarified spheres, and continuing to approach ever closer to the Divine Presence. Thus, he will achieve the attributes of the people about whom Allah says:

تَتَجَافَى جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا

Their sides draw away from (their) beds, they call upon their Lord in fear and in hope. (32:16)

They fear His Hellfire and hope for His Garden of Paradise. They fear distancing themselves from His nearness, and hope for His closeness. They fear that He might desert them and hope that He will be pleased with them. They fear disconnection from Him and hope for connection with Him.

In addition, those who place their hopes in Allah are of different levels. Ibn Ajiba in *Mi'raj al-Tashawwuf* says, "The hope of the common is the hope of returning with a good reward; the hope of the elite is of obtaining His pleasure and nearness; and the hope of the elite of the elite is of obtaining witnessing and increasing in the attainment of secrets of the King, the Worshipped."

Ikhlāṣ

Imam al-Qushayri (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, defining ikhlāṣ:

Ikhlāṣ is intending to devote oneself to the Truth, may He be glorified, through obedience. It is wanting, by means of obedience, to get closer to Allah. One is obedient, not to acquire the respect of others or their praise, but for no other reason than to get closer to Allah.

Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Ikhlāṣ is to avoid attracting the attention of others; the mukhlīṣ (the sincere one) is not a hypocrite in front of people."

Al-Fadil ibn 'Ayad (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Leaving spiritual work for the sake of getting the attention of people is hypocrisy. Work for the sake of people is shirk. Through ikhlāṣ Allah will cure you from them both."

Imam al-Junayd (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Ikhlāṣ is a secret between Allah and the slave that is unknown to an angel so that he can write it down, or to a Shayṭān so that he can spoil it, or a desire in the heart so that it can cause him to deviate."

Shaykh al-Islam Zakariya al-Ansari said, "The truth of the mukhlīṣ is that he neither sees his sincerity nor is content with it. Whenever sincerity differs with this it is not complete. Some may even call it hypocrisy."

Since the acceptance of actions is conditioned by the existence of sincerity, Allah directed His Prophet to teach the Nation of Islam sincerity in the performance of worship. Allah says:

قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ

Say: I am commanded that I should serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience. (39:11)

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ دِينِي

Say: Allah (it is Whom) I serve, being sincere to Him in my Dīn. (39:14)

Allah the Mighty and Majestic says also:

فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ

Therefore, serve Allah, being sincere to Him in Dīn. (39:2)

Allah has ordered His creation to use their voices, their limbs, and their possessions in worship purely for Him, far from falseness in front of people. He said:

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

And they were not enjoined anything except that they should serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience. (98:5)

The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) encourages us to be sincere and to leave hypocrisy. The following are a few prophetic traditions indicating this.

It is related from Abu Umamah (may Allah be pleased with him) that a man came to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and asked, "If you see a man taking part in a ghazwa (jihad) seeking reward and fame, what does he get?" The Prophet said, "He will get nothing." The man repeated his question again, three times, and the Messenger of Allah responded, saying, "There is nothing for him." Then he said, "Allah does not accept any action unless it is purely for Allah, seeking His face."

It is related from Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) that he heard the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) say, "Surely Allah does not look at your bodies or your appearances; rather, He looks at your hearts."

It is related from Shadad ibn Aws (may Allah be pleased with him) who heard the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) say, "He who prays so that people see him praying, has committed shirk, and he who gives ṣadaqah so that people see him giving, has also committed shirk."

It is related from Mahmud ibn Labīd (may Allah be pleased with him) who said that the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) left his house and said to those with him, "O people, beware of committing shirk of hidden motives (shirk al-sarā'ir)." They said, "What is shirk of hidden motives?" He said, "It is when a man stands to pray, beautifying his prayer with the utmost effort so that others will see it and admire it."

It is also related from Mahmud ibn Labīd (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "What I fear most for you is the smallest shirk." They asked, "What is the smallest shirk, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Riyā' (showing off in front of others). Allah says that if people were rewarded according to their actions, He would tell those who do riyā' to go to those whom they used to show off for in the dunya. Then let them see if they can find a reward with them."

Abu Sa'id ibn Abi Faḍālah (may Allah be pleased with him) who was one of the companions related that he heard the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) say, "When Allah gathers the first and the last on the Yawm al-Qiyāmah, a day in which there is no doubt, a caller will call out, 'He who has committed shirk in an action that should have been for Allah, let him seek his reward from the one he did the action for. Surely, Allah is not in need of the shirk of those who commit it.'"

What our masters have said about Ikhḷāṣ

Makhūl said (may Allah have mercy upon him), "If a slave of Allah is sincere for 40 days, the springs of wisdom will appear from his heart and tongue."

Sahl ibn 'Abd Allah al-Tasturi (may Allah have mercy upon him) was asked, "What is the hardest thing on one's self?" He replied, "Ikhḷāṣ, because it has no share in it."

Abu Sulayman al-Darāni (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, "If the slave is sincere, a lot of waswasa (devilish whispering and insinuation) and hypocrisy will be severed from him."

Ikhḷāṣ has three degrees: ikhḷāṣ of the common, ikhḷāṣ of the elite, and ikhḷāṣ of the elite of the elite. The ikhḷāṣ of the common is excluding people when one is performing actions for Allah while seeking one's

portion of this world and the next, of health, wealth, palaces, or beautiful women. The ikhlāṣ of the elite is excluding people when one is performing actions for Allah; however, one doesn't seek one's portion in this world, only in the next world. The ikhlāṣ of the elite of the elite is complete abandonment of one's portion. The elite of the elite worship in order to realize their slavehood and to serve their Lord out of love and longing to see Him.

The loftiest intention of the Ṣufīs is to ascend by sincerity to the highest degrees of servanthood and worship Allah seeking His face without intending a reward. Sayyida Rabiya al-Adawiya said, "I don't worship You fearing Your Hellfire, nor hoping for Your Garden of Paradise, I worship You only for Your Essence (dhatika)." Even if there were no reward or punishment, no Garden of Paradise or Hellfire, they would not delay their worship, or deviate from their obedience because they worship Allah for Allah's Essence.

Imam al-Suyuti (may Allah have mercy upon him) said:

Doing what is ordered and abstaining from what is forbidden is for Allah alone—neither to gain reward nor to avoid punishment. He who does this worships Allah for His sake. The one who worships Allah seeking reward and fearing punishment is different. He worships seeking a portion for his nafs, though he also worships out of love. His rank is that of the abrār (the pious), while the previous one is of the rank of the muqarrabīn (close ones).

Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq (may Allah have mercy upon him) said in the "Rules of Taṣawwuf":

Exalting what Allah exalts is an obligation; having disdain for what He exalts may be kufr. The following statement is not to be understood literally: "We do not worship Allah fearing His Hellfire or hoping for His Garden of Paradise." It is not correct to either disdain them—for Allah himself has exalted them—or to not need them—for surely the believer is not free of needing the blessings of his Master (Allah, the Exalted). Surely, they don't intend them (the Hellfire and the Garden of Paradise) in their worship; they worship Allah for no other reason but Him. Through Him they seek the pleasure of the Garden and the safety from the Hellfire, not for anything they've done but because everything is in His hands.

The evidence for this is the words of Allah:

إِنَّمَا نَطْعُمُكُمْ لِيُوجِهَ اللَّهُ

We only feed you for Allah's face. (76:9)

Thus, he makes the purpose of his action the desire to see the face of the Exalted.

The sālik (spiritual traveler) may face many harmful things that could corrupt his ikhlāṣ. They are veils that hinder his movement to Allah, the Most High. Thus, it is necessary first to point these veils out and warn the spiritual traveler against them. Next, it is necessary to show the sālik the way to get rid of them so that all his actions remain purely for Allah's face.

The first veil is admiring one's own action, obscuring the action's real purpose which is to worship the worshipped. Its cure is to know that ikhlāṣ is by the bounty of Allah and the success that Allah bestows, and that Allah created the sālik and all his actions. Allah says:

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

And Allah created you and what you do. (37:96)

The second veil is seeking reward for one's actions, either in this life or in the next. The cure is to know that one is truly a slave of Allah, and that entrance to the Garden of Paradise or safety from the Hellfire is not obtained except by Allah's largess and goodness toward him. It has been narrated that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "None of you will enter the Garden of Paradise by his actions." Those with him replied, "Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?" To which he responded, "Not even I, unless He covers me with His mercy."

The third veil is being pleased with one's actions and deluded by them. Safety from this is through seeing their defects and feeling shame. However small an action may be, the Shayṭān and the nafs have a share in it. One should see one's inability and incompleteness in his giving Allah, may He be glorified, His due because no one is able to fulfill Allah's right, even by the smallest of particles, even if he struggles night and day. Allah the Exalted says:

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ

And they do not assign to Allah the attributes due to Him. (6:91)

Listen to the call of Allah, the Blessed and Exalted:

فَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللَّهِ

Therefore flee to Allah. (51:50)

Respond to it and say: “At your service my Lord; I leave everything other than You, and I come to You.”

Wara‘

Sayyid al-Jarjani (may Allah have mercy upon him) defines wara‘ as avoiding the doubtful in fear of falling into the forbidden. Muhammad ibn ‘Alān al-Sadiqi (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “According to the scholars, wara‘ is leaving something that may have something wrong in it for fear of doing something truly wrong.” Ibn ‘Ajiba (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Wara‘ is stopping oneself from intentionally doing something whose consequence is detested (makrūh).”

Wara‘ of the common is leaving the doubtful so as not to fall into the mire of the prohibited. It is following the directions of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) in which he said:

Surely the halāl is clear and the harām is clear and between them are matters in which there are ambiguities unknown to many people. So, he who keeps away from the doubtful protects his Dīn and his honor. He who falls into the doubtful, has fallen into the harām, like the shepherd who has guided his sheep near a forbidden sanctuary, on the verge of leading them to graze inside. Isn’t it true that every king has a forbidden area? Allah’s is what He has declared forbidden and sacrosanct (in the Sharī‘ah).

