ABBAS AL HUMAID

No Limits

From the Islamic Theory of Origination Project

Self-Development from an Islamic Perspective



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Revised Edition — 2026

The Islamic Theory of Origination Project

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From the Islamic Theory of Origination Project

The Islamic Theory of Origination is an interpretive intellectual project situated within the Islamic worldview. It studies human becoming, existential movement, growth, conduct, and purpose-bearing responsibility. It is a human endeavour: it is not identical with Islam itself and does not replace creed, jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, or specialised disciplines. The project is not a single book but a system of six books, each with its own question, function, and voice. They complement one another without duplicating one another's role.

THE SIX-BOOK MAP

1. **The Islamic Intellectual Framework** — the worldview foundation and home of the broader cosmic account.
2. **Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview** — the governing reference text, which includes the Reader's Guide and the reference glossary.
3. **The Immortal Self** — the book of the human being, his becoming, and his trajectory.
4. **No Limits** — the reader-facing gateway to the laws and comparative critique.
5. **Live Happily** — the gateway to contemplation and lived engagement.
6. **The Journey of a Toiler** — the gateway to narrative embodiment.

Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview opens with a concise guide to the project, its books, and its reading paths; it closes with a simplified reference glossary of the project's terms. Both serve the governing reference text itself; neither is a separate volume nor a seventh book within the six-book project.

THIS BOOK'S PLACE IN THE PROJECT

No Limits offers the practical, reader-facing application of the Laws of Origination in the light of the Islamic vision. It ties self-development to fitra (the God-given constitution of the human being), servanthood, tazkiya (purification and cultivation), and the journey to God, and offers a critical reading of the most prominent modern theories of self-development from within that vision.

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Dedication to the Beloved of God

To the beloved Chosen One, the noblest of prophets, the physician of hearts, a mercy to all worlds, Muhammad son of ʿAbd Allah — may God bless him and his family…

To you, Messenger of God, I dedicate this book: a modest attempt to follow your way in the tazkiya of the human self and in awakening its spiritual station. You are the one whom the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAli (peace be upon him), described in these words: 'a physician who goes about with his medicine, who has perfected his ointments and heated his cauteries, placing them wherever they are needed — upon blind hearts, deaf ears, and mute tongues; pursuing with his remedy the places of heedlessness and the haunts of bewilderment.'[1]

Messenger of God, you were a physician of the human self, sent as a mercy to all worlds. You brought the remedy to all who had lost their way; you laid balm upon inward wounds; and you opened the eyes of intellects to the light of God. Peace be upon you for every heart God has brought

1 *Nahj al-Balāgha*, from Sermon 108 (the numbering varies between editions).

to life through you, and for every person you have led from darkness into light.

My master, my beloved, Messenger of God: I ask you to accept this modest dedication from me. I know that nothing can rise to the height of your station, yet it comes from sincere love and unending gratitude. I ask God to honour me with your intercession and to include me in your blessed prayer, for you are the mercy bestowed as a gift and the intercessor whose intercession is granted.

Messenger of God, pray for me, for my family, and for the believing men and women: for guidance and forgiveness, for what is good in this world and the next, and that we may be among those who walk in your path, live by your Sunna, and purify themselves through the tazkiya you taught — until we meet you at the Pool, where you look upon us with the eye of your mercy and give us the good news of God's pleasure.

If there is any good in this book, it is a spark from the light of your guidance; and if there is any deficiency in it, then perfection belongs to you, master of the first and the last, and to the mercy and clarity you brought.

A Letter to Personal Coaches

‘And who is better in speech than one who calls to God,
acts rightly, and says: I am one of those who submit?’

(Q 41:33)

Personal coaching is a trust, because a single word can shape a person’s decision, their relationships, and their path. The verse reminds us that goodness of speech is inseparable from right action and truthfulness before God: it is not enough for what we say to be moving if it is not also responsible and weighed against the truth.

In the field of self-development, genuinely useful tools sit alongside sweeping accounts of the human being, of success, and of happiness. A coach should neither reject everything new merely because of its source nor pass it on merely because it is widespread. The task is to understand it first, to verify its evidence, to know its domain and its limits, and then to weigh its use against values and rights.

Nor can a coach take the place of a physician or psychotherapist. When a person’s suffering calls for diagnosis or treatment, honouring the trust means referring them to a specialist, while continuing to offer human and spiritual support within their proper limits.

I therefore propose three practical rules:

- Verify a method’s claim, its evidence, and its domain before adopting it, and state its limits openly instead of promising guaranteed results.

- Distinguish general coaching from specialised treatment, and do not make faith or willpower alone the explanation for every form of suffering.
- Tie success to purpose, to rights, and to right action, without neglecting a person's worldly needs or reducing their worth to achievement.

This book is an attempt to offer a practical framework for self-development in the light of the Islamic vision, together with a critical reading of some contemporary theories. I hope it will help the coach to ask responsible questions, to choose what is genuinely useful within their field, and to preserve both the limits of their role and the rights of those who seek their help.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped bring this book into the form in which you now hold it.

My thanks and appreciation go to the generous reviewers who offered their constructive views and valuable feedback on the drafts of this book: Dr Salim Al-Busaidi, Mr Anis Musa Al-Lawati, Mr Salih Muhammad Rida, Mr Muhammad Rida Muhammad Sulaiman, Mr Mustafa Muhsin, Mr Ali Hassan Jaafar, my wife Tahira Al-Khabouriya, and my son Muhammad Abbas. Their observations enriched the content of the book and helped improve its quality.

I also drew on artificial intelligence tools in some of the work of drafting, organising, exploring, and reviewing. They were used as supporting tools; the intellectual and editorial choices, and the final responsibility for the content of this book, remain the author's.

To all of you, my deepest thanks and gratitude.

Praise for the Book

These impressions express their authors' views, and the descriptions are presented as they framed them. They do not constitute a scholarly endorsement, and the author does not adopt anything in them as a description of the book's function or clinical purpose. This book is not a substitute for diagnosis, treatment, or specialised professional training.

The following endorsement is reproduced from its original English text, as written by its author.



Alexander Vuckovic, MD
Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Harvard Medical School

Al Humaid has presented us with a comprehensive and masterful synthesis of two disparate yet paradoxically related topics: the science and art of psychotherapy with its grounding in secular and materialistic principles, and the deeply spiritual Islamic understanding of human affairs.

He persuasively connects several psychological perspectives from the Western canon with specific elements of Islamic teaching and discipline.

Ultimately, he enlarges the scope of his analysis to demonstrating an individual's power to actualize his and her potential by using the combined principles of the two philosophies with scientifically derived algorithms as well as common sensical first principles.

This book is for Muslims and non-Muslims, therapists and patients, and anyone who wishes to reach their full potential in this all too short life.



Prof. Tariq Al-Habib
Professor and Consultant Psychiatrist
General Supervisor of the Mutmainnah Centres for Consultation and Training
Secretary-General of the Arab Federation of Psychiatrists (2018–2023)

'With an ease that reaches the self and the spirit at once, and without asking leave, our gifted author Abbas Al Humaid takes us travelling from one flower to another among the flowers of life that we had thought far away — and places them within our reach.'



His Eminence the Erudite Scholar Dr Sayyed Muhammad Bahr al-ʿUlum

'No Limits is a distinguished book that presents a fresh vision in the field of self-development, one that takes into account the Muslim's sense of purpose in an unending journey of integration and in seeking the good pleasure of God Almighty... I hope this approach will find its way into practical application.'



Prof. Ahmad Kamil Al-ʿAwadi
Professor and Consultant Psychiatrist
Professor of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine
Al-Azhar University, Cairo

'How beautiful it is when knowledge meets the spirit, and how noble when a person begins the journey of discovering the self through its bond with its Creator — the One who created it and

proportioned it, and inspired it with its wrongdoing and its God-consciousness.

This meaning is clearly manifest in a journey into the depths led by a skilled diver, the creative writer Abbas Al Humaid, in his book No Limits. He has skilfully drawn for us shores at which to anchor, so that we may rest from the weariness of wandering in our attempt to understand the self: where did it come from? What has shaped it? And what is its purpose in life?

This treatment is set within an authentic Islamic framework that engages with the most prominent modern theories which have sought to plumb the depths of the human psyche and to understand its inner structure. This book is therefore a comprehensive reference and a practical guide for everyone searching for themselves, and for everyone journeying towards their Lord — as God Almighty has said: "O human being, you are labouring towards your Lord with great labour, and you shall meet him" (Q 84:6).

The author is distinguished — as ever — by an engaging and enjoyable style that never wearies the reader: he crowns each chapter with a focused summary and appends practical exercises that help the reader to develop themselves in accordance with an integrated Islamic approach.

May God reward this creative author with the best of rewards for this blessed effort, place his work in the balance of his good deeds, and bring benefit to the community through it.'



Dr Zakiya Ali Salim Al-Daîya
Consultant Psychiatrist
Sultan Qaboos University Hospital
University Medical City

'No Limits sheds light on an important and vital subject: psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective. This book is a valuable

addition to the Islamic library, opening the door to a discussion for which the available sources do not yet match the scale of its importance.

The book addresses how the principles of the Islamic religion may be applied in psychotherapy, which makes it an important reference for the individual and for the Muslim therapist alike. By offering a comprehensive view that brings together knowledge and religion, it helps meet the needs of those seeking approaches consistent with their religious convictions. Section One offers a distinctive spiritual journey, essential to anyone seeking inner peace amid a fast-changing world, so that the teachings of our faith remain the constants that illuminate a Muslim's path: "light upon light; God guides to his light whom he wills" (Q 24:35).

The importance of the book:

1. Reliable sources: the book offers trustworthy sources and precise information on how Islamic principles may be used in psychotherapy, helping people to better understand how to address their psychological difficulties from a religious perspective.

2. Self-development: the book is not confined to psychotherapy; it also addresses how to develop oneself on the foundations of the Islamic religion, which makes it a comprehensive reference for those seeking to improve their personal and spiritual lives.

3. Meeting a community need: the book meets the needs of a Muslim community seeking approaches consistent with its values and beliefs, which makes it an effective instrument for strengthening psychological and spiritual health.