The wara‘ of the elect is leaving what clouds the heart, making it anxious and dark. So the people of hearts refrain from dwelling upon waswas (whisperings) and doubts that suddenly appear in their hearts. Their pure hearts are the greatest instruments of warning when they are hesitant in a matter or are in doubt about a religious judgment. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him) indicated this when he said, “Leave what you are doubtful of for what you are not doubtful of.” He also said, “Being pious and kind is good character and sin is what exists within yourself that you would hate other people to know about.”

About this matter Sufyan al-Thawri (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “I haven’t seen anything that is easier than wara‘: Whatever you find in yourself that is troubling you, just leave it.”

The wara‘ of the elect of the elect is refusing to depend upon other than Allah the Exalted. It is shutting the door of hope in other than Allah, placing all high aspirations in Him, and depending only on Him. This is the wara‘ of the ‘ārafīn who see that everything that distracts them from Allah signifies an evil portent.

Al-Shibli (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Wara‘ is abstaining from everything except Allah.”

The virtue of wara‘

Clearly from what has been said, wara‘ is a quality that includes all the qualities of perfection. When al-Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy upon him) entered Makkah he saw a little boy, one of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib’s children, supporting his back against the Ka‘ba exhorting the people in religious matters. Al-Hasan stopped in front of him and asked, “What is the foundation of the Dīn?” And the boy answered, “Wara‘.” Then he asked, “What is the pestilence destroying the Dīn.” And he replied, “Greed.” Al-Hasan was amazed by him and said, “The weight of one minute portion of wara‘ is better than the weight of a thousand portions of fasting and prayer.”

Ibn Ata’ Allah al-Sakandari (may Allah have mercy upon him) said:

The understanding of one of Allah’s servants is not indicated by the abundance of his knowledge, or by his continuous performance of his wurd; rather, his light and understanding is shown by his being rich with his Lord, his heart being totally with Allah, his being free from greed’s slavery, and his being adorned with wara‘.

Nothing is more indicative of the station of wara‘ and that it is the best kind of worship than the advice that the Messenger of Allah (Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) gave to Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) when he said, “O Abu Hurayra, be scrupulous (have wara‘) and you will be the most worshipful among people.” Thus wara‘ is a way to obtain great divine gifts. Yahya bin Mu‘adh (may Allah be

pleased with him) said, “He who does not look into the smallest details of wara‘ will not reach the splendor of the gift.”

The following hadiths indicate the importance of wara‘, its high station, its exaltedness, and its great effect:

- It is related from one of the companions, ‘Atiya bin ‘Urwat al-Sa‘di (may Allah be pleased with him), that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “The slave of Allah will not become one of the people of taqwā until he leaves what may be doubtful in his Dīn for what has no doubtfulness in it.”
- Hudhayfa bin al-Yamām (may Allah be pleased with him) said that the Messenger of Allah said, “The virtue of knowledge is better than the virtue of worship, and the best in your Dīn is wara‘.”
- It is related from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “He who has got the following three things is entitled to Allah’s reward and has completed his faith: a character that enables him to live among people, scrupulousness (wara‘) that keeps him from what Allah has forbidden, and a forbearance with the ignorance of the ignorant.”
- It is related from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that when the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) found a date on the road he said, “If it were not for the fact that it might be ṣadaqah I would eat it.” (He and his progeny are forbidden ṣadaqah.)
- It is related from Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) that Hasan ibn ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with both of them) took a date from what was ṣadaqah. When he put it in his mouth the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “No! No! Throw it away! We neither eat from ṣadaqah nor is ṣadaqah ḥalāl for us to take from.”

When the Ṣufi masters try to achieve the lofty status of wara‘, they bring to life the practice of the companions and the followers (may Allah be pleased with all of them). It has been related that the Ṣiddīq, Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), ate food that one of his children had brought. Then the child informed him that there was some uncertainty about it. The Ṣiddīq put his hand in his mouth and vomited everything in his stomach. He used to say, “We would leave 70 doors of ḥalāl for fear of falling into one door of ḥarām.”

When musk from the booty of war was brought to ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, he held it in his hand and said, “Though its scent gives benefit to whomever smells it, I hate to benefit from it without sharing it with the rest of the Muslims.” That is, because it was booty, it had to be shared according to the rules of the Shari‘ah.

It is related that ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar said:

I bought camels and took them to the protected area [which was under the charge of the Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, his father, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb]. After they had become fat, I brought them to the market place (to be sold). When (my father) ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) entered the marketplace, he saw the fat camels and asked whose they were. He was told that they belonged to ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar. He kept saying, “O ‘Abd Allah! Bakhin! Bakhin! (expressing displeasure) The son of the Amīr al-Mu‘minīn!” Later he asked me, “Tell me about these camels?!” “They were very thin camels that I bought and sent to the protected area,” I said, “wanting what other Muslims want.” “Let the camels of the Amir al-Mu‘minin graze! Let the camels of the Amīr al-Mu‘minīn drink!” said ‘Umar. “O ‘Abd Allah bin ‘Umar, take the capital (from the sale of the camels) and put the profit into the bayt al-māl of the Muslims.”

Khuzaymah bin Thabit said that when ‘Umar appointed someone to a administrative position he would have an agreement written and witnessed by a number of people with the following conditions: (the appointee agrees) not to ride to work on a horse, not to eat the food of the rich, not to wear soft clothes, and not to close his door to the needy. If the appointee did any of these, ‘Umar’s punishment fell upon him.

The following story about ‘Umar and his wife is well-known. After she had saved some money, she wanted to buy sweets and asked him to buy them. He asked, “Where did you get the money for these sweets?” She said, “I have saved the money.” He said, “Take it back to the bayt al-māl. If you had needed it, you would not have saved it.” He was the one who used to go hungry so that his subjects could eat to their satisfaction.

‘Umar bin ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz had a child who used to bring him a pot of hot water for ablution everyday. One day he asked the boy, “Do you take this pot to the kitchen of the Muslims until it heats up, then bring it to me?” The boy said, “Yes, may Allah guide you.” ‘Umar said, “You have spoiled it for us.” Then in compensation for the firewood that was used, ‘Umar instructed another boy to boil a pot (full of water), see how much firewood was used, count the previous number of days in which the pot was boiled, and then bring the firewood to the kitchen that was used.

The great scholar, al-Munawi (may Allah have mercy upon him), said, “Ibn al-Mubarak (may Allah have mercy upon him) returned from Khorasan to Sham to give back a pencil he had borrowed in Sham.”

A story is related about Bishr al-Hafī (may Allah have mercy upon him), an invalid, in which he is carried to a dinner gathering. In the story, when food is put in front of him, he is unable to put his hand into it to eat. He tries three times but he can’t reach the food. Then a man who knows him says, “Surely it is well-known that his hand is not able to reach for harām food or food in which there is doubt, no matter how he tries. The host shouldn’t have invited this man to his house.”

The Şufī way of wara‘ (scrupulously avoiding what is doubtful) is but following the example of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and his noble companions (may Allah be pleased with them). One of the many marks of their love for Allah and of their holding to His guidance, is their great fear of falling into opposition to Allah. Certainly, he who has tasted the food of īmān, Allah will ennoble with taqwā; and he who has realized taqwā avoids situations in which there is doubt. Shah al-Karmani said, “The sign of taqwā is wara‘, and the sign of wara‘ is stopping when there are doubts. The sign of fear of Allah is sadness, and the sign of hope in Allah is obedience.”

Ridā

Al-Sayyid said, “Ridā is the heart’s pleasure with the bitterness of the decree.”

Ibn Ajiba (may Allah have mercy upon him) said:

Ridā is accepting destruction with a smiling face; or, it is the happiness that the heart finds at the moment of death; or, it is to let Allah choose what will come to pass or occur; or, it is to accept or be content with whatever comes from the Mighty, the One.

The great scholar, al-Barkawi (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Ridā is maintaining without change a soul at ease, even when a misfortune befalls one or an opportunity passes one by.”

Ibn Ata’ Allah al-Sakandari (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Ridā is the heart looking at what Allah has chosen for his slave.” Meaning: the heart is free of annoyance.

Al-Muhasibi (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Ridā is the heart’s stillness under the flow of (Allah’s) judgments.”

So ridā is a maqām of the heart. When the believer embodies this, he will be able to accept catastrophes and disasters with firm faith, a contented soul, and a still heart. But this maqām might reach even higher. Because the believer loves Allah and has been given knowledge of Him (may He be glorified and exalted), he may be able to feel pleasure or even happiness when experiencing the bitterness of Allah’s decree. For example, Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him) said while suffering the last moments before death, “Oh what a pleasure! Tomorrow we will meet the loved ones, Muhammad and his companions.”

One of the sunnahs of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) which he taught his companions and planted within the hearts of his ummah was *ridā billah* (being pleased with Allah). He used to say:

Whoever says in the morning or in the evening: “We accept with pleasure Allah as Lord, Islam as Dīn, and Muhammad as Messenger,”¹ Allah will consider it His obligation to please him.

How many repeat this saying with their tongues while their hearts are discontented with it; they neither appreciate its noble meanings nor embody its exalted intentions. When misfortunes rain down upon them, when disasters assail them, or when they are called upon to abide by divine judgments contradicting their wishes and interests, worries and troubles intensify in their hearts.

“Satisfaction with Allah as Lord (*ridā billah rabban*)” is to accept all His actions in the affairs of His created beings. “Being pleased with Islam as Dīn (*ridā bil-islami dīnan*)” is to hold fast to Islam’s instructions, to leave what it prohibits, and to submit to its judgments. “Being pleased with Muhammad as messenger (*ridā bi-muhammadin rasula*)” is to take his personal character as the highest example so that you struggle against your lower desires until you follow his guidance, walk in his footsteps, and beautify your life with his Sunnah.

¹ رَضِينَا بِاللَّهِ رَبًّا وَبِالْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا ، وَبِمُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولًا .

Whoever is denied the sweetness of īmān and the blessings of ridā is always worried and anxious. When trials befall him, he is tormented and tortured, and his life becomes dark before his eyes. Today we witness this condition in the dangerously increasing number of suicides. May Allah help us.