In closing: this book represents an important step towards integrating knowledge and religion in the field of psychotherapy, opening new horizons for individuals and for Muslim therapists. By offering reliable information, it helps meet the needs of the Muslim community and strengthens psychological and spiritual health; it also provides a source for a subject in which I have long hoped to see further research, studies, and practical applications. As a Muslim psychiatrist, I find that the Western psychological sciences can be put to better use when they take on a religious — and specifically Islamic — colouring.'

Introduction

In the palace of Yazid son of Muʿawiya, where tyranny and brute power had taken command of events after Karbala, the tyrant imagined that the victory of the sword meant the effacement of truth, and that his dominance would erase the memory of the Prophet's family for ever. But Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) had a rendezvous with history, and she reversed the balance. She stood before him not as a broken captive but as an unbending figure of faith and courage. In a voice filled with certainty in God, and with a confidence that defied swords and tyranny, she faced him and said: 'So devise your schemes, exert your efforts, and marshal all your strength. By God, you will not efface our remembrance, nor extinguish our revelation, nor wash away its disgrace from yourself. Is your judgement anything but error, your days anything but numbered, and your gathering anything but scattered...'[1]

That moment was more than a confrontation. It was a timeless lesson in patience under affliction, in faith that does not waver, and in the inner strength that gives light even in the darkest hours. Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) proved that challenges,

1 From the address of Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) in Yazīd's assembly in Damascus; see al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 2, and al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 45. The wording varies slightly across transmissions and editions.

however overwhelming they appear, can be turned into an occasion for steadfastness and inspiration when we face them with certainty in God and with firm principles.

How does this book inspire our journey?

The strength of Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) was not born in that moment; it was the fruit of settled faith and a clear vision of the meaning of life. In this book we shall travel together to discover how these values can become part of our own journey towards building ourselves with strength and constancy.

This book offers a practical reading of self-development in the light of the Islamic vision from which the project proceeds. It reorganises key concepts — patience, tazkiya, balance, responsibility — and translates them into practices that help you meet life's challenges and seek balanced success in this world and the next.

Islam is in its essence a message of tazkiya and reform, aimed at building the human being spiritually, intellectually, and morally. Religion was never a set of acts of worship isolated from lived reality; it is an integrated way that cultivates and purifies the single self, develops its intellect and its heart, refines its embodied presence, and connects it with its spiritual station — so that its various aspects fall into order under the authority of truth, and worldly ambition is balanced against the purpose of the hereafter.

God Almighty summed up this great mission in his words: 'God has certainly favoured the believers when he raised up among them a messenger from among themselves, reciting to them his signs, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom, though before that they were in clear error' (Q 3:164).

The verse reveals that tazkiya, teaching, and wisdom lie at the very heart of human development in the prophetic mission.

The role of the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) was not confined to conveying a message: he was a teacher of intellects, a nurturer of the human self, and a guide to the path of wisdom and certainty. This is the starting point for the book's examination of self-development: it should not be confined to worldly success, but should be ordered within tazkiya, servanthood, and the human perfection that is genuinely attainable.

The Prophet (may God bless him and his family) affirmed this meaning when he said: 'I was sent only to perfect noble character.' Genuine human development does not stop at motivation or achievement, but is ordered within servanthood before God — the encompassing purpose embodied in worship, right action, and the cultivation of the earth through the values of truth and goodness.[2]

This book is not merely a survey of modern theories of human development. It is an attempt to reconnect that field with an authentic Islamic approach, so that self-development becomes an integrated journey which brings together knowledge and faith, and which seeks a deep balance between personal ambition and spiritual purpose, between striving in this world and preparing for the next.

In these pages you will find a comparison between the Islamic account and contemporary theories of self-development, such as the law of attraction and flow theory. The comparison sets out where they meet and where they part, and shows what is distinctive in the Islamic account: a breadth of view that connects the spiritual dimension with the material. The book also offers practical tools drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunna to help you review your goals, understand the challenges you face, work through them with truthfulness and

2 Reported by al-Bayhaqī in *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* and *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, and by Aḥmad in the *Musnad*; it appears in al-Ṭabrisī's *Makārim al-Akhlāq* and in al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-Anwār*.

constancy, and direct your striving towards what is genuinely beneficial.

Some Western theories of self-development offer tools that are useful in specific domains, but they do not by themselves determine the spiritual purpose of the human being or the measure of happiness in its Islamic sense. The vision from which this project proceeds sees the human being as a single embodied self; it refers success back to servanthood before God and to a non-spatial nearness to him, to the safeguarding of rights, and to working for higher ends. In this book we shall see how personal accomplishments can be ordered within a life built on meaning, tranquillity, and the purpose of the hereafter — without accomplishment becoming the measure of worth or of nearness.

An account that disregards the spiritual dimension and human fitra remains unable to explain happiness in its existential sense, or to identify the source of tranquillity and the purpose of the human being, however useful the tools it offers within their own fields. God Almighty pointed to the effect of turning away from his remembrance and his authority when he said: 'And whoever turns away from my remembrance shall have a straitened life, and we shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection' (Q 20:124).

This straitening does not refer to every psychological disorder or instance of clinical anxiety; anxiety and depression may have multiple bodily, psychological, and social causes. The verse rather sets out the effect of turning away from God's authority in its own domain, without being turned into a diagnosis of every form of suffering or a judgement upon the faith of one who is in pain.

Why the title 'No Limits'?

No Limits is an invitation to discover that the human being — while remaining a creature limited in himself and dependent

upon God — is not reducible to the constraints of material reality or to his present condition. God created you for a great purpose, gave you receptivities and levels of preparedness that can develop within his established patterns and within your practical scope, and opened before you a path extending from your worldly origination to your eternal end.

In this book we shall see how Islam opens before the human being a wide horizon that does not close at worldly success. You are a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, bearing a general trust to spread good and cultivate life. Your fulfilment of this trust unfolds by degrees according to how your life is ordered within servanthood, justice, and trustworthiness, and within the limits of what you have been given and what you are able to do.

No Limits is not merely a book about self-development; it is an integrated vision that reshapes your understanding of your capacities and your responsibilities. It is an invitation to discover your created strength and to put it to use in dependence upon God and in servanthood to him, while ordering your striving in this world under the purpose of the next. In it you will find practical guidance from the Qur'an and the Sunna to help you meet challenges and to develop the receptivities God has given you — without imagining yourself independent of him or able to overstep his patterns.

Prepare yourself for a real journey of change. When you come to know your God-given receptivity to growth, refer your strength back to him, and work within your practical scope, a life begins that is wider in meaning and truer in orientation. This is the life to which the title No Limits points: a horizon that does not close so long as the human being is journeying towards God.

For me, the principles offered in this book are not merely theoretical conceptions; they have shaped my own life deeply. That is a personal experience: it is not a substitute for

evidence, and it does not guarantee the same effect for every reader. For the project's terms and governing relationships, the reference is Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview, the project's governing text. The Immortal Self explores the human being, his becoming, and his trajectory, while No Limits brings the Laws of Origination closer to application through exercises and practices. And for anyone who wishes to see these ideas embodied in a narrative, there is the novel The Journey of a Toiler, which brings these concepts to life through a story of facing affliction and striving towards success and happiness.[3]

What does this book offer?

This book takes you on a distinctive journey of self-discovery along three main lines:

- The spiritual and psychological foundation of the self: it helps you answer the great questions you face in life. Who am I? What is my purpose? And how do the aspects of my self — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — fall into order under the authority of truth?
- A comparison between the Islamic account and modern theories: it offers an analysis of contemporary theories of self-development, such as the law of attraction and meditation, and brings out the comprehensiveness of the Islamic account, which joins the spiritual foundation to the psychological one.
- Practical, applied steps: the book offers advice and exercises drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunna for applying Islamic principles in your daily life and for meeting challenges with truthfulness and constancy.

3 A novel by the author, offering a concrete model of these principles in application.

Who is this book for?

This book is for everyone seeking success, happiness, and tranquillity, and it may also benefit those who work, or plan to work, in personal coaching. It offers a framework that brings together what has proved genuinely useful in some modern theories of self-development and a vision that treats the human being as a single self, understood through the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit.

The book includes a critical reading of approaches to self-development alongside practical exercises drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunna. A coach may draw on these within the limits of their competence, but the book is not a substitute for professional training or specialised diagnosis and treatment.

An invitation to change

Each of us seeks change, but change is not produced by inner factors alone, nor by external factors alone; it comes about through the interaction of what is in the self with the body, the environment, relationships, opportunities, and work. The verse draws attention to the human being's responsibility for what lies within their practical scope — review, choice, and reform: 'God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves' (Q 13:11).

It is important to stress that suffering from psychological disorders — depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, psychosis — is not an indicator of weak faith or a lack of steadfastness in uprightness, just as suffering from physical illness does not indicate a lack of religious devotion. Such disorders involve multiple bodily, psychological, social, environmental, and genetic factors, and understanding them requires specialist diagnosis; they are therefore not reducible to willpower or to faith.

The path of uprightness and nearness to God may help a person face psychological challenges through the meaning, hope, and spiritual practices it offers. For some people, it may contribute to coping and resilience. But it does not guarantee protection from psychological disorders, and it does not remove the need for diagnosis, treatment, and seeking help; these disorders involve multiple bodily, psychological, and environmental factors and are not subject to willpower alone.

This book does not offer medical solutions for such conditions, but it may help in building meaning and hope, and in learning to remain steadfast and engage honestly with affliction. Tranquillity here does not mean the absence of anxiety or pain, and it is not to be made a substitute for psychological or medical treatment when that is needed.

If you are suffering from any psychological disorder — depression, excessive anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder — or if you are close to someone who is, it is important to consult a specialist psychiatrist for accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment. Treatment may involve psychotherapeutic techniques, medication, or both, as determined by the specialist. Psychological health is no less important than physical health, and early treatment may be the key to recovery and to a more balanced and stable life.

This book is not merely something to read; it is an interactive experience that invites you to dive into the depths of yourself, to discover where your strength and your weakness lie, and to begin building yourself on firm foundations that bring together knowledge and faith.

No Limits is an open invitation to strive to meet the challenges one faces, with God's help and within one's practical scope, and to seek balance and meaning without denying one's real limits or one's need for other people and for means.

I ask God to make this book a source of help to you on your journey, to illuminate your path towards the tazkiya of your self and towards understanding your orientation in a way that pleases him, and to bring benefit to you and to those around you.



A Word about This Edition

What you hold is the revised edition of No Limits. It is not a lightly revised reprint, but a rebuilding of the substance and method of Section Two, together with a refinement of Section One that preserved its spirit while tightening its expression. Here I summarise the most important changes so that you can read with a clear understanding of what has changed.

From ‘faith-based alternatives’ to independent laws. In its first edition, Section Two presented Islamic concepts as parallel versions of Western theories — ‘faith-based programming’ alongside neuro-linguistic programming, ‘faith-based psychology’ alongside positive psychology, and so on. I came to see a flaw in this foundation: a concept framed as the counterpart of another remains captive to a framework that is not its own. I therefore rebuilt the section from the ground up and, within the Islamic Theory of Origination Project, formulated nine laws grounded in revelation, fitra, the purpose of the human being, and God’s established patterns — not in fragmented human needs alone. I gathered them under the name The Laws of Islamic Origination. Western theories thus became stations we pass through rather than axes around which we revolve; for that reason, the chapter titles now carry the names of the laws, not the theories.

The Laws of Origination are governing principles that disclose conditional regularities in human becoming and direct understanding and action without determinism or any

guarantee of a result. They form a system of interacting functions rather than a sequence of stages: truthfulness discloses and unifies; striving embodies; presence returns each hour to what is due to it; reflection gives insight; faith-building consolidates; growth weighs; tranquillity steadies; ardent love moves; and wholehearted turning gathers the heart in devotion to God. The introduction to Section Two sets them alongside the Western theories with which the chapters engage and shows that they provide a practical gateway to the wider structure developed in Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview.

Condensing while allowing the book to breathe. Section Two has been substantially reduced by removing repetition and digression, with care taken not to compress the meaning; a foundational book must be allowed to breathe. Section One's structure and spirit have been preserved, with selective conceptual harmonisation that tightened its governing definitions without changing its overall course.

This edition, then, is not merely an improvement in form but a maturing of vision: a book that has become truer in its grounding, clearer in its structure, and closer to what I wanted from the first line — that self-development be a return to God rather than a turning away from him.



SECTION ONE

The Spiritual and Psychological Foundation of the Self

From the Islamic Theory of Origination Project

Introduction to Section One

A Journey towards Knowing the Self and Its Orientation

We are all making our way through this life in search of the meaning of our existence and of our true identity, and at different moments deep questions return to us: Who am I? And why am I here?

In this section we shall begin a journey into the self — a journey whose aim is not merely to discover your skills and abilities, but to understand yourself anew from a deeper perspective: one that illuminates your relationship with God and connects your psychological structure with your orientation and your role in this world.

But this is not an easy journey. It is more like opening a door within yourself whose existence no one suspected. How many people live their whole lives in the prison of their limited conceptions of themselves? How many believe they know themselves, when in truth they are no more than a reflection of what others want them to be?

Essential questions that map the journey

In this section we shall pose questions that must be faced truthfully, because they are the key to every real change:

- Who are you? — We shall go deeper into understanding your reality as a human being, and reflect on what God's breathing of the spirit into the human being signifies for your dignity and for your created spiritual station. It does not mean

that a part of God's essence is within you, but that you are a human self not reducible to matter, open to truth, to perfection, and to the purpose of servanthood.

- What is your purpose in life? — We shall search for the highest meaning of your existence, and explore how such a purpose can give you clarity and constancy amid the changes of life.
- How do you balance your worldly and spiritual needs? — We shall discover how a person can hold worldly ambition and spiritual elevation together, without falling into the trap of material absorption or of a life-denying asceticism.

These questions are not merely philosophical enquiries; they are the practical foundation on which we shall build our journey through this book.

Core concepts for building the self and its tazkiya

For this journey to succeed, we must pause at certain pivotal stations that form the basis for understanding and developing the self. These include:

- The concept of vicegerency: we shall reconsider what it means to be a vicegerent upon the earth — not only as an honour, but as a responsibility that calls for a deep awareness of the self and of its role in this world.
- The path of inner truthfulness: we shall learn how the aspects of the single self — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — come into mutual accord under the authority of truth and the demands of fitra. Facing the self, disclosing gaps, self-accounting, repentance, and reform are practical means of establishing this accord within one's practical scope.

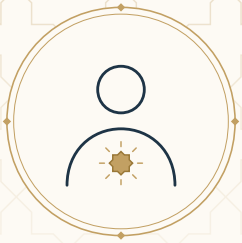
- Self-awareness: we shall speak of the importance of knowing oneself from a practical standpoint, and of how this shapes our decisions, our relationships, and our view of the world.
- Conceit versus humility: we shall uncover the psychological traps that can prevent a person from developing — such as the conceit that slips into the heart under the cover of self-confidence — and learn how humility is the compass that keeps the journey towards true greatness in balance.

Prepare for a different kind of experience

This journey is not a matter of casual reading, nor is it a collection of theories. It is a conscious review of how the aspects of the single self — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — come into order under the authority of truth, and how worldly success can be placed within the purpose of servanthood and non-spatial nearness to God.

If you read it well, you may come away from this section with a wider awareness of your standing and your purpose, and a greater readiness to review yourself and to walk steadily on the path of tazkiya and servanthood.

Are you ready to discover the depths of yourself?
The journey begins now…



CHAPTER ONE

Who Are You?

At some point in life, each of us pauses to reflect on himself and ask: Who am I? Why am I here? What makes me distinctive in this vast universe? Is my reality reducible to a body governed by time and place, or am I a human self possessing a spiritual station, bearing receptivities broader than those presently apparent? These questions do not arise from passing curiosity; they are the beginning of a deep journey towards self-discovery and towards understanding the role we play in existence.

The importance of knowing who you are lies in this: before you can bring about any real change in your life, you must begin from within, from a foundational point that determines everything that follows. Are you truthful with yourself?

Inner truthfulness is not following whatever lies within you, nor seeking a comfortable consistency around just any end. It is the mutual accord of the aspects of your self — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — under truth and fitra: the intellect understands and discerns the truth; the

heart assents to it; the spirit turns towards God and the purpose of servanthood; and the body embodies it in speech and action. Knowing what you think, love, imagine, intend, say, and do helps disclose where these aspects accord and where gaps remain; self-accounting, repentance, and reform then draw you nearer to that accord within your practical scope.

Many people seek success, but few realise that real success does not come from achieving outward ambitions alone. It comes from the ordering of the self under the authority of truth: a person comes to know his motives, reviews his shakila — the relatively settled inner configuration that makes some patterns of perception and response more likely — and his orientation, and lives according to the values that have become established for him — not according to the expectations of others, and not according to an inner consistency that may revolve around falsehood.

The greatness of the human being: vicegerency upon the earth

The human being is a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth. Vicegerency is a trust and a general charge to cultivate the earth, establish justice, and render what is due; its ethical realisation unfolds by degrees according to fidelity to servanthood and the trust. God has granted the human being the root of choice, awareness, and perception, and has established patterns and means through which he may strive within his practical scope. God Almighty said to the angels: 'I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth. They said: Will you place upon it one who will spread corruption there and shed blood, while we glorify you with praise and proclaim your holiness? He said: I know what you do not know' (Q 2:30). This charge places the resources of the earth and its creatures within the sphere of trust, not within a human being's independent ownership.

God commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam in honour of what God had endowed Adam with. The angels obeyed, while Iblis refused and grew arrogant. God Almighty says: 'When your Lord said to the angels: I am creating a human being from clay; when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of my spirit, fall down before him in prostration. So the angels prostrated, all of them together — except Iblis, who was arrogant and became one of the deniers' (Q 38:71–74).

The secret of human dignity does not lie in some divine substance deposited within the human being, but in the fact that God created him a human self possessing a spiritual station not reducible to the body — as his words indicate: 'and breathed into him of my spirit' (Q 38:72). In the terminology of this model, the spirit is the self considered from the standpoint of its spiritual station and its openness to truth, perfection, and the purpose of servanthood. This is a functional, non-exclusive use: spirit, heart, intellect, and bodily dimension are interwoven aspects of the activity of the single self, not independent entities or aspects of the same ontological kind. This station is created and dependent upon God; it is neither a part of his essence nor an independent thing lodged in the body. Awareness of your dependence and your servanthood before God opens a wide horizon for work and growth within his established patterns and within your practical scope. Among the instances of what God brings about at the hands of his servants is what the Qur'an recounts of 'one who had knowledge from the Book': 'The one who had knowledge from the Book said: I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you' (Q 27:40).

But the question you must put to yourself is this: am I living according to this greatness that God has granted me? Have I truly grasped my reality as a human being charged with vicegerency upon the earth — or have I simply followed the roles that society and circumstance have assigned to me?

To be aware of yourself means to hold these questions clearly in view and to seek their answers truthfully; for this is the beginning of the road to understanding yourself and your responsibility, and to the spiritual elevation for which you were created as part of the purpose of servanthood.

Your choice, your freedom, and your responsibility

With this spiritual station comes the responsibility of choice: 'We guided him to the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful' (Q 76:3). You possess the root of choice, but your will operates within the knowledge that has reached you and within what your actual capacity, your environment, and your practical scope allow. It is a genuine cause in action, not a magical power that creates alternatives and outcomes out of nothing.

Choice is a path of elevation when it turns towards truth and holds firm to it within one's practical scope. A person can develop real perfections within himself through his bond with God and through right action, just as he can entrench a deficiency when he adopts deviation. Daily decisions contribute to shaping the shakila, the orientation, and the form the self comes to assume — though not all their causes are chosen, and the outcome is not entirely in a human being's hands.

Elevation and nearness to God

Nearness is neither a distance nor a passing feeling; it concerns what the human being comes to be and how he responds to the truth that has become clear to him. Nearness to God is a non-spatial designation for the human being's movement towards the perfection proper to him and his response to truth. The Nearness Equation is a non-numerical, relational formulation that examines this through the interaction of two dimensions: what has actually been realised in the self — knowledge,

understanding, will, powers, settled dispositions, and perfections — and the orientation of its response to truth and servanthood, whether in acceptance and obedience or in refusal and arrogance, in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope. This equation is not a measure for ranking people or judging their inner states and final ends. Daily actions contribute to this journey when their orientation and means are sound: helping someone in need, refraining from harm, and safeguarding what is due are steps towards that purpose: 'Did you think that we created you in vain, and that you would not be returned to us?' (Q 23:115).