The sīrah (history of the life) of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), his khulafa' (those who ruled in his place) and his noble companions (may Allah be pleased with all of them), the followers (tabi'īn), and the righteous (ṣālihīn) overflow with events that show that they were realized in the highest degrees of ridā. When the Messenger of Allah was hit with stones in Ta'if so that he began to bleed, he turned to Allah the Exalted to converse with Him. Among that which he said is the following: "As long as You are not angry with me, I don't mind whatever harm befalls me."

The noble companions suffered various forms of torture in Makkah, but they met all of them with hearts pleased, faces smiling, and tongues remembering Allah. Know that Allah the Exalted is not satisfied with His slave until the slave is satisfied with his Lord in all of His judgments and actions, then satisfaction is mutual. Allah indicates this in the Qur'an when He says:

رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ

○Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him. (5:119)

The Ṣūfī masters know this secret, the correlation between the two ridās (ridā of Allah and ridā of the slave). One day when Sufyan al-Thawri was with Rabi'a al-'Adawiya he said, "O Allah, be satisfied with me." "Aren't you ashamed to ask Him for ridā while you are not satisfied with Him?" she said. To which he responded, "I ask Allah's forgiveness."

Obtaining the pleasure of the Lord of Paradise is higher than being in Paradise; it is the ultimate request of the dwellers of Paradise. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) informed us of this when he said:

Allah addressed the people of Paradise saying, "O people of Paradise!" They said, "At Your service our Lord!" Allah asked, "Are you satisfied?" To which they replied, "Why would we not be satisfied when You have given us what You have not given to others of Your created beings (mankind)?" Then Allah said, "I will give you better than this." And they said, "O Lord, what is better than this?" Allah replied, "I will adorn you with My satisfaction (that is, being satisfied with Me) so that after this My displeasure will never fall upon you."

Shukr

Ibn 'Ajiba (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Shukr is the heart's pleasure at obtaining blessings while the senses are directed towards humble obedience to the One who provides the blessings, acknowledging that He is their source.

Al-Sayyid (may have mercy on him) said in his definitions, "Shukr is when the slave uses all the God-given senses, such as hearing and seeing, for what they have been created for."

Clearly, Allah's blessings upon His slaves are so numerous they cannot be counted. Allah says:

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا

And if you count Allah's favors, you will not be able to count them. (14:34)

Blessings can be divided into three groups:

- for this world, such as good health, well-being, and ḥalāl wealth;
- for the Dīn, such as actions, knowledge, taqwā, and knowledge of Allah; and
- for the next world, such as rewards for good actions which, though they may be small, yield great benefits.

The greatest of Allah's blessings bestowed upon His slave is the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace); next comes the blessings of Islam and faith; and among the other blessings are one's parents and then one's teachers from among the rightly guided who know Allah and can take one to Him. The believer is obliged to thank Allah because He is the real provider of blessings. Allah the Most High says:

“And whatever favor is (bestowed) upon you it is from Allah” (16:53).¹ In addition, the believer is obliged to thank whomever Allah placed as a means for obtaining his blessing. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “He who doesn’t thank people doesn’t thank Allah.”

Three aspects of shukr

The first aspect of shukr is that it requires giving thanks with the tongue, i.e., speaking about Allah’s blessings. This is in compliance with the Most High’s words: “And as for the favor of your Lord, announce (it)” (93:11)²; and in application of the Messenger’s words: “Speaking of Allah’s blessings is shukr.”

The second aspect of shukr is that its foundation is doing something only for the sake of Allah. Indicating this Allah says: “Give thanks, O family of Dawud” (34:13).³ Sayyida ‘A’isha (may Allah be pleased with her) said:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to stand in prayer throughout the night until his feet became swollen. One time I asked him, “Why do you do this, O Messenger of Allah? Allah has forgiven you for what you may have done and for what you may do in the future.” He answered, “Should I not be a grateful slave?”

The third aspect of shukr pertains to the soul. It is testifying that every blessing for you or for anyone else comes from Allah the Exalted. Again, we mention that Allah says: “And whatever favor is (bestowed) upon you is from Allah” (16:53).⁴ Do not let blessings obscure you from the vision of the Giver of those blessings. The Messenger directs our attention to this fact when he says:

Whoever rises in the morning and says, “O Allah, whatever blessings I or anyone receive this morning, it is from You alone. You have no partner, so to You belongs the praise and thanks,” has given thanks for the day. And whoever says this at night, has given thanks for the night.

In traditions it is recorded that when Musa (peace be upon him) said, “O my Lord, you have created Adam with Your hand; You have blown from Your soul into him; You have made Your angels to prostrate to him; You have taught him the names of everything; and You have done many other things. So, how can I find the means to thank You?” Allah responded by saying, “Know that the ability to thank is from Me.” This knowledge itself is shukr.

Three levels of shukr

The common people thank Allah only for blessings.

The elite thank Allah for blessings and misfortunes. They testify to His goodness and blessings upon them in all of their states. In a noble hadith recorded by Abu Musa al-Ash‘arī (may Allah be pleased with him) the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said:

When the son of a slave of Allah dies, Allah says to His angels, “You have seized the son of My slave.” And they will say, “Yes.” Then Allah will ask, “What has My slave said?” They will say, “He praised You and said, *Inna lilahi wa inna ilayhi rāji‘ūn* (Surely we are from Allah and surely to Him we return).” Allah then says, “Build a house in Paradise for My slave and name it the House of Praise.”

The shukr of the elite of the elite is being absent in the Giver from seeing both the blessings and the misfortunes. Al-Shibli (may Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Shukr is seeing the Giver, not seeing the blessing.”

Shukr is among the highest of stations (maqāmāt) because it includes the heart, the tongue, and the limbs, and because it embraces patience (ṣabr), satisfaction (ridā), praise (ḥamd) and many other of the acts of worship (‘ibādāt) of the Dīn.

¹ وَمَا بِكُمْ مِّنْ نُّعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ .

² وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ .

³ اِعْمَلُوا ءَالَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا .

⁴ وَمَا بِكُمْ مِّنْ نُّعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ .

Shukr is among the greatest qualities of the noble messengers (blessings and peace be upon them). Giving His due to Sayyiduna Ibrahim, Allah says:

شَاكِرًا لِأَنْعَمِهِ

Grateful for His favors. (16:121)

And also giving His due to Sayyiduna Nuh, He says:

إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا

Surely he was a grateful slave. (17:3)

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) was the best at realizing thankfulness (shukr), and he called upon his companions (may Allah be pleased with them) and all believers to achieve this great maqām. He showed them how to seek help from Allah with du‘a after every prayer and through dhikr and shukr. He said to Ma‘ādh bin Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him), “I exhort you, O Ma‘ādh, to say after every salat: O Allah, help me to remember You, to thank You, and to worship You in the best way.”¹ (Narrated by Abu Dawud in his *Sunan*)

Because of shukr’s high station it is difficult to ascend to it. To achieve it one needs struggle (mujāhadāt), sulūk (traveling a clear spiritual path) with ṣidq (sincerity), ṣabr (patience), and istiḳāmah (righteousness). For this reason the grateful and noble ones are rare, as Allah describes them in the Qur’an:

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرِينَ

And very few of My slaves are grateful. (34:13)

In contrast, Allah describes most of mankind as being ungrateful despite the blessings that He has bestowed upon them, and the vastness of His overflowing abundance and generosity. Allah the Exalted says:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ

And surely your Lord is the Lord of grace to men, but most of them are not grateful. (27:73)

For this reason, in the Qur’an Allah often reminds mankind of His great blessings and generosity. He often calls us to think about the universe, to be aware of what He has surrounded us—all the glorious blessings and wonderful beneficence. All of this is so that we thank Him properly. Allah says:

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers—you did not know anything—and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks. (16:78)

Allah describes the person possessing intellect. He enjoys mental maturity and perfection of humanness. Upon reaching the age of forty, he sees Allah’s blessings surrounding him, testifies to His overflowing abundance upon him, and takes refuge in Allah in complete humility so that Allah may give him success in his thankfulness. Allah says:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً قَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ

Until when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years, he says: My Lord! Grant me that I may give thanks for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases Thee. (46:15)

The Messenger of Allah (Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him) has made the station of the one who enjoys Allah’s provisions and thanks Him for them, the same as the station of the one who suffers through the performance of spiritual acts of worship with patience. He said, “The one who eats food and thanks Allah for

¹ اللَّهُمَّ اعْنِي عَلَى ذِكْرِكَ وَشُكْرِكَ وَحُسْنِ عِبَادَتِكَ .

it has the same station as the one who fasts with patience.” (Related by al-Tirmidhi in the *Book of al-Qiyāmah* from Abu Hurayrah.)

Thankfulness is the best means of affecting the continuance of blessings. It has been said, “Blessings are secured with shukr.” Ibn Ata’ Allah (may Allah have mercy upon him) said in his *Hikam* (Wise Sayings), “He who is not thankful for blessings runs the risk of losing them. He who is thankful for them has tied them down with their rope (i.e., with thankfulness).”

In contrast, meeting blessings with ungratefulness, unbelief, and denial brings about Allah’s wrath, His punishment, and the stripping away of His blessings. Allah says:

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ ءَامِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِّنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ
فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ

And Allah sets forth a parable: (Consider) a town safe and secure to which its means of subsistence come in abundance from every quarter; but it became ungrateful for Allah’s favors, therefore Allah made it to taste the utmost degree of hunger and fear because of what they wrought. (16:112)

Allah has promised the believers that His blessings will increase upon them if they are met with thankfulness. Allah says:

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more. (14:7)

The thankful one will bring good to himself when he thanks Allah. Allah says:

وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

And whoever is grateful, he is grateful only for his own soul, and whoever is ungrateful, then surely my Lord is Self-sufficient, Honored. (27:40)

The Şufi masters are realized by thankfulness and they know its great maqām. Abu Hamza al-Baghdadi (may Allah have mercy upon him) said:

When Allah opens a way of good for you, stick to it. Beware of gazing upon and being proud of it; rather, busy yourself with thanking the One who has given you this success. Looking at your success will cause you to fall from your maqām; however, busying yourself with thankfulness will bring you more of it. Allah says:

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more . . . (14:7)

Thus the Şufis knock on the door of thankfulness to Allah in every state and praise Him in all their affairs. They witness the Absolute Doer, the Generous Giver of Blessings, the Giver of all Good, the Merciful, the Noble Thankful One. They fall humbly at His doorstep, asking Him. In their hearts is the light of knowledge and on their tongues are ayats of praise and thankfulness. In their deeds are the brilliant rulings of the Sharī’ah. By this they are following in the footsteps of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and his noble shining companions (may Allah be pleased with them), and those who follow them in their correct and direct method.