The way to this is God-consciousness and growth through tazkiya: 'The most honoured of you before God is the most God-conscious of you' (Q 49:13). God has charged the human being with the trust of bearing witness to truth and goodness: 'that you may be witnesses over the people, and that the Messenger may be a witness over you' (Q 2:143). God's breathing of the spirit into the human being indicates the human being's created spiritual station and dignity. Actual capacity, however, rests on the body, intellect, preparedness, and environment God has given him, on the learning and striving he undertakes, and on the guidance and enabling grace with which God supports him.

Fitra is a distinctive mode of human creation. It comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood. It is neither detailed conceptual knowledge nor completed religious awareness; its manifestation and the identification of its object therefore require revelation, intellect, and tazkiya. Whatever knowledge, mercy, justice, and wisdom are realised in a human being are created and limited perfections proper to the creature's station and dependence. As effects, they point to the perfection of their Creator without

implying likeness to God, participation in his absolute attributes, or independent possession of them. God Almighty says: 'So set your face towards the religion, inclining to truth: the fitra of God upon which he originated people. There is no altering God's creation' (Q 30:30).

When we say that you return to what your fitra requires, we do not mean that you draw from within yourself everything you ought to know, or recover a self that was once complete and then lost. The Qur'an speaks of God calling the human being to bear witness to his lordship: 'Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, we bear witness' (Q 7:172). In this project's reading, fitra describes the root of this bond from the standpoint of creation, while the covenant refers to that witnessing, acknowledgement, and establishment of proof. We call this connection 'the covenant of fitra'[1], while preserving the distinction between the two meanings and without deciding how that witnessing occurred, a question on which interpretations differ.

The pledge set out in Sura Ya Sin makes clear what acknowledging God's lordship requires in our choices — that we should not worship Satan, and that we should worship God. It states: 'Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan — for he is a manifest enemy to you — and that you should worship me? This is a straight path' (Q 36:60–61). Self-development is therefore not merely the invention of a purpose that satisfies the self, but fidelity in practice to the truth towards which the human being was created to turn. Fitra is a root and an orientation, not an acquired perfection realised all at once; we therefore need clarification, tazkiya, and action,

1 See Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon One, the passage 'to call upon them to fulfil the covenant of God-given fitra'; and al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, vol. 2, Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on "The Fitra upon Which People Are Created: Divine Oneness", hadith 2. These are used here as witnesses to the connection, not as evidence that 'pledge' and 'covenant' are synonymous in every context, or as a determination of the manner of the witnessing.

and our responsibility remains proportionate to what has reached us and what we are able to do.

The effects of fitra flourish when the aspects of the self come into mutual accord and harmony under truth. The self then becomes more integrated and gathered, while the causes of dispersion, conflict, and veiling diminish. Facing gaps, self-accounting, repentance, and reform are means by which this accord becomes established; they are not its complete definition.

Inner truthfulness is not following whatever lies within you, but the mutual accord of the aspects of the self under truth and fitra, followed by work to address the gaps that appear within one's practical scope. As this accord increases, the self's tranquillity, steadfastness, and stability increase, while pain, illness, and the need for treatment may remain. A genuine spiritual station is not the same thing as the speed with which emotional calm appears.

Inner truthfulness, then, is not confined to knowing your strengths and weaknesses. It orders the intellect's understanding, the heart's assent, the spirit's orientation, and the body's embodiment of these in action under one authority, and opens the way to addressing the gaps that appear within one's practical scope. One's orientation becomes clearer and one's aspirations are ordered within the purpose of servanthood.

The human being: an open horizon in the journey of life

The human being cannot be reduced to material dimensions or to the present moment. He is a creature whose path extends onward, a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, and responsible for spreading truth, justice, and goodness within the limits of his trust and practical scope. God Almighty says: 'You are the best community brought forth for humankind:

you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God' (Q 3:110). This responsibility calls him to move beyond the centrality of the ego and to see his life within the path of the trust, from this world to its final end.

This human journey is not merely an effort to achieve limited worldly successes; it is an eternal journey towards God, one that does not end at the boundaries of this world but extends into the hereafter: 'O human being, you are labouring towards your Lord with great labour, and you shall meet him' (Q 84:6). On this understanding the human being is bound to the whole of existence and to higher purposes that go beyond his material needs and reach to a deeper meaning of existence and of purpose.

The human being and the universe: a relationship beyond brotherhood

The universe is not merely an outward scene you pass through; it is a set of signs pointing to the Creator and a field of trust in which the human being works. God has made subject to him such of its benefits as sustain his life and help him build up the earth — not to make the whole of existence subordinate to his desires, but so that he may know his Lord and fulfil his responsibility within creation.

From the vast heavens to the wide earth, from the smallest living creatures to the mountains and seas, everything lies within an order that God has made subject to the human being as a trust and for responsible use, not to grant him independence from his Creator. The purpose is non-spatial nearness to God, read through the powers and perfections actually realised in the self and through the orientation of its response to truth — in acceptance or refusal — in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope, not through a numerical measure or a judgement upon people's inner states.

He said: 'And he has made subject to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, all of it, from him. In that are signs for a people who reflect' (Q 45:13).

But our relationship with the universe is not merely one of benefit and use. We and all creatures share ontological dependence upon God: our existence, continuance, and power subsist through him, while he is absolutely self-sufficient and needs nothing from us. Analytically, this may be described as creational servanthood, but it is distinct from the conscious, chosen servanthood to which the human being is called.

This shared dependence reminds us that every creature subsists by God, proceeds by his command, and glorifies him with praise in the manner he alone knows. The human being, however, is called to conscious servanthood and to bearing the trust within practical scope: he knows, chooses, and embodies his orientation in intention, obedience, and action. God Almighty says: 'The seven heavens and the earth and all who are in them glorify him; there is nothing that does not glorify him with praise, but you do not comprehend their glorification' (Q 17:44).

Summary: the horizon of human possibility and its limits

The human being is an honoured creature, yet limited in himself and dependent upon God. His greatness appears in the truthfulness of his servanthood, in developing the receptivities and abilities God has given him, and in using them in accordance with truth and within his practical scope. He does not overstep every material and non-material limit, and he does not own the outcome; but he can widen his field of action by learning, working, seeking treatment, and changing some of his conditions — and can direct all of this towards his purpose.

The human being, like everything in the universe, subsists by God in the very root of his existence and continuance. This is

the reality of ontological dependence, and there is no moral distinction in it as such. God Almighty says: 'O people, you are the ones in need of God, and God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy' (Q 35:15). This dependence is not an incidental defect but the very reality of a creature; through it he comes to know that his strength, his knowledge, and his ability are gifts and trusts, not possessions held independently.

And because God is absolutely self-sufficient, his giving and support never cease; each person receives from them according to what their receptivity, preparedness, and circumstances allow. In his words, 'And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge' (Q 20:114), there is a call to perpetual increase — not a claim that a creature's knowledge or ability is infinite. The same holds for every other aspect of growth: it remains open so long as God continues to give, yet at every stage it is bounded by what a person can bear and what their preparedness allows.

This meaning is evident even in the noblest of creatures, the greatest Messenger (may God bless him and his family). He reached the summit of human perfection and yet remained, at every moment, a servant dependent upon God. His greatness is unmatched among human beings, but it is created and finite in comparison with the absolute perfection of God, drawn from his favour and his support, not independent of him.

And so it is with us: we are not infinite, yet the door of growth does not close so long as God gives and guides, and so long as a person strives within his practical scope. We move gradually from potential to act, increasing in knowledge and virtue, journeying towards God on a path whose end extends into the hereafter.

Every moment in a person's life is an opportunity for learning and for tazkiya. Dependence upon God and servanthood before him give a person a reference point and support for his

striving, without guaranteeing that everything he aspires to will be realised; outcomes run through the network of causes and by God's wisdom. A person's life is part of a wider path along which he moves towards his purpose and his meeting with his Lord.

With this understanding we begin our journey in No Limits: not to discover a self that transcends every constraint, but to know a self that is not reducible to matter, possesses receptivities to growth, and bears responsibility for directing them. This journey goes beyond personal ambitions towards a non-spatial nearness read through the knowledge, will, powers, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through the orientation of its response to truth and servanthood — in acceptance or refusal — in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope.

Now that you have come to know, in this chapter, your reality and your responsibility as a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, you begin to face the conflicts that take place within the self. The choice between good and evil is not always easy, and shakila, environment, body, and habit all affect the field of action and its cost. In the coming chapters we shall examine how to face the self when desire overcomes it, how to review thoughts and weigh them against truth and fitra, and how to build capacity within practical scope — without reducing change to positive thinking or willpower alone.

Exercises and reflective questions

A reflective question:

Do the aspects of my self accord under truth, or am I content with an image of myself shaped by other people's

expectations or by my desires? Take a few moments to reflect, and ask yourself:

- What has my intellect understood of the truth in an issue that occupies me, and what has my heart actually assented to?
- Towards what purpose does my spirit turn in this situation, and how does my body embody that in speech and action?
- What one gap has appeared among these aspects, and what step of tazkiya lies within my practical scope — learning, self-accounting, repentance, reform, or seeking help?

Exercise 1: The mirror of the self

Set aside a quiet time to reflect on a specific situation in your life. Write down what your intellect understood, what your heart assented to, the purpose towards which your spirit turned, and what your body embodied in speech and action. Then identify one point of accord and one gap, and choose a practical step of tazkiya within your practical scope. That step may be learning, treatment, training, an apology, or a change in your environment — not merely an inward promise.

Exercise 2: Writing a letter to yourself

Write a letter addressed to yourself ten years from now. Speak in it about the goals you hope to have achieved and the advice you would like to offer your future self. What values do you wish to preserve? And how do you imagine yourself ten years from now?

This exercise strengthens long-term vision and focuses attention on your deepest personal aspirations.

Exercise 3: Writing a letter of thanks to God

Set aside a quiet moment with yourself, take a pen and paper, and write a letter to God as though you were addressing him directly, with all the sincerity of your feelings.

Begin your letter by thanking God for the blessings he has granted you — not only the obvious ones, such as health or family, but also those you may never have noticed before. Think of five blessings for which you have not thanked him sufficiently, and express your gratitude for them truthfully.

Then tell God of your aspirations and your goals, and ask him to grant you the strength and the will to reach them, and to bless your striving.

Do not let your letter be merely a list of requests; make it a truthful conversation of the heart, in which you share your hopes and your longings and ask him to direct you towards what is good for you.

Close your letter with a prayer that God may grant you contentment with him and trust in his wisdom, that he may make you one of his servants who are grateful for his blessings, and that he may inspire you to learn from what is disclosed to you in some of your trials — without denying their pain or claiming certainty about the particular wisdom behind them.



CHAPTER TWO

Your Problem Is Within You

In our own age, where economic, social, and psychological pressures grow ever sharper, the Book of God offers us a guide to understanding the human self. God Almighty says: 'I do not declare my self innocent; the self is indeed prone to command evil, except as my Lord has mercy. My Lord is forgiving, merciful' (Q 12:53). The self is not evil in itself, nor is it a synonym for base desire; but if it is left without tazkiya, and appetite, habit, and self-justification prevail over it, then the aspect within it that commands evil comes to the fore. At the same time it remains capable of returning and being purified through God's mercy and guidance.

The problem is not reducible to the self's inclinations or to its framework of ideas alone. A human being's becoming unfolds through the interaction of what is in his shakila with his body, his environment, his relationships, his experience, and what he

chooses within his practical scope. Even so, recurring thoughts shape his vision and responses, and maps and appraisals that either correspond to reality or diverge from it may settle in his shakila. They therefore need to be reviewed against truth and the facts.

The formative environment is the network of conditions, relationships, messages, models, incentives, opportunities, and material, social, and cultural obstacles that participate, over time, in the whole of a person's taking shape and becoming. It affects what one knows and loves, one's inclinations, habits, shakila, and orientation, and what one sees, understands, finds familiar or easy, and is able to do — without determining the person or cancelling agency and choice.

For example, someone who believes he is incapable of success may avoid opportunities that were in fact open to him, whereas a more realistic view of his abilities might move him to try, learn, and seek help. But his way of thinking is not the only factor: the body, the formative environment, opportunities, actual capacity, and practical scope all bear upon what a person can do and upon the outcome he reaches.

Recognising the effect of our thoughts is an important step towards freeing ourselves from the patterns that have settled in the shakila, but it does not amount to complete control over life. Reviewing a thought, directing attention, and building capacity can change the course of choice within one's practical scope, while the outcome remains bound to the network of causes and to what God decrees.

The self is the single human being considered from the standpoint of perception, choice, and becoming; the body is its corporeal rank in this world. Neither is the adversary of the other. A person's body is part of their worldly existence and the field of their action, entrusted to them by God; this calls for preserving it, caring for it, treating it, allowing it rest, developing its capacity according to need and practical scope, and using it

in truth. Tazkiya of the self does not mean degrading the body or neglecting its needs; it means ordering the whole human being under the authority of truth.

Consider God's words: 'The human being was created anxious: when evil touches him, distressed; and when good touches him, withholding — except those who pray' (Q 70:19–22). These verses describe a human receptivity to anxiety and withholding when the self is not ordered around faith and worship; they then set out a path of prayer, of rights, of assent, and of self-examination that reorients him. The point is not that some independent dimension is missing from him, nor that prayer guarantees the absence of anxiety or distress in every case.

The human being was created with weakness, needs, and powers capable of being directed. Neither his need for safety nor his desire for what is good is evil in itself. He is always dependent upon God; faith does not remove this dependence, but corrects his awareness of it and his manner of striving. What is required is the refinement of these powers, not their abolition, nor the blaming of a person merely for needing safety or feeling fear.

Yet a way of living may carry some of its distress within itself. When a person turns away from God's guidance and makes wealth, acceptance, or control his highest point of reference, what he sought in order to feel safe may become a recurring source of fear. This distress is not simply a natural need, but a possible effect of attachment coming to dominate orientation and choice. It is in this sense that we use the expression 'formative distress' here: an effect within the self's way of living, appraising, and responding — not the name of a psychological illness, nor a pain inseparable from the original constitution of the human being.

In the light of God's words, 'And we shall certainly make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater punishment, that they may return' (Q 32:21), the book proposes that some of the distress arising from turning away may be among the forms of the nearer punishment that alert a person to the need to return. This is a reading that brings texts together, not a judgement that every pain is punishment or that everyone in pain is far from God. Distress may alert a person without his understanding its cause, and he may understand without responding. Bodily, psychological, and social causes may also be interwoven in suffering, calling for understanding, treatment, and support; suffering must not be reduced to this one meaning.

In our own era, the figures for depression reveal the scale of a real psychological burden. In the United States, some 21 million adults experienced at least one major depressive episode during 2021 — 8.3 per cent of adults, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.[1] During the pandemic, a nationally representative longitudinal study tracked the persistence of elevated symptoms between 2020 and 2021; its authors included researchers from Boston University.[2] These statistics call us to compassion, research, and treatment, not to the reduction of every case to a single spiritual cause. Materialistic culture, isolation, and the pressures of life may contribute to some suffering, as may bodily, genetic, psychological, and social factors; the weight of each is known only through research and diagnosis.

1 National Institute of Mental Health, "Major Depression," data from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): approximately 21.0 million US adults, or 8.3 per cent, experienced a major depressive episode. The page notes that the 2021 data-collection method differed and that direct comparison with earlier years is not appropriate.

2 C. K. Ettman et al., "Persistent Depressive Symptoms During COVID-19: A National, Population-Representative, Longitudinal Study of U.S. Adults," *The Lancet Regional Health – Americas* 5 (2022): 100091.

The power of thoughts and beliefs: the road to changing the self

Among the clearest illustrations of the interaction between expectation and the experience of health is what is known as the placebo effect. In some trials, improvement may follow an intervention that is pharmacologically inert in that context, through expectation, the therapeutic setting, and other factors; new drugs are therefore often compared with an appropriate control in order to distinguish their specific effect. This does not mean that belief creates healing, that the control substance is identical in every trial, or that expectation removes the need for diagnosis and treatment.

But the effect of thoughts and beliefs is not confined to bodily health. It extends to attention, decision, perseverance, and relationships. Someone who holds unfair thoughts about himself may avoid opportunities, or interpret failure in a way that deepens his incapacity. Yet external circumstances, available abilities, and environment remain genuine factors that must not be disregarded.

The mind never stops receiving images and thoughts, and the self may treat certain imagined pictures or repeated suppositions as though they were facts if they are not reviewed by the intellect, truthfulness, and evidence. We might call this, as a secondary, cautionary expression, a ‘misleading illusion’: granting an image or supposition the status of fact without evidence. It is not a new central term, but a practical reminder to examine our assumptions. A thought influences emotion, decision, and behaviour, and repeated behaviour may contribute to shaping what becomes possible within the network of causes — but it does not make reality on its own. God Almighty says: ‘God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves’ (Q 13:11).

If a person wants to change some aspect of his reality, he must begin with what falls within his practical scope: reviewing his interpretation, building his knowledge and skill, seeking help, changing some of his conditions, and then acting. His way of thinking is part of this path; it is not a magic key that puts every outcome in his hands.

Much of our daily behaviour follows automatic patterns that have settled in the shakila: knowledge, conceptions, habits, and emotions become a lens that shapes how we interpret situations. If this lens fills with unfair or misleading thoughts, it needs reflection, self-examination, and evidence — and sometimes the help of a specialist — so that a truer path may open, one that leads to understanding and action rather than merely to a pleasant feeling.

Taking back control of our lives: the role of our framework of ideas

Many of the thoughts and beliefs we carry, whether consciously or unconsciously, exert a deep influence upon the course of our lives and our daily conduct. Our framework of ideas engages with life through the 'mental maps' stored within it, which form the basis of its responses to situations and events. When these maps are distorted by negativity, they become a hidden constraint that prevents us from developing and changing.

Cognitive restructuring of what has settled in our shakila is therefore not a luxury. It can begin with reflection and self-examination, with the testing of evidence, with training oneself to act well, and with recourse to those qualified to help when that is needed. The aim is not to eliminate every unwanted thought that crosses the mind, but to change what we adopt and what we build our judgements and conduct upon.

Anyone who observes himself truthfully may notice that some negative thoughts, if left unexamined and unreviewed,

may return in cycles of anxiety and rumination, and may settle in the shakila so as to weigh down his responses. But this is not inevitable: their effects can change through reflection, treatment, action, and a supportive environment, within one's practical scope.

Unfair thoughts are like a distorting lens that directs attention towards whatever confirms them, so that the self overlooks other evidence or reads it in the light of fear. With repetition, a cycle of rumination and helplessness may arise, even when the picture the self has formed does not correspond to reality.

Reviewing misleading thoughts is necessary to free the self from this lens. Change begins from what a person can do within himself and outside himself: correcting his knowledge, seeking clarification, changing habit and environment, and working within his practical scope. God Almighty says: 'God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves' (Q 13:11).

But changing thoughts alone is not enough. Change requires more precise knowledge, a will that works within one's practical scope, graduated practice, a suitable environment and support, and specialist treatment when that is needed. New conceptions may become established through repetition and action, while some patterns may still require long periods and continuing support.

Watching over oneself does not mean controlling every passing thought or preventing every troubling idea. It means noticing what you adopt, what you repeat, and what you build your decisions upon, and then examining it in the light of truth and reality. Involuntary thoughts are not condemned merely for occurring; but dwelling upon them, justifying them, and acting upon them are matters of responsibility, in proportion to one's knowledge and practical scope.

When a person brings together truer knowledge, a will directed towards truth, and repeated action within his practical scope, he can take part in reshaping his shakila and his life. This is deeper than 'positive thinking', because the measure of a thought is not that it should be comfortable, but that it should be truer and closer to truth and to fitra.

Turning towards God and returning to what fitra requires are among the most important things that free the self from enslavement to destructive thoughts. Faith, remembrance, repentance, and right action open the door of hope and restore one's orientation — without cancelling the need for knowledge, treatment, support, and a change of environment when these are called for.