Taşawwuf

Taşawwuf is a knowledge that defines how to travel the mystic path (sulūk) to the presence of the King of Kings. It is a knowledge that purifies man’s inner dimension from vices, adorning it with virtues or absenting the creation in the witnessing of the Real or with the returning to the traces (athār). Its beginning is knowledge, its middle is action, and its end is a gift (from the All-Merciful).

Taşawwuf is derived either from *al-şafā’* (the pure), because it revolves around *al-taşfiya* (purification); from *al-şifah* (the attribute), because it means to be described by perfections; or from *şufa*, in reference to the people of the Şufa at the Prophet’s Mosque, either because the Şufis resembled them in their perfections or because, like people of the Şufa, the Şufis wore wool (very rough clothing) and took very little from this

world because of their zuhd. The Şufis chose this way of dressing because it was most like the dress of the prophets. This last derivation is closer and clearer to the meaning than the others because wearing wool (şuf) is something that is clearly seen. If the derivation of the meaning of taşawwuf is related to other things than şuf, the meaning would be unseen and judging by the seen is better and clearer. It is said that someone is taşawwuf when he wears şuf, just as it is said that someone is taqammas when he wears a qamis (shirt). Being related to taşawwuf is to be called Şufi.

Sahl said (may Allah be pleased with him), “The Şufi is the one who is pure of turbidity, full of reflection, and has left mankind to be with Allah. Gold and mud are the same to him; that is, he has no desire for anything except his Master.”

Imam al-Junayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “The Şufi is like the earth: every dirty thing is thrown upon him but from him comes nothing except what is beautiful and good.” And he also said, “The Şufi is like the earth, he is stepped upon by both the pious and the shameless; he is like the sky, everything is shaded by him; and he is like the rain, he waters everything.”

Taqwā

Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Taqwā is beholding the states that are commensurate with one’s being alone with Allah.” This means that one avoids what is other than Allah while being in a state of stillness, and at the same time loving and feeling at ease with Him. Allah says: “Therefore have taqwā of Allah as much as you can. (64:16)”¹ That is, be godfearing with all of your ability. Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him) also said that taqwā was “to be able to show your poverty and complete need for Allah.”

Muhammad Sinjan (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Taqwā is leaving what is other than Allah.”

Commenting on Allah’s words “But to Him is acceptable taqwā on your part” (22:37),² Sahl said, “Taqwā is to separate from oneself with sincerity.” Others have also said that taqwā originates from avoiding what is prohibited and knowing and identifying the nafs. Therefore, as much as one is able to deny the nafs its desire and its portion, one will achieve certainty (yaqīn).

Al-Nuri says in a poem:

I fear You not out of
 Precaution for what awaits at life’s end.
 How can I fear that while You are my
 Companion, better than any other?
 Giving completely the consciousness its secrets
 While encompassing what is hidden in the consciousness.
 I exalt Your value so much that I value nothing
 Other than You, even if there is some paltry danger associated with it.

Tawāḍu‘

Imam al-Junayd (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked about tawāḍu‘ and he said, “It is lowering the wing (serving with humility) and breaking the side (abasing one’s self).”

Ruwayn (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Tawāḍu‘ is abasing the heart to the Knower of the Unseen.”

Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “The perfection of dhikr Allah is in witnessing, and the perfection of tawāḍu‘ is being pleased with Him.”

Another has said, “Tawāḍu‘ is accepting the Truth from the True and for the sake of the Truth.”

Another has said, “Tawāḍu‘ is being proud with little, accepting abasement, and bearing the weight of the people of the millah (nation).”

¹ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ .

² وَلَكِنْ يَنْالُهُ التَّقْوَى مِنْكُمْ .

Dhikr

The reality of dhikr is forgetting what is other than the One mentioned in dhikr. Allah says:

وَأَذْكُرُ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ

And remember your Lord when you forget. (18:24)

This means that if you forget other than Allah, you remember Allah.

The Prophet said, “Those who concentrate on the Unique One are the foremost.” When he was asked, “Who are the ones who concentrate on the Unique One?” he replied, “The men and women who make a lot of dhikr.”

The Mufrad (the Singular, the Unique) is the one with whom there is no other. Some of the masters have said that dhikr is getting rid of heedlessness (ghaflah). So if ghaflah is lifted dhikr is made, even if it is silent. Shaykh al-Junayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said in a poem:

I mentioned You, not because I forgot You, even for an instant
And the easiest dhikr is dhikr of the tongue.

Abu Qasim al-Baghdadi (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

Why would some of the nafs of the ‘ārafīn become impatient with making dhikr and seek ease in ideas, for thinking yields them no conclusion, and performing dhikr makes them happy? . . . The nafs of the ‘ārafīn considered the fruit of their dhikr of little value, so they didn’t endure their struggles. The honor they saw behind the ideas overwhelmed them and turned them away from enduring the difficulties of their mujāhadah.

He meant by saying “the nafs of the ‘ārafīn considered the fruit of dhikr of little value” that in every benefit gained from dhikr there is a portion for the nafs. Those who know, ignore the nafs and its portion, and focus their thoughts on Allah’s majesty, awe, generosity, and goodness. They think about what they have to do for Allah in showing His greatness and ignore what He will give them, out of respect for Him. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, reporting what Allah said to him, “He who busies himself with My remembrance so that he is too occupied to ask Me, I will give him the best of what I give those who ask.” One meaning of this hadith qudsi is that whoever is occupied with beholding His greatness is taken away from the dhikr of the tongue because all dhikr of the tongue is requesting. Another meaning is that beholding His greatness is bewildering and cuts one off from dhikr of Him. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “I can’t count the praises that are due You.”

Al-Nuri says in a poem:

I want continuous dhikr because I love Him so much
So amazing, there is so much love in dhikr.
And more amazing than this is absence of love sometimes
And the absence of dhikr is in being close and being far.

Al-Junayd said, “He who says Allah the High without beholding Him is a liar, indicating the truthfulness of Allah’s words: ‘We bear witness that you are most surely Allah’s messenger (63:1).’¹ Then he recited: ‘And Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars (63:1).’²”

Allah informs us that the hypocrites’ lied (in their hearts) although what they said was true. What they said was without beholding (i.e., they hadn’t witnessed the truth within themselves).

Another has said, “The heart is for beholding, and the tongue is to express what is beheld. So whoever expresses without beholding, he is a witness giving false testimony.” Someone said in a poem:

You are the one who makes me lose consciousness, not the dhikr
My dhikr will never get hold of my heart.
The dhikr will obscure You from my sight
If my thoughts occupy my mind (thinking).

¹ قَالُوا نَشْهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولَ اللَّهِ .

² وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَكَاذِبُونَ .

The meaning is that dhikr is the attribute of the dhākir (the one who makes dhikr); that is, “if I am absent in my dhikr, my absence is in me.” Only the slave’s own attributes veil the slave from beholding his Master.

Sari al-Saqati (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “I was a companion of a slave while traveling in the countryside. I saw that whenever he made dhikr of Allah his color changed to white. I said, “What I see amazes me. Whenever you make dhikr of Allah, you and what you wear change (i.e., change to white).” He said, “O my brother, if you were to make true dhikr for Allah, you and your clothes would also change.” Then he read the following lines of a poem:

We are reminded, although we don’t need to be reminded to make dhikr
But the breeze of closeness appears, so illuminates.
It is enough for me to remain with it for the sake of Him
When the truth about Him informs and leads the way.

Sari al-Saqati categorizes dhikr into three. The first is dhikr of the heart. It is when the remembered one is not forgotten though dhikr is still made. The second is dhikr focusing on the attributes of the remembered one (Allah). The third dhikr is beholding the remembered, thus annihilating the dhikr. For the characteristics of the remembered (Allah) annihilate the rememberer from his characteristics, thus annihilating the dhikr.

Faqr

Abu Muhammad al-Juraymi (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Faqr is not to demand the nonexistent so that you lose the existent.” Meaning, you ask for rizq only when fearing the inability to perform the fard (obligatory) without the rizq.

Ibn al-Jallā’ (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Faqr is that you don’t have, and when you do have, it is not for you. Allah expresses the meaning of this in the following ayah:

وَيُؤْتُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ

And they prefer (others) before themselves though poverty may afflict them. (59:9)

Abu Muhammad Ruwaym ibn Muhammad said, “Faqr is negating each existent thing, and leaving every loss without concern.”

Al-Kinani (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “When poverty is truly for the sake of Allah then being rich is truly for the sake of Allah because they are two states, each incomplete without the other.”

Al-Nuri (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “The faqīr (one who is poor) is characterized by sukūn (stillness) when he has nothing, and giving unselfishly when he has something, even when he is in need.”

Some of the masters have said that the faqīr is he who is denied companionship and prohibited from asking for help. The Prophet (Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him) said, “If he were to swear upon Allah, surely Allah would give him.” This hadith indicates that he does not swear (i.e., ask Allah for his own sake).

Al-Darraj (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

When I was looking for a container of kohl among my teacher’s things, I found a small piece of silver. I was surprised and bewildered. When my teacher returned, I mentioned that I had found a small piece of silver among his possessions. He said, “Did you see it? Give it to me.” Then he said, “Take it, and buy something with it.” I said to him, “By Allah, what does your being in possession of a piece of silver mean?” He answered, “Allah has never given me any gold or silver other than this. I intended to keep it and tie it to my shroud in order to return it back to Allah, the Mighty and Majestic.”