The human self between fitra and losing its way

The self is receptive to good and to deviation; it does not carry 'seeds of evil' that make it evil in its essence. God has inspired it with its wrongdoing and its God-consciousness and opened before it the path of tazkiya. In its original constitution, fitra comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood. It is neither detailed, infallible knowledge nor a compelling impulse; it therefore requires revelation, intellect, and tazkiya.

The danger is that the effects of fitra should be veiled beneath the accumulation of heedlessness, habit, and desire — not that fitra itself should disappear or be exchanged for another. Persisting in materialism and deviation may make some poor responses easier, but it does not make losing one's way inevitable, and it does not close the door of repentance, learning, and treatment.

Inner conflict is not an inescapable fate that compels surrender, just as the human being is not the absolute victim of

what has come to be within him. God has granted him the root of choice; but his responsibility is understood in proportion to the clarity that has reached him and to what lies within his practical scope, taking into account the body, the environment, upbringing, illness, and coercion. Tazkiya is therefore a conscious participation in reforming the shakila and the orientation, not a basis for blaming a person for a starting point he did not choose.

Here lies the challenge in a person's life: will he take part in refining his self and undertaking its tazkiya through what falls within his practical scope, or will he surrender to desire and self-justification? This participation recurs across many choices, but people do not all begin from the same point: bodies, environments, levels of preparedness, and opportunities differ, and God knows the measure of clarity, of practical scope, and of striving in each case.

The way to safety: spiritual direction and intellectual self-examination

To protect the self from the seductions of desire and self-justification, a person needs to take part in his own becoming and in shaping what he comes to be on foundations drawn from revelation, fitra, and the intellect, and to change what he can of his habits, environment, and conditions of action. He does not 'remake himself' alone; he strives within God's guidance and support and within the network of causes.

The essence of change begins from a person's understanding of his spiritual reality and his awareness of his role as a servant of God and a vicegerent upon the earth. This understanding guides one's orientation, but it needs knowledge, action, self-examination, repentance, and reform if it is to become a shakila.

The practical solution is not to harness a 'conscious mind' as though it were an independent power, but to activate the self's awareness and the intellect's work in understanding, discernment, and review, and then to build responses that accord with truth and fitra. This may require learning, training, treatment, and a supportive environment — not the repetition of phrases alone.

Cognitive restructuring is not an instantaneous process but a path of learning, examination, and practice. Over time, misleading thoughts may weaken and the presence of sound meanings grow stronger, so that one's perception of reality improves and one's capacity to respond to it truthfully increases.

When the shakila changes in accordance with truth, some sound responses become easier and more likely to arise. But this does not automatically transform a life from misery to happiness, nor does it guarantee the removal of illness or pain. True happiness is the soundness of the self and its actualisation of perfection and servanthood; tranquillity is its settling in God and in truth, an original fruit and a graduated manifestation of nearness. Both may coexist with sorrow or fatigue, just as a person may need continuing treatment and support.

For sound meanings to take root in the self, they need the support of remembrance, right action, repetition, and a supportive environment — not the 'erasure' of every prior trace. Striving against the self means resisting desire and self-justification and directing the will towards truth; it is wider than merely improving performance or replacing one thought with another.

Notice that when the Qur'an describes the human being as created anxious — distressed when evil touches him, and withholding when good touches him — it does not present this as an inescapable fate. It excepts those who pray, and then describes their constancy in prayer, their giving, their assent to the Day of Judgement, their safeguarding of trusts and the pledge, and

their bearing of witness (Q 70:19–35)[3]. Fidelity to the pledge is thus present in this practical path, without every pledge mentioned here being confined to the covenant in Sura al-Aʿraf.

These are acts of servanthood and tazkiya, not merely 'healthy practices'. They are intended as fidelity to God, and constancy in them contributes to refining attachment, fear, and withholding, and to shaping the shakila. The exception does not mean the erasure of all fear; the verses describe these same people as apprehensive of their Lord's punishment. It opens a way of understanding how a person may emerge from the tyranny of anxiety; it does not promise that every hardship or form of suffering will disappear merely through the performance of worship.

Not every thought that appears positive accords with truth. The measure is not comfort or enthusiasm, but the thought's agreement with revelation, with fitra, with the intellect, and with reality. Fitra does not supply detailed, infallible knowledge in every situation: revelation makes clear, the intellect discriminates, the heart assents, and then a person chooses and acts.

Experiences may leave traces of varying depth in the self, conscious or unconscious, contributing to the shakila without governing it alone. We therefore need to educate ourselves, to review our convictions, to practise what nourishes faith and intellect, and to build a healthy formative environment as far as we are able.

Given the complexity of the modern world, it is not enough to accustom ourselves to 'positive inputs'. It is more useful to distinguish truthful and beneficial inputs from misleading and harmful ones, to engage with beauty and goodness with

3 Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, al-Mīzān, vol. 20, commentary on Q 70:19–35; and Makārim al-Shīrāzī, al-Amthal, commentary on the same verses. The point concerns the original powers and the effect of constancy in refining them, not a guarantee of an automatic psychological result.

gratitude, and to seek treatment and support when problems exceed our own capacity.

At the same time we should take a conscious stance towards falsehood and harm — neither ignoring reality nor falling into an obsessive fear of every painful piece of news, but rejecting what contradicts truth and working to put it right within our practical scope. Abraham (peace be upon him) offered the model of disavowing idolatry and falsehood, not the model of fleeing every piece of news or every uncomfortable feeling.

Islam expresses this stance as loyalty to truth and to its people, and disavowal of falsehood and aggression — not as a mere division of the world into 'positive' and 'negative'. The believer accepts the good and adopts it, and rejects evil and resists its effects, while retaining mercy, justice, and insight.

Finally, we must recognise that genuine reform does not spring from isolation or from turning in upon oneself. It is achieved by moving beyond individualism to reform at every level. It begins within our families, with our spouses and our children, as God Almighty says: 'O you who believe, guard yourselves and your families against a fire whose fuel is people and stones' (Q 66:6). But it does not stop at the boundaries of the family; it extends to the whole of society, and then to the whole world. We are a community whose responsibility is greater, as God Almighty says: 'You are the best community brought forth for humankind: you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God' (Q 3:110).

And because individual efforts alone may not suffice, the Qur'an directs us to the importance of organised collective work founded upon cooperation and unity: 'Cooperate with one another in righteousness and God-consciousness, and do not cooperate in sin and aggression' (Q 5:2). In this collective spirit, reform becomes a shared endeavour whose good reaches everyone.

Exercises and reflective questions

A reflective question:

How do I deal with the thoughts that arise within me? What can I review or change, and what needs acceptance, treatment, or support? Take a few moments to consider how you handle your thoughts day by day, and ask yourself:

- Which unfair or misleading thoughts do I repeat to myself? What effect do they have on my feelings and my decisions? Are they founded on evidence, or on fear, overgeneralisation, or a past experience? And how do I weigh them against truth and reality, instead of merely labelling them 'negative'?
- What part of reviewing how I think lies within my practical scope, and what knowledge or support do I need?
- How can I begin to rebuild my framework of ideas in a way that supports me rather than constrains me?

Exercise 1: Analysing negative thoughts

Choose an unfair or misleading thought that recurs in your mind, then write out more truthful and reasonable responses grounded in evidence and reality. Observe the effect on your behaviour — and do not make this exercise a substitute for specialist care if the thought is intrusive or bound up with a psychological disorder.

Exercise 2: Reframing thoughts

Review the thought as often as is needed to build a truer response, without turning the review into rumination or obsessive checking. Combine the correction of understanding with one small practical action that falls within your practical scope.



CHAPTER THREE

What Is Your Purpose in Life?

Seeking to understand the purpose of life

From the beginning of human existence upon this earth, the question of life's purpose has been among the deepest and most important questions to occupy human thought. What does it mean to live? And why are we here? These are not merely philosophical musings or passing ideas; they are the very core of the human search for the meaning of one's existence and one's role in this universe.

Life is not a random journey; it is a course with an end and a purpose. Every person, at some moment, stands wondering why he exists and what the events and experiences he passes through mean. In these moments of self-reflection it becomes clear that life is not only about the pursuit of money, or fame, or even temporary happiness; it is about realising a greater purpose that transcends all those limited material goals.

The purpose of life begins with understanding oneself, and through this understanding a person can come to realise that

he was created for a higher end. God Almighty says: 'I did not create jinn and humankind except to worship me' (Q 51:56). This realisation — that we were created for servanthood before God — places us on a path that reorders our priorities and gives us a compass by which to direct our lives towards what is greater than worldly achievement.

But this realisation is not confined to theoretical knowledge; it is an experience lived out each day. When someone grasps that his life has a meaning deeper than the pursuit of material successes, he begins to see the details of his day differently.

Every decision, every step, every challenge becomes part of his journey towards his highest purpose. Life takes on real meaning only when a person sees it as a continuous road towards tazkiya and spiritual ascent, and not as a series of random events.

Grasping one's purpose may give a person clarity and meaning that help him order his choices, but it does not exempt him from bewilderment or pain, nor does it guarantee a permanent sense of tranquillity. The difference is that he has a reference point to return to whenever he is unsettled: he reviews his orientation, seeks the truth, and continues to walk within his practical scope.

Seeking to understand the purpose of life is not a matter of philosophy or religion alone; it is a practical experience that every person lives at every moment. Ambitions, relationships, successes, and even the challenges we face all arise within this larger context. Here the balance we seek becomes clear: how can we live our lives in all their daily detail and at the same time remain bound to the highest purpose for which God created us?

Nearness to God as the foundation of life

God teaches us that the highest purpose of our lives is servanthood before him and the seeking of nearness to him. God Almighty says: 'And the foremost, the foremost — those are the

ones brought near' (Q 56:10–11). This nearness is neither spatial nor numerical. It is read through the knowledge, understanding, will, powers, settled dispositions, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through the orientation of the person's response to the truth made clear to them — in acceptance and obedience or in refusal and arrogance — in light of the clarification available and within their practical scope. Whatever perfections are realised in us are created and limited effects that point to the perfection of their Creator without likeness to him.