Abu al-Qasim al-Baghdadi (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

I heard al-Dawri saying, “We were with Abu al-Hasan al-Nuri (may Allah be pleased with him) on the night of īd in the Shunizi Mosque when a man entered the mosque and asked al-Nuri, “O Shaykh, tomorrow is the īd, what are you going to wear?” The Shaykh answered with the following poem:

They said, “Tomorrow is the īd, what are you going to wear?”
I said, “An old piece of cloth to cover His slave’s leg, accepting
Poverty and patience, my two robes—under them
A heart that sees its Lord on īds and Fridays.”
Clothes are worn most appropriately
On the day you visit the One who gave them to you.

All the time is mourning if You are absent, O my hope
And it is īd whenever You are seeing and listening to me.

Some of the distinguished were asked, “What would prevent the rich from helping a particular group of poor people?” They answered that there were three things that would prevent the rich from helping them. The first is that what the rich possess is not clean (ṭayyib), while the poor in this case are specially chosen by Allah. Whatever is given to the People of Allah will be accepted, but Allah will not accept what is not clean. The second is that while these poor are worthy (of receiving help), the others (who possess wealth) are denied the barakat and reward of helping them (because they are not worthy). The third is that these poor people are intended for trial, so the Truth prevents help coming to them from others, in order to complete His intention for them.

A warrior was heard saying:

I said to one of the poor upon whom I saw signs of hunger and suffering, “Why don’t you ask people for alms so that they can feed you?” He replied, “I am afraid that if I were to ask them and they refused, they would not be among the successful (prosperous in this world and the next). For I have heard that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) has said, “If the one asking is truly sincere, then whoever denies him will not be successful.”

Qurb

Sari al-Saqati (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked about qurb and he said, “It is obedience.”

Qurb is to feel free towards Him while humbling oneself to Him, for Allah says:

وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ

And make obeisance and draw near. (96:19)

Ruwaym (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked about qurb and said, “It is the removal of every obstacle.”

Qurb is to see His actions in yourself; meaning, you see His actions and gifts upon you, completely disappearing in them, thus not seeing your own actions and efforts. Another meaning is that you do not see yourself doing any action. For Allah said to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him):

وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى

And you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it was Allah who smote. (8:17)

And

فَلَمْ تَقْتُلْهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ

So you did not slay them, but it was Allah who slew them. (8:17)

Al-Nuri wrote the following poem:

Being gathered in You in my annihilation showed me intimacy
And being in fanā’ from everything else but You is intimacy.
I have no patience with being away from You, I cannot help it
I must be with You, and there is no way to escape You.
Those hoping for intimacy, You reach out to them;
Then why am I so far from You while all are perishing?

The author means by this poem: “My state showed me that being gathered with You and being annihilated from all other than You is intimacy with You. Jama’ (gatheredness) and fanā’ (annihilation) are two attributes; qurb does not come from any quality that I possess, rather it comes from You.”

Al-Nuri (may Allah show him mercy) also said:

Some people sought intimacy with You through their actions and obediences, so You reached out to them in Your generosity. I don’t have actions by which I can seek intimacy with You. I shall perish in longing to be close to you. There is no way for me to get to You from where I am.

Al-Nuri also wrote in a poem:

O He whom I see, and think He is
Close to me, though reaching Him is precious, requiring a mighty effort.
If in myself I express despair of reaching Him, I am brought back
To Him by the beholding of He whose wonders never end.

He wrote concerning the meaning: “Whenever I felt despair, I was brought back through His overflowing generosity with which He began with me.”

Al-Shibli (may Allah be pleased with me) said, “I am bewildered by You. Take me by my hand, O Guide of he who is bewildered by You.”

Maḥabbah

Al-Junayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Maḥabbah is a longing of the heart.” The meaning is that one’s heart inclines toward Allah the High and toward what belongs to Allah, without affectation.

Another has said, “Maḥabbah is being in agreement.” Maḥabbah is obeying Allah in what He orders, and abstaining from what He prohibits, taking pleasure in His judgment and decree.

Muhammad al-Kittani (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Maḥabbah is giving unselfishly to the Beloved.”

Another has said, “Maḥabbah is giving unselfishly what you love to Him who you love.”

Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Nabaji said, “Maḥabbah is a pleasure in the created one and perishing in the Creator.” The meaning is that there is no portion for you (the created) and there is no secondary cause for your love, your love is purely for His sake.

Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Whoever loves Allah, he is living; and whoever loves, he is not living.” The meaning of “he is living” is that his life is good because the lover finds pleasure in whatever he gets from the beloved, whether he likes what he gets or not. The meaning of “he is not living” is that his life is lost to him because in his constant effort to reach Him, he is in perpetual fear of being cut off from Him.

Some of the foremost have said:

Maḥabbah is pleasure; however, the Truth is not an object of pleasure. This is because when the reality manifests it astonishes, consummates, and bewilders. The slave’s love for Allah is manifested by his exalting Him by means of the unfolding of secrets. It is not considered permissible to exalt anything other than Allah. Allah’s love for the slave is His testing His slave by means of Himself so that the slave won’t be good for anything other than for Allah.

The meaning of “the slave won’t be good for anything other than for Allah” is that nothing remains for him to observe or consider other than Allah. He is completely occupied with Allah.

Some of them have said:

Maḥabbah is of two kinds. The first is love by admission, which is for both the elite and the common. The second kind of love is through ecstasy when one is subjected to severe trials. He cannot see himself or others, he doesn’t see causes or conditions, and he is completely occupied in seeing what belongs to Allah or what is from Him.

The following poem is sung about this:

I love You with two kinds of love: passionate love
And a love which You deserve.
As for the passionate love,
It is my preoccupation with remembering You from other than You.
As for the other love which You deserve,
It is that I don’t see the universe unless I see You.
There is no praise in either love for me
But praise is only for You in both of them.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Samad said, “Maḥabbah is what blinds and deafens. It blinds one from seeing other than the Loved One so that he cannot see anything other than the Sought-after.”

The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “Your love for something blinds and deafens you.”

The following is sung about this:

Love has deafened me from any evening entertainment except being with Him.
I don't know anyone else whose love has caused such deafness.
I became blind to all concerns except Him.
Love causes blindness, and will kill if it remains concealed.

Another poem is the following:

Overwhelming love is a condition which cannot be fought against.
The noble one cannot fight against it, even after cautioned.
If the adversities it engenders are set right, pleasure is obtained
If, in this balance there is increase, illumination results.

Yaqīn

Al-Junayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Yaqīn is the lifting of doubt."

Al-Nuri (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Yaqīn is beholding."

Ibn Ata' Allah al-Sakandarī (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Yaqīn is a state against which there is no opposition at all times."

Dhu al-Nun (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "All that is seen by the eyes is related to knowledge, and what is known by the hearts is related to yaqīn."

It is said, "Yaqīn is the eye of the heart."

It is said, "Yaqīn is connecting with the evident and disconnecting from what is between you and the evident." The meaning of this is in Haritha's words: "It is as if I am looking at the throne of my Lord prominently displayed." Its vision is connected with the unseen, and all obstacles between Haritha and the unseen are lifted.

Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Yaqīn is unveiling." He also said, "If I had lifted the cover, my yaqīn wouldn't have increased."

Courtesies of the Ṭarīq

Two commentaries on the famous poem:

**“The Pleasure of Life Is Only in the
Company of the Fuqarā’ ”**

by

Shaykh Abu Madyan Shu‘ayb al-Maghrabī

may Allah sanctify his secret

The First:

A poem in five-line verse

by Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Ĥatīmī al-Ṭā’ī
al-Andalusī

may Allah sanctify his secret

Followed by:

The Model of Success in the Courtesies of the Ṭarīq

by Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Muhammad
‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah al-Sakandarī

may Allah sanctify his secret

A Five-Line Verse Poem

What follows is a five-line verse poem composed by Shaykh al-Akbar. Its first three lines are his commentary on the next two lines (in bold) which are from Shaykh Abu Madyan's original poem.

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

O you who seek the pleasure of drawing near, if you wish all good to be seen upon you, the one who is consulted is honest, so listen to the news.

The pleasure of life is only in the company of the fuqarā' – they are the sultans, the masters, and the princes.

People who are content with the simplest clothing and diet, they never think about this world. Their chests are free of *waswas*.

Therefore, keep their company and have adab in their assemblies. Leave your portion behind you whenever they send you forward.

Take their ṭarīq if you are following them. Leave your claims. Be careful, and avoid being critical of what they desire. Seek their benefit.

Seize the moment and always be present with them. Know that ridā is bestowed on those who are present.

Be pleased with them, by them you will rise and arrive. If they keep you, stay. If they ask you to vanish, disappear. If they don't feed you, be hungry. If they feed you, eat.

Cling to silence unless you are questioned. Then say, "I have no knowledge," and be concealed in ignorance.

Don't criticize the faults of people, even if it is clear and seen. Look with the eye of perfection. Don't find fault with anyone.

Do not look at faults unless you see a clear fault appear in you, but it is concealed.

You will get what you are seeking from adab. Humble yourself to them, without doubt. But that is modesty in place of adab.

Lower your head and ask forgiveness without cause. Stand apologizing in just treatment.

If you want from them a light for the way, avoid all the actions that they dislike. Keep yourself doing good actions.

If a fault appears from you, then apologize and lift the face of your apology for what has flowed in you from you.

Praise them with compliments and say, "Cure with your reconciliation using the ointment of your pardon the wounds you caused. I am the one at fault, give me your genuine advice."

Say, "Your insignificant slave is more entitled to your pardon." Act kindly in forgiveness and adhere to gentleness, O fuqara!

Don't fear their himmah if you commit a sin. Higher and greater is their relationship to you than to cause you any harm. They are not tyrants that their power will harm you.

Take for granted their goodness for that is their nature. Fear neither overtaking nor harm from them.

If you wish to tread the path of guidance by means of them, work hard to immediately satisfy what they demand of you. Be careful not to put it off until tomorrow.

Always be generous in singing the praises of the brothers in the senses and the meaning. Lower the eye if someone slips.

Be truthful with them, avoid unclean ways, because they are the people of truth, they are the masters and leaders. Pardon every one of them who harms you.

Watch the shaykh carefully in his states, perhaps a trace of his approval will be seen on you.

Ask the shaykh to make du'a for you. You may gain from this. By his barakah, you may obtain what you wish for. Keep a good opinion of him and realize his true inviolability.

Advance with seriousness and leap to serve him. Perhaps he will be pleased, and beware lest you become irritated.

Keep his advice. Increase yourself by his guidance. If he calls you, answer him immediately. Lower your voice to gentleness in obedience to him.

The pleasure of the Creator is in his pleasure and his obedience. He will be pleased with you, so then beware of leaving it.

Be with him who is diplomatic with the nafs in this time, for surely the nafs despairs of them, for their trade with people is valueless.

Know that the Path of the People is obscure needing study, and the state of the one who claims it today is as you see.

It is my right to be sad if they leave me, because I am used to being with them. I will always be sad when I am cut off from their company.

When will I see them and where will I see them? When will my ear hear some news of them?

Separation stops me from being worthy of them. I came from them, so blame me. I am not blaming them. O my Lord, grant me righteousness so that I may spend the night in discourse with them.

Whom do I have to help me, and how is it possible for someone like me to compete with them in wells about which I do not recognize impurity?

Their glorious deeds are beyond description and number, the seen ones proving the existence of the unseen ones. Their glory in this world is by their obedience to Allah.

I love them and treat them gently and I offer them my heart's blood – especially a party of them.

A people who are made leaders of all of creation by their acts of obedience; those who sit with them acquire their courtesies. He who absents himself from their company, his portion is misery.

A people of noble qualities – wherever they sit, a fragrance remains in the place after them.

Try to be with them, do not separate from them, and increase in love. If you absent yourself from them, cry with regret and sorrow. They are a group with whom a young man gains honor from being with them.

Taşawwuf is guided by their character in the Paths. Excellent harmony is theirs that delights my eye.

I pulled the tail of my robe being proud of my love for them when they accepted me as a small slave in their love. Their right is in their love, I am not their equal.

They are the people of my love and my lovers who are among those who trail the coat-tails of might in magnificence.

I cut my heart into pieces, making poetry about their love. I asked Allah earnestly through them, hoping that Allah would forgive me and all the Muslims together.

May I be reunited with them in Allah, and my wrong actions forgiven and pardoned in Him.

O everyone who has been in this circle with us, I ask Allah through them to erase our sins.

Then blessings be upon the Chosen, Sayyiduna Muhammad, the best of those who fulfilled and who vowed.

The Model of Success in the Courtesies of the Ṭarīq

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

The Shaykh, the Realized in Allah (‘ārif bi Allah), the Able, the Recognized, the Crown of the Realized, the Tongue of the Theologians (Mutakallimīn), the Imam of His Time, the Unique of His Era, Taj al-Dīn Abu al-Faḍl Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah al-Sakandarī, may Allah be pleased with him, and give us benefit through him, amīn, says the following:

The praise belongs to Allah who is alone in creating and organizing, the Unique (al-Wāḥid) in judgment and decree. He is the King (al-Malik) who has no minister in his kingdom, the Owner (al-Mālik) from whose dominion nothing is excluded large or small, the Sanctified (al-Mutaqaddis) in the perfection of His attributes from resemblance and similarity, in the perfection of His essence far above likeness and representation, and the Omniscient (al-‘Alīm) from whom nothing in consciousness can be hidden. “Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware” (Qur’an: Surat al-Mulk, ayah 14). He is the Knowing (al-‘Ālim) whose knowledge surrounds the beginning and the end of matters, the All-Hearing (al-Samī‘) who in His hearing distinguishes between the apparent and the hidden sounds (i.e., He hears both what man can hear and what he cannot hear), the Provider (al-Razzāq) who conveys nourishment to the creation, the Self-Existing (al-Qayyūm) who takes responsibility for caring for created beings in all conditions, the Bestower (al-Wahhāb) who grants to the souls the existence of their lives, the All-Powerful (al-Qadīr) who

brings them back after their death, and the Reckoner (al-Ḥasīb) who meets out reward or punishment according to mankind's good or bad deeds on the day they return to Him. Glory be to Him who by His generosity provides for the servants even before their existence, provides them with their sustenance whether they accept or deny His existence. He supports everything in existence with His gift, maintaining the world by extending its continuance (baqā'). He is apparent by means of His wisdom on the earth and His decree in His heaven. I witness that there is no god but Allah alone, without partner, as a servant of Allah who surrenders to His decree and accepts His judgment. I witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger, the Preferred One over all of His prophets, the Chosen by virtue of his great giving and generosity, the Opener and the Seal – titles given only to him, the Intercessor for all of mankind when the Real gathers them for judgment. May Allah bless him, his Family, and his Companions who held strongly to their loyalty to him, and grant them abundant peace.

O brother, may Allah place you among the people of His affection. May He present you with the existence of His nearness, and give you a taste from the drink of the people of His love. May He secure you from being turned away from Him by a continuous presence with Him. May He connect you to Him through His servants, those upon whom He has shown special favor by conferring upon them His messages. Know that He healed their broken hearts when they came to know that the eyes could not reach Him because of the light of His self-manifestations (tajaliyyāt). He opened the gardens of nearness then blew from them upon their hearts spiritual visions of His fragrant breezes. He showed them what He had already prepared for them, so they submitted to His command. He exposed the secret of His kindness (luṭf), and thus they left argument and obstinacy, submitting to Him and relying upon Him.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has said, "A man will be gathered on the Day of Gathering upon the Dīn of his intimate companion. So let each one of you look to whom he is keeping intimate company." Dear brother, be intimate only with someone whose state raises you and whose speech shows you the way to Allah. Such a person is the faqīr, stripped of otherness, drawing close to the Master. There is no sweetness except in his intimacy; there is no happiness except in his service and company. Thus, the Shaykh, the Realized, Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

The pleasure of life is only in the company of the fuqarā' – they are the sultans, the masters, and the princes.

That is, the spiritual traveler on the way to his Lord and Master has no sweetness in his life except in keeping the company of the fuqarā' (those poor in their need for Allah). The word fuqarā' is the plural of faqīr. The faqīr has stripped himself of attachments, turned away from them. He no longer has a direction (qiblah) or an intention except Allah the Most High. He denounces everything other than Him. He is realized in the reality of "There is no god except Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." Thus his companionship causes you to taste the sweetness of the path (Ṭarīq). He pours into each of your hearts a most delicious nectar from the drink of the People. He acquaints you with the path, cuts short the infliction of punishment, and removes impediments from your heart. Through his spiritual aspiration (himmah), he lifts you to the highest of ranks. Whoever is like this is the sultan over the reality, the master over the people of the path, and the prince over the people of inner sight (baṣīrah).

So, O wayfarer (sālik), don't diverge from his path. O diligent sālik, strive to reach this companion. Keep his company and be courteous when sitting in his gatherings. By the blessing (barakah) of his companionship, he will remove every impediment. As he (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

Therefore, keep their company and have adab in their assemblies. Leave your portion behind you whenever they send you forward.

That is, keep the company of the fuqarā', maintain courtesy with them when attending their gatherings. Surely, the assembly is the apparent form (shabāh) and adab is its soul. If you unite them, you seize the benefit of keeping the shaykh's company; otherwise, your companionship is but a corpse. Is there any hope of attaining benefit from the dead?

One of the most important courtesies of the gathering is leaving your portion behind you. Do not spend your himmah except in obedience to their orders. As a result, your efforts will be appreciated. If you take on this character, you will quickly seize the reward of presence. Being sincere in this, your degree will rise and your himmah be exalted. About this Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

Seize the moment and always be present with them. Know that ridā is bestowed on those who are present.

That is, utilize the time being in the company of the fuqarā' and always be present with them in heart and body. As a result, their spiritual nourishment will easily enter you and their benefits flow over you. Your

outwardness will be made healthy by their courtesies, and your inwardness illuminated by the adornment of their lights. Surely, by keeping company, qualities are acquired. If you sit with a sad person, you become sad, and if you sit with a happy person, you become happy. If you sit with the heedless, heedlessness comes to you. Surely, misery will not come to someone who keeps the company of these people. So how can those who serve them, love them, and hold intimate talk with them have any distress. The best that can be said about this is the following:

Because of their great rank and honor, my masters' feet are on the heads;

Even if I am not one of them, just by loving them I get rank and honor.

Know that this is satisfaction (*riḍā*). This station is bestowed upon those who are present with them by means of adab, excluding the nafs, and adorning oneself with humility and brokenness. So exclude yourself if you are among them. If you enter their gathering, be low and broken, then you will taste the sweetness of presence. Be aided by holding to silence. The lights of joy will dawn upon you. Gladness will flow over you. As Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

Cling to silence unless you are questioned. Then say, "I have no knowledge," and be concealed in ignorance.

The state rises for the one who has the quality of being silent in the company of the people of *ṭarīqah*. According to them, silence is of two kinds: silence of the tongue and silence of the heart. Both of them must be present in the path. He who silences his heart while his tongue speaks, speaks with wisdom. He who silences his tongue and his heart, his secret is manifest to him, his Lord speaks with him. This is the goal of silence. The speech of the shaykh points to that. So cling to silence, O *sālik*, unless you are questioned. If you are questioned, return to your origin and connection and say, "I have no knowledge," and cover yourself with ignorance. The lights of knowledge from God's presence (*al-ʿilm al-ladunī*) will rise within you. Surely, whenever you acknowledge your ignorance and return to your origin, knowledge of the nafs dawns upon you. If you know it then you know your Lord, as it is related in the hadith: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." All of this is from the benefits of silence and adhering to it adabs. So be silent and be courteous and cling to the door – you will be among His beloveds.