Nearness through servanthood is the establishment and deepening of servanthood in knowing God, loving him, directing one's intention towards him, obeying him, and submitting to him. Among its forms is 'the perfection of wholehearted turning to God', as it appears in the Shaʿbaniyya Supplication. This does not mean withdrawal from reality; it means that the heart belongs to God while the person remains present in life, discharging what is due to the body, the family, work, and society. In this sense we may read the expression current in contemplative literature: 'I saw nothing without seeing God before it and after it.'[1]

Making nearness to God the highest purpose gives life meaning, and may strengthen resolve and constancy when it is ordered within faith, remembrance, and action. But it does not turn a person into an inexhaustible source of energy, and it does not guarantee permanent motivation or permanent emotional peace. The servant continues to need rest, means, companionship, and treatment, and he struggles against flagging spirits whenever they come upon him.

Nevertheless, servanthood and nearness to God do not conflict with enjoying the good things of life, as God Almighty says:

1 From the Shaʿbāniyya Supplication related from the Commander of the Faithful and the Imams among his descendants (peace be upon them): 'My God, grant me the perfection of wholehearted turning to you'; related by Ibn Ṭāwūs in *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*.

'Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of God which he has brought forth for his servants, and the good things of provision? Say: They are for those who believe, in the life of this world, purely theirs on the Day of Resurrection' (Q 7:32). These good things are lawful benefits and fields of trial and trust; they may enter into the path of nearness when the purpose and the means are sound and rights are preserved — not because they are mechanical instruments of perfection.

But the question many face is this: how can we balance our striving for worldly success with our commitment to our highest purpose?

The challenge does not lie in having worldly ambitions, but in ensuring that they do not become independent ends that obstruct the orientation towards happiness and servanthood, or crowd out rights and duties.

Material success — in work, wealth, or relationships — can be an instrument on the path of servanthood if its orientation and means are sound and what is due is discharged. But it does not automatically increase nearness, and it is no evidence of nearness. An achievement may serve actualised perfection and response to truth and servanthood; it may equally become a veil if it becomes independent of the purpose.

God Almighty says: 'And seek, in what God has given you, the abode of the hereafter; and do not forget your share of this world' (Q 28:77). This Qur'anic direction is not a call to reject the world, but a call for the world's goods to be ordered towards the hereafter and within servanthood — so that worldly success serves tazkiya and the realisation of perfection, and does not become an end cut off from the higher course of a person's life.

Seeking true happiness and tranquillity

In our search for the purpose of life we find that people seek many goods: security, relationships, success, ease, and joy.

These goods contribute to psychological wellbeing and quality of life, but they are not identical with existential happiness or with tranquillity. Happiness is the soundness and flourishing of the self in truth and servanthood; tranquillity is the settledness of its point of reference in God along the course of that journey.

In a public talk in 2015, Robert Waldinger — director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development — referred to a separate survey that asked millennials about their most important goals. More than 80 per cent said that becoming rich was a major goal, and about 50 per cent also named fame. These percentages were not findings of the Harvard longitudinal study itself; he used them as an introduction to compare common aims with what the study discloses about the importance of good relationships.[2]

For ambition to take its proper place, the aspects of the single self — the body, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — need care and ordering under the authority of truth. Neglecting bodily need does harm, just as turning it into an end does harm; and the intellect, the heart, and the spiritual station each have a function that is not served by the domination of any one of them.

Good human relationships play an important part in wellbeing, in support, and in a sense of belonging, and they may help a person along the path of happiness — but they are not happiness itself, nor its sole cause. The human being is social by nature, and God has made mutual acquaintance, mercy, and rights part of his trust: 'O people, we created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another' (Q 49:13). What studies of relationships generally measure is health, wellbeing, and a sense of

2 Robert Waldinger, "What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness," TEDxBeaconStreet, November 2015. The millennial percentages are presented there as a separate survey, not as a result of the Harvard Study of Adult Development.

satisfaction; happiness in the sense used in this book, however, is the soundness of the self and its ordering within truth and servanthood.

Some observational studies have found an association between regular weekly attendance at communal worship and lower mortality among women.[3] Another found an association with lower mortality related to drugs, alcohol, and suicide among health professionals.[4] Statistical association, however, does not establish that every disorder is caused by spiritual turning away, nor that worship guarantees health or prevents illness. Religious care remains a source of meaning and support for many, while bodily, psychological, and social causes and specialist treatment must be respected.

Sound relationships are among the goods of life and sources of support, but they do not produce happiness on their own. Happiness is the soundness of the self and its graduated realisation of the perfection proper to its fitra, and its ordering within truth and servanthood. Good relationships and worldly goods may accompany it without being identical with it. What many studies measure as wellbeing remains a valid psychological and social description within its own field.

Happiness does not lie in the amount of wealth, influence, or fame we possess. It lies in the kind of life we live and in what the self comes to be. Inner consistency is not enough if it revolves around falsehood; it benefits us only when knowledge, heart, intention, and action are ordered under the authority of truth and fitra.

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3 S. Li, M. J. Stampfer, D. R. Williams, and T. J. VanderWeele, "Association of Religious Service Attendance With Mortality Among Women," *JAMA Internal Medicine* 176, no. 6 (2016).

4 Y. Chen, H. K. Koh, I. Kawachi, M. Botticelli, and T. J. VanderWeele, "Religious Service Attendance and Deaths Related to Drugs, Alcohol, and Suicide Among US Health Care Professionals," *JAMA Psychiatry* 77, no. 7 (2020).

Happiness is the soundness and existential flourishing of the self through the growth of its powers and perfections and their ordering in response to truth and servanthood. It is graduated in this world and may coexist with pain and sorrow. This course develops through inner truthfulness: the mutual accord of the aspects of the single self — the bodily dimension, heart, intellect, and spirit — under truth and fitra, followed by work to address the gaps that appear within one's practical scope.

Tranquillity is the settledness of the self and heart in God along this course. It is an original fruit, a graduated manifestation, and an inward qualitative sign of nearness — not merely emotional calm and not a substitute for treatment. God Almighty says: 'O tranquil self, return to your Lord, well pleased and pleasing; enter among my servants, and enter my garden' (Q 89:27–30).

Ambition and achievement between this world and the next

Tazkiya-oriented aspiration is a person's striving to develop their powers, competences, and achievements and to extend their impact within servanthood and trust, such that instrumental expansion serves growth through tazkiya rather than replacing it. The question, then, is not whether we should aspire, but how worldly aspiration can become part of our trust and our road to the hereafter.

Many focus on material and professional success as a mark of self-realisation, and may imagine that wealth, fame, or standing determines their worth. The highest purpose, however, is the worship of God and the seeking of his pleasure and of meeting him; a servant's happiness comes from the soundness of his self and its ordering within this journey. Worldly ambitions are therefore directed to serve the trust, and are not made a source of dignity or a measure of nearness.

Worldly ambition is not rejected in Islam. On the contrary, God encourages us to strive to achieve our goals in this world — on condition that this striving be balanced and in harmony with the requirements of the spirit and of the hereafter. God Almighty says: 'And seek, in what God has given you, the abode of the hereafter; and do not forget your share of this world' (Q 28:77). This verse points clearly to the necessity of balance between worldly ambition and spiritual goals. Success in this world should be a means of drawing near to God, not an end in itself.

Material or professional ambition should serve a person's trust and his spiritual purposes, not become a final reference point. When it turns into an independent end it may exhaust the self and scatter its orientation, and an abundance of gains guarantees neither its happiness nor its tranquillity. It is related from the greatest Messenger (may God bless him and his family): 'If a son of Adam had two valleys of wealth, he would seek a third; nothing fills the belly of the son of Adam but dust.'[5]

Sound ambition does not lie in amassing wealth or influence for their own sake, but in developing the instrumental abilities and existential perfections a person has been given, and using them in truth and in the service of people and religion. God Almighty says: 'He who created death and life to test which of you is best in deed' (Q 67:2). This path is read along two dimensions: the perfection realised within the self, and how it responds to truth according to the clarification it has received and the practical scope available to it — not by the size of an achievement or its outward effect alone.

Ambition therefore needs to be ordered within the single self: the bodily dimension is the aspect of its embodied presence and action; the intellect, the aspect of its understanding and discernment; the heart, the aspect of its assent, its love, and its

5 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6436; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1048.

intention; and the spirit, the aspect of its openness to truth and to its purpose. These are not adjacent parts but avenues for analysing the unity of the human being.

Balancing worldly ambition with work for the hereafter is a recurring challenge, and awareness of purpose, contentment, and the safeguarding of rights all help us meet it. Yet contentment alone does not guarantee the soundness of the path; it needs knowledge, self-examination, and review. The greatest Messenger (may God bless him and his family) said: 'Wealth does not consist in an abundance of possessions; rather, wealth is the wealth of the self.' Ambition may enter into this wealth of the self when it is ordered within servanthood and remains within one's practical scope.[6]

Inner truthfulness as the road to happiness

Happiness is not a passing feeling of joy or satisfaction, but the soundness and flourishing of the self in truth and servanthood. Inner truthfulness is the mutual accord of the functions of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit within the single self under the authority of truth and the demands of fitra. Facing gaps, self-accounting, repentance, and reform are means by which this accord becomes established within practical scope.

As the aspects of the self come into greater accord and harmony under truth, the self becomes more integrated and gathered, while the causes of dispersion and veiling diminish; its tranquillity, steadfastness, and stability increase. This does not mean that pain or illness disappears, nor does it turn nearness into a quantity by which people may be ranked.

The search for truth, and the inclination towards morality, beauty, creativity, love, and belonging, are all demands rooted

6 Agreed upon: reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from Abū Hurayra.

in fitra. And the reality of the human being is not the composition of a body and a spirit as two adjacent entities, but a single embodied self, read in its worldly origination through the body, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit.

Inner truthfulness and tazkiya are among the foundations of happiness and tranquillity and the course by which they grow; they are not a formula guaranteeing a particular emotional state. Ṣiddīqiyya is the graduated summit of the path of inner truthfulness, in which the accord of the self's aspects and their ordering under truth and servanthood reach their highest possible degrees. It also admits of degrees of intensity and breadth, does not mean infallibility, and does not authorise judging people's inner states.