O brother, rise with high *himmah* to the door of your Master. Being realized in your slavehood, His resplendent lights will shine upon you. The Shaykh, Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him), indicates this when he says:

Do not look at faults unless you see a clear fault appear in you, but it is concealed.

That is, be realized in your attributes of poverty, inability, and lowliness. When you are realized in these, you will witness faults but they will be covered. You will gain the favor of the attributes of your Master appearing within you, as it has been said: "Glory be to He who conceals the secret of slavehood." Now understand from this the secret meaning of Allah's words: "Glory be to He who took *His slave* for a journey." He didn't say "His Messenger" or "His Prophet."

O brother, be broken and abased by the *Ṭarīq*. Don't let other than this be seen in your state or speech. There is nothing you can say that will remove any hindrance from you. Ask for forgiveness from anything that comes into your heart concerning slavehood to Allah. Fully admit this and stand in fair and just judgment against yourself. By this, the highest stations will be reached and your humanity will be enriched. The Shaykh (may Allah be pleased with him) says the following about this:

Lower your head and ask forgiveness without cause. Stand apologizing in just treatment.

That is, be humble and broken. Put the noblest of what you have – your head – on what is lowest – the earth – thereby achieving the station of nearness. It has been related in a hadith: "The closest the servant of Allah can get to Him is when he is in *sajdah*." Because the servant of Allah approaches Him through humility, brokenness, and discarding human attributes, always see yourself as guilty of committing wrongs, even if there is nothing upon you to show this guilt. Surely, the servant of Allah is never free from fault. Stand in a state of just treatment for your sins, feeling shame for your evil actions and faults. If He deals with an ordinary human being in this manner, wherein His love for him makes his faults and evil actions seem as good deeds, then how will He treat a true friend, one who realizes Him and has no friend other than Him. This has been mentioned in the hadith: "O Allah, You are the companion of the traveler, the one who is left behind (*khalīfah*) to take care of family, possessions, and children."

O brother, be ready for this treatment (transaction) with your brothers, the *fuqarā'*, so that it will be for you a *mi'rāj* (night journey, referring to the *mi'raj* of the Prophet) by which you gain access to a transaction with the

Lord of heaven. You will gain acceptance among mankind and the Creator, and the transaction will be purified for you. The lights of realities will dawn upon you, as he (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

If a fault appears from you, then apologize and lift the face of your apology for what has flowed in you from you.

Say, “Your insignificant slave is more entitled to your pardon.” Act kindly in forgiveness and adhere to gentleness, O fuqara!

Take for granted their goodness for that is their nature. Fear neither overtaking nor harm from them.

That is, your state should always be humbleness, brokenness, seeking pardon, and asking for Allah’s forgiveness, whether you have committed a sin or not. If a fault is seen upon you, admit it and ask for forgiveness. When someone makes tawbah from a sin, it is as if he has not committed it at all. This doesn’t mean that you don’t make sins, rather, it means that you don’t persist in making them. It has been transmitted that “with Allah, the moaning (of regret) of the guilty is better than the humming of those who are glorifying Allah, but with self-admiration and pride.” I have said this in the Hikam: “Sometimes He opens the door of obedience for you but not the door of acceptance; or sometimes He condemns you to wrong action, and it turns out to be a cause of arriving at Him.” “A disobedience that bequeaths humiliation and extreme need is better than an obedience that bequeaths self-infatuation and pride.” With your admission and asking for forgiveness, apologize for what has preceded from you, so that will be the cause for erasing the sin and leading to acceptance.

Be humble, modest, and broken, and say, “Your slaves are more deserving of your pardon.” Certainly the slave has no other door than the door of his Master.

Then he says (may Allah be pleased with him) that the fuqarā’ are more deserving of pardon. It is their practice while always remaining kind and generous. This is their way with their friends and it is natural to them. How can it not be their disposition since they are taking on the character of their Master. It has been narrated: “Take on the attributes of Allah.”

Fear no harm from them, O sālik, the one in their company, and hold to their coat tails. “They are the people in whose company one will never feel unhappy or miserable.” If you know that, O sālik, take on their good qualities and be generous with your brothers. Ignore their mistakes. In this way you will take the best of their qualities. He says (may Allah be pleased with him):

Always be generous in singing the praises of the brothers in the senses and the meaning. Lower the eye if someone slips.

That is, be generous to your brothers materially, such as by giving money, or in meaning. Don’t be stingy with anything that you can give to them, for generosity is the heart of the Ṭarīq. All obstacles will be removed from the heart of the one who takes on these qualities.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir says, “O brothers, I didn’t arrive to Allah by night prayers, day fasts, or acquiring knowledge. Rather, I reached Allah by generosity, humility, and purity of heart.” These words of the Shaykh prove that generosity is the foundation. And with the addition of humility, planting the seeds of success will be complete for the sālik. If he has these two qualities, his heart will be free of attachment. All hindrances will be removed from his way. It has been narrated in a hadith: “Surely there are rooms in Paradise whose outside is seen from the inside and whose inside is seen from the outside. Allah has prepared them for the one who is gentle in his speech, feeds others, and is consistent in standing in prayer at night while the people are asleep.”

Think deeply about this hadith, O brother, wherein the Prophet first mentions gentleness of speech, pointing to humility, then feeding others, indicating generosity, and finally prayer. Add to prayer, fasting, as indicated by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir. So, my brother, rise to these glorious deeds. Then add to them the best of good manners and ignoring the faults of brothers if you see them, looking only at their good actions. Abu Madyan says in one of his early wisdoms: “Seeing the good actions of the slaves of Allah and absenting oneself from their bad actions is one of the perfections of tawhīd.”

O brother, acquiring these honorable qualities make you eligible to be with the shaykh. So, get up and move to his door. Observe him with exalted himmah. The Shaykh (may Allah be pleased with him) indicates this, saying:

Watch the Shaykh carefully in his states, perhaps a trace of his approval will be seen on you.

That is, if you acquire the good manners which have been mentioned and arrive at the shaykh with your poverty and brokenness, holding fast to the traces leading to the steps (to his door), observe his states. Strive for the attainment of his pleasure. Be broken and submit to him at all times. For he is an antidote and a cure. Surely, the hearts of the shaykhs are the antidotes of the Ṭarīqs. Anyone who has had the good fortune of reaching him, gets his desires fulfilled by him and is delivered from every obstacle. O brother, struggle in witnessing this meaning, for perhaps some traces of his appreciation of your state will be seen upon you. Some of those who have arrived have said, “Among the most difficult privations is being with the awliyā’ Allah without getting their acceptance.” If this happens to you, it is caused by nothing other than your impoliteness, not their meanness nor their deficiency. As I have said in the Hikam: “The matter is not making a request. What really matters is that it bequeaths good adab.”

A sultan who visited the tomb of Abu Yazīd (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Is there anyone here who has met Abu Yazīd?” An old man was pointed out to the sultan. The sultan asked him, “Have you heard anything that he said?” The old man said, “Yes, Abu Yazīd said, ‘Whoever visits me will not be burned by the Fire of Hell.’” The sultan was amazed by this, and exclaimed, “How can Abu Yazīd say such a thing when Abu Jahl, who saw the Prophet, is burning in the Fire of Hell?” The old man answered the sultan, saying, “Abu Jahl did not see the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace); rather, he saw the orphan of Abu Talib. If he had seen him the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), he would not be burning in the Fire of Hell.” The sultan understood and admired what the old man said. This means that Abu Jahl never looked at the Prophet with respect and honor, believing him to be the Messenger of Allah. If he had seen him with this meaning, he would not be burned with fire. Abu Jahl looked at him with spite and contempt, believing that he was only the orphan of Abu Talib, so his seeing the Prophet did not benefit him. And if you, O brother, meet the qutb of the time without adab, this meeting will have no benefit for you. In fact, it may have more harm in it than benefit. So have adab in front of the shaykh and struggle to travel the best ways of conduct (sulūk). Apply what you know with seriousness and effort. With sincerity, rise to serve him in order to become one of the masters.

Advance with seriousness and leap to serve him. Perhaps he will be pleased, and beware lest you become irritated.

The pleasure of the Creator is in his pleasure and his obedience. He will be pleased with you, so then beware of leaving it.

Meaning, rise to serve the shaykh with seriousness. Maybe you will gain his pleasure and become a master among the masters. Beware of showing displeasure or impatience, for this will spoil what you have gained. Cling to the steps leading to his door, morning and evening, in order to gain his friendship.

O sālik, if you gain his pleasure, Allah will be pleased with you, and you will gain more than what you hoped for. Being obedient to him leads you to being obedient to your Master and gaining His pleasure. In addition, you gain an abundance of his miracles.

Hold fast to service of the shaykh when you achieve arrival to him. Joy had engulfed you from all directions when Allah introduced you to him.

“Know that the Ṭarīq of the People is obscure and needs to be studied. The state of the one who claims it today is as you see.” But, if divine concern helps you, you will win and smell the fragrant breeze from Madinah al-Munawwarah (ṭaybah), more fragrant than the strongest scent of musk. Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

Know that the Path of the People is obscure needing study, and the state of the one who claims it today is as you see.

When will I see them and where will I see them? When will my ear hear some news of them?

Whom do I have to help me, and how is it possible for someone like me to compete with them in wells about which I do not recognize impurity?

I love them and treat them gently and I offer them my heart’s blood – especially a party of them.

The Shaykh starts by making the sālik look forward to the way of his people. He informs them that their Ṭarīq is obscure, needing study, and the state of those who claim it today are as you see in this period. It is as if the himmah of people is weak, and therefore, they lose hope of reaching the Path because it is so obscure and precious, hard of access. It is as though the Path were from a vanishing age. The Ṭarīq is only obtained by one individual at a time. This is the well-known sunnah (way). Like valuable jewelry, it is not easily found. Because of its scarcity, people often think it is nonexistent. The people of the Ṭarīq are hidden in the world like laylat al-qadr is hidden in the month of Ramaḍān, or like the hour of jumu‘ah in its day until the seeker

makes an effort to reach it. Surely, he who is serious finds what he is looking for, and he who knocks insistently on the door will go through it.

After he said there must be a shaykh in the Ṭarīq, I asked, “How can you tell us to find him and serve him when it is said the presence of the shaykh is like red sulphur or a legendary bird. Who is going to find this bird while it is nonexistent. How can you order me to reach someone with such a state?” He said, “If you are true in your quest, like a child suffering from thirst, you will never be satisfied until you achieve your intention.” The Shaykh indicates that the shaykh exists. How can’t he exist while the building of the world is by means of those like him: the world is like a person and the awliya are its soul. Since the world exists, they exist. But, because of their hiddenness and lack of outwardness it is judged that they are missing.

So struggle and be truthful in your quest, you will find what you are seeking. Seek help for that quest from the One who knows the unseen. Surely, gaining what one seeks is not possible except through His generosity and kindness. If He leads you to the shaykh, He leads you to Himself, as I have said in the *Hikam*: “Glory be to Him who does not make the evidence leading to His awliya, except as an evidence leading to Himself, and Who does not lead to them except him whom He wants to arrive to Him.”

After the Shaykh (may Allah be pleased with him) mentions that the Ṭarīq is precious and hard of access, and that its people have disappeared, he begins to feel regret for not having met them when he had the chance. However, his belief that he will not achieve this, and thereby be honored, is the result of his humility and brokenness – he sees himself as unworthy and lowly. This is the state of one who knows himself by himself. He is complete in his knowledge of his Lord. He is adorned with inrushes (wāridāt) of His sanctity into his heart because he does not see for himself any state or speech. He sees himself less than everything. This is the complete vision. The poet says:

The more knowledge one has, the humbler one becomes;
While the more one’s ignorance increases, the more one feels elevated.
Just as the green branch laden with ripe fruit is easily reached;
While the branch without fruit is out of reach.

Look at Shaykh Abu Madyan and his high status in the Ṭarīq. Although twelve thousand murīds have arrived through his tarbiya (spiritual education), notice his humility and abasement. The branches from the tree of his ma‘rifah hang low, descending to the earth in humility and brokenness until he sees that he is not even worthy of meeting with the people of the Ṭarīqah. This abasement increases his ascension, for the deeper the roots of a tree, the higher it grows.

So, be humble in the Ṭarīq. Take this great lineage from a fully realized ‘ārif, it will remove all obstacles from your way.

After this Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him) says, “I love them . . .” Meaning: “Even though I am not one of them, I love them.” He who loves a people is one of them, as stated in the hadith: “A person is with those whom he loves.” The poet also says:

I love the righteous people, although I am not one of them;
Maybe I get shafā‘ by being with them.
I hate him whose commodity is disobedience;
Even though we are together in this commodity of disobedience.

These are the qualities of the People and their attributes. Therefore their rank is elevated and their gifts increased, as he (may Allah be pleased with him) describes:

A people of noble qualities – wherever they sit, a fragrance remains in the place after them.
Taşawwuf is guided by their character in the Paths. Excellent harmony is theirs that delights my eye.
They are the people of my love and my lovers who are among those who trail the coat-tails of might in magnificence.
May I be reunited with them in Allah, and my wrong actions forgiven and pardoned in Him.
Then blessings be upon the Chosen, Sayyiduna Muhammad, the best of those who fulfilled and who vowed.

That is, they are a people of noble qualities and their himmah is great. Wherever they sit, they leave behind their beautiful fragrant scent. Wherever they go, the sun of their knowledge shines and hearts are illuminated. By them, the dunya and the ākhīrah are made good. By their character, Tasawwuf leads the eager sālik to the Ṭarīq. There, he is able to carry on in his sulūk in a praiseworthy manner. Therefore, theirs is the best

gathering. Everyone who looks, likes what he sees; they work hard to achieve every complete and subtle meaning until the lights of inner sight are adorned with their kohl.

The Shaykh also says, “They are the people of my affection and love . . .” One only loves one’s own kind, or one with whom there is a kinship. These words indicate that he is one of them, from the same special clay. What he has already mentioned of modesty and brokenness is an evidence of his realization of this glory and pride. So we ask Allah to lead us to the best of spiritual paths.

Then he makes du‘a and asks that he be included among them for Allah. He asks to be pardoned for his sins. We also ask Allah the complete blessing and peace upon Our Master Muhammad, the Chosen One, the Best of Those Who Fulfilled and Vowed, the Most Noble Neighbor, and upon his Family and Companions, the righteous masters, the Followers, and their followers to goodness until the last day. These are the best meanings we could get from this poem. But we admit that we have not fully obtained its meaning. Our intentions were good and deeds are fulfilled according to intentions. And Allah knows best.

Terms

adab	أَدَبٌ	courtesy
‘amal ṣāliḥ; pl., a‘māl ṣāliḥah	عَمَلٌ صَالِحٌ؛ أَعْمَالٌ صَالِحَةٌ	good action
‘ārif; pl., ārifīn	عَارِفٌ؛ عَارِفِينَ	spiritually awakened
‘ibādah; pl., ‘ibādāt	عِبَادَةٌ؛ عِبَادَاتٌ	act of worship
‘ubudiya	عِبْدِيَّةٌ	slavehood
athār	أَثَارٌ	traces
abrār	أَبْرَارٌ	pious
bayt al-māl	بَيْتُ الْمَالِ	the treasury
bid‘	بِدْعٌ	innovation
dhikr; dhākir	ذِكْرٌ؛ ذَاكِرٌ	remembrance of Allah; one who remembers Allah
Dīn	دِينٌ	religion
dunya	دُنْيَا	this world
fanā’	فَنَاءٌ	annihilation
faqīr	فَقِيرٌ	poor
fard	فَرَضٌ	obligatory
ghaybah	غَيْبَةٌ	backbiting
ghazwa	غَزْوَةٌ	battle
ḥalāl	حَالَالٌ	permissible
ḥamd	حَمْدٌ	praise
ḥarām	حَرَامٌ	forbidden
ḥasanah	حَسَنَةٌ	goodness
himmah	هِمَّةٌ	spiritual aspiration
ḥubb	حُبٌّ	love
īd	عِيدٌ	festival
ikhhlāṣ; mukhlīṣ	إِخْلَاصٌ؛ مُخْلِصٌ	sincerity; sincere one
īmān	إِيمَانٌ	belief
istiḳāmah	إِسْتِقَامَةٌ	righteousness
jama‘	جَمْعٌ	gatheredness

Jannah	الْجَنَّةُ	the Garden of Paradise
Ka'bah	الْكَعْبَةَ	House of Allah in Makkah
khawf	خَوْفٌ	fear
khulafā'	خُلَفَاءُ	successors, caliphs
maḥabbah	مَحَبَّةٌ	love
makrūh	مَكْرُوهٌ	detested, disliked
maqām; pl., maqāmāt	مَقَامٌ؛ مَقَامَاتٌ	station
millah	مِلَّةٌ	nation
mu'min	مُؤْمِنٌ	believer
Mufrad	الْمُفْرَدُ	the Singular, the Alone
muḥāsabah	مُحَاسَبَةٌ	taking account of oneself
mujāhadah; pl., mujāhadāt	مُجَاهَدَةٌ؛ مُجَاهَدَاتٌ	spiritual effort; opposing the self
muqarrab; pl., muqarrabīn	مُقَرَّبٌ؛ مُقَرَّبِينَ	foremost
murāqabah	مُرَاقَبَةٌ	keeping watch over the self
murīd; pl., murīdīn	مُرِيدٌ؛ مُرِيدِينَ	spiritual aspirant
nafs	نَفْسٌ	self; the lower self
qurb	قُرْبٌ	intimacy
rajā'	رَجَاءٌ	hope
riḍā	رِضَى	pleasure
riyā'	رِيَاءٌ	hypocrisy; showing off
rizq	رِزْقٌ	provision
rububiya	رُبُوبِيَّةٌ	lordship
ruh	رُوحٌ	spirit
ṣadaqah	صَدَقَةٌ	charity
ṣāliḥ; pl., ṣāliḥīn	صَالِحٌ؛ صَالِحِينَ	devout individual
sālik; pl., sālikīn	سَالِكٌ؛ سَالِكِينَ	spiritual traveler
sayyi'ah	سَيِّئَةٌ	bad
Sharī'ah	الشَّرِيعَةُ	the outward law of Islam
Shayṭān	الشَّيْطَانُ	Satan
shirk	شِرْكٌ	idol worship
shirk al-sarā'ir	شِرْكُ السَّرَائِرِ	shirk of hidden motives
shukr	شُكْرٌ	thankfulness
ṣiddīq	صِدِّيقٌ	truthful; one who believes instantly
ṣidq	صِدْقٌ	truthfulness
sirr	سِرٌّ	secret
Ṣufa	صُفَى	a place at the Prophet's mosque
Ṣūfi	صُوفِيٌّ	Sufi
sukūn	سُكُونٌ	stillness
sulūk	سُلُوكٌ	spiritual travel
Sunnah	السُّنَّةُ	the practice of the Prophet
tabi'īn	تَابِعِينَ	the followers of the Sahabah

taqwā	تَقْوَى	godfearingness
Taṣawwuf	التَّصَوُّفُ	spiritual path of Islam; path of the Sufi
tawādu‘	تَوَاضَع	humility; modesty
tawakkul	تَوَكَّل	trust in Allah
tawbah	تَوْبَة	turning in repentance
tawbat naṣūḥah	تَوْبَة نَصُوحَة	sincere turning in repentance
ṭayyib	طَيِّب	goodness
Ummah	الْأُمَّة	the People of Islam
wājib	وَاجِب	required
wara‘	وَرَعَ	scrupulousness
waswasa	وَسْوَسَة	devilish whispering, insinuation
wilāya	وِلَايَة	guardianship, sainthood
wird	وَرْد	spiritual work or practice
yaqīn	يَقِين	certainty
Yawm al-Qiyamah	الْيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ	the Day of Standing before Allah at the end of time
zuhd	زُهْد	abstention