Inner truthfulness is foundational to spiritual and psychological happiness, but it does not guarantee the absence of tension or disorder. A truthful person may suffer, or fall ill, or remain in a struggle with an old habit; but he does not shield the gap with justification. He acknowledges it and seeks what will help him put it right.

It is likewise an inner compass — but one that is not independent of truth. When a person reviews himself truthfully, and examines what he loves, intends, and chooses in the light of revelation, the intellect, rights, and reality, he becomes able to distinguish the essential from the secondary and to direct his effort and his abilities towards his purpose.

But reaching a state of inner truthfulness requires courage: the courage to face the truth in all its aspects, including those that may be uncomfortable. It also requires persistent work on improving oneself and learning from one's mistakes. A person who is truthful with himself does not deny his weakness; he acknowledges it and works to improve. Nor does he pretend to perfection; he accepts himself as he is, while continuing to strive towards what is better.

When a person is truthful, his heart opens to the love of God and of his creation, and he sees the universe as signs and trusts — not as a 'partner' in some sense that would erase the difference between the human being and other existents. All creatures subsist by God and glorify him, and the human being is charged with showing them mercy and with building up the earth within the limits of his trust.

Inner truthfulness is not confined to understanding oneself; it orders the aspects of the self under truth and helps a person review his orientation and address gaps within practical scope. As this accord increases, tranquillity and steadfastness increase as a graduated fruit — without a promise of the deepest stations or of their completion in this world, and without denying pain or the need for treatment.

Realising the highest purpose does not rest on abstract inner consistency, but on truthfulness in our vertical relation to truth. Beliefs, feelings, and behaviour may all align around a corrupt end; truthfulness requires reviewing the reference point itself, and then ordering intention and action in its light.

Chapter summary

We have seen that nearness to God is a non-spatial designation for the human being's movement towards the perfection proper to him and his response to truth. It is read through the knowledge, will, powers, settled dispositions, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through the orientation of its response — in acceptance or refusal — in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope; it is not turned into a number or a judgement upon people's inner states. Nearness through servanthood is the deepening and consolidation of servanthood in knowledge, love, intention, obedience, and surrender.

Inner truthfulness is likewise the mutual accord of the aspects of the self under fitra and truth, not a merely inward consistency that might revolve around falsehood. As this accord increases, the self's tranquillity, steadfastness, and stability increase. Tranquillity is an original fruit and a graduated manifestation of nearness, while disturbance, pain, and illness may remain.

As for ambition and achievement, they are fields of trust, not measures of a person's worth. God has made them among the settings of trial through excellence of deed: 'We have made what is upon the earth an adornment for it, that we may test which of them is best in deed' (Q 18:7). The self is read through the aspects of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit, but it is not composed of four adjacent parts; and every worldly success acquires its value from its orientation, the legitimacy of its means, its effect upon the self and upon people, and its ordering within the purpose of the hereafter.

In the end it becomes clear that the highest purpose is servanthood and nearness to God, and that the tazkiya of the self orders one's striving between this world and the next. This does not mean seeking permanent psychological ease or a separate 'self-realisation'; it means that a person should know his orientation and discharge his trust truthfully.

Every person is therefore called to review his goals: are they ordered within truth and servanthood, or have they become ends independent of God? God desires for his servants success and happiness in their Islamic sense: the soundness of the path in truth, and the soundness and perfection of the self — not merely an abundance of achievement or of pleasure.

Life is a continuous journey towards God, and every moment in it is an opportunity to advance further in spiritual and human elevation and success.

Exercises and reflective questions

A reflective question:

Are the goals I pursue today ordered within the purpose of servanthood and the truth that has become clear to me, or are they temporary stations unconnected with my actual orientation? Take a few moments to consider your present goals, and ask yourself:

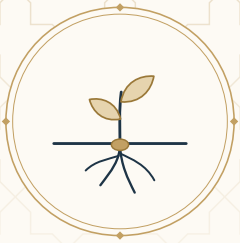
- Do these goals accord with the truth that has become clear to me, and do they preserve rights — or are they merely a reflection of what society imposes or desire dictates?
- What would happen if I achieved all these goals? Would I feel fulfilled, or would I look for something else?
- How can I reformulate my goals so that they accord more closely with my highest purpose?

Exercise 1: Identifying core values

Identify the values and principles you believe direct your life, then weigh them against revelation, truth, the intellect, and rights — do not rest content with the strength of your feelings about them. Write down why each value matters, how it affects your daily decisions, and what needs review or further learning.

Exercise 2: Envisioning success

Write what success means to you in a comprehensive sense, both worldly and spiritual. Identify specific goals and ambitions that represent your personal vision of success, along with how they connect to your highest purposes. This exercise helps you place your goals within both a spiritual and a material framework.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Becoming of the Self: The Story of the Self and the Intellect

Having reflected upon the purpose of our lives, we now turn to a journey exploring the course of our own becoming: how fitra, the body, preparedness, environment, experience, and choice interact, and how the effects of all this are ordered into habits, settled dispositions, shakila, and orientation.

In this chapter we shall recognise that we are not merely the product of biological or hereditary factors, nor are we independent spirits deposited in bodies foreign to them. Each of us is a single human self possessing a spiritual station and embodied in a body. Our becoming unfolds through the interaction of the fitra, body, and preparedness we have been given, the upbringing, environment, and experience that have befallen us, and what we have known, loved, chosen, and repeated.

We shall also learn how the self, by its will and together with the work of the intellect, faith, remembrance, and practice, takes part in reviewing its framework of knowledge and in changing some of its habits and conditions within its practical scope — not to create itself unaided, or to reach some 'ideal version', but to become truer in orientation and closer to truth.

The journey of self-discovery: shakila, the formative environment, and the will to change

Much of our behaviour and many of our reactions occur automatically through the shakila: the inner structure in which our knowledge, loves, habits, settled dispositions, and the traces of temperament, body, and experience are ordered. God Almighty says: 'Say: Everyone acts according to his shakila' (Q 17:84). The formative environment is the network of conditions, relationships, messages, models, incentives, opportunities, and material, social, and cultural obstacles that participate, over time, in the whole of a person's taking shape and becoming. It affects what one knows and loves, one's inclinations, habits, shakila, and orientation, and what one sees, understands, finds familiar or easy, and is able to do — without determining the person or cancelling agency and choice. The self itself is what is aware: it uses the intellect in understanding, discernment, and review, and takes part in changing what falls within its practical scope.

The shakila is relatively stable; it is not an inescapable fate. A person can take part in reshaping some of its elements through learning, action, repentance, treatment, and such change of environment as is feasible — while factors remain that he did not choose or cannot change. God Almighty says: 'God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves' (Q 13:11).

Change does not begin from within alone, nor from outside alone. It begins from the interaction of the shakila with environment, body, opportunity, and choice. A supportive environment may widen preparedness and ability, and a harsh environment may make the path harder — without either being the sole cause or an inevitable verdict upon a person.

Self-development is therefore not confined to knowing one's strengths and weaknesses. It requires reading the shakila, understanding the formative environment, gauging actual capacity and practical scope, and then choosing what can be changed in knowledge, habit, skill, relationship, and circumstance.

When God Almighty said: 'When your Lord said to the angels: I am creating a human being from clay; when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of my spirit, fall down before him in prostration' (Q 38:71–72), this indicated the unity of the embodied human being and his created spiritual station — not two independent entities. His worldly presence may be read from two complementary aspects:

- The bodily rank: this includes biological structure, corporeal qualities, the senses, the brain, temperament, and forms of preparedness influenced by heredity. It is part of the unity of the person, not the adversary of his spirit or a machine alien to him.
- The human spiritual rank: this is the self itself, considered from the standpoint of its irreducibility to matter and its openness to truth, to absolute perfection, and to the purpose of servanthood.

These two aspects are not two persons side by side; they are two faces of the unity of the human being. Heredity, body, and environment contribute differing levels of preparedness and receptivities, with which knowledge, love, intention, choice, and action then interact along the path of becoming.

Fitra is a distinctive mode of human creation. It comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood. It is neither detailed conceptual knowledge nor completed religious awareness; its manifestation and the identification of its object therefore require revelation, intellect, and tazkiya. God Almighty says: 'So set your face towards the religion, inclining to truth: the fitra of God upon which he originated people' (Q 30:30). Fitra does not grow or wither as though it were an acquired disposition; its effects may be disclosed or veiled, and tazkiya removes veils and develops the perfections that accord with it.

As for bodily and temperamental qualities and inherited forms of preparedness, they are neither all fixed nor all mutable to the same degree. Some of what we call boldness or calmness may be a natural preparedness rather than a completed virtue; for a virtue such as courage or forbearance requires knowledge of the truth, choice, and practice, and is also affected by upbringing, environment, treatment, and the body.

The details of life contribute to our formation in differing degrees. Learning, work, relationships, trials, the thoughts we adopt, and the acts we repeat all leave traces in the self — but not every passing thought or feeling is a 'deep imprint'. A firmly established trait comes to be through a network of knowledge, love, intention, practice, repetition, environment, and divine support.

The human being is capable of renewal, but he does not possess an unlimited capacity to remake himself. His identity emerges through a process of becoming shaped by the interaction of heredity, body, environment, experience, and choice, and he takes part through his will in shaping his shakila and his existential form within God's established patterns and within his practical scope. The aim is not to design a 'best version' by

the measure of the marketplace, but tazkiya, truthfulness, and the faithful discharge of the trust.

Inner truthfulness: the ordering of the aspects of the single self

A person may find himself in inner contradiction: he wants one thing, feels another, and thinks in a way that does not accord with his conduct. This tension may be one of the causes of anxiety, but it is not the only explanation for it: the body, experience, environment, illness, and ways of thinking all contribute to anxiety, and each case needs to be understood in its own context.

Inner truthfulness is not following whatever lies within you, but the mutual accord of the self's aspects under truth and fitra, followed by work to address the gaps that appear within practical scope. Knowledge, imagination, intention, speech, and action are fields that disclose the degree of this accord within the four aspects; they are not a competing definition of it.

A contradiction between what a person knows, what he loves, and what he does may be a source of anxiety, but it is not the sole cause of suffering. Body, illness, trauma, relationships, and social circumstances also have their effect. Truthfulness therefore does not demand the elimination of feelings or the privileging of the heart over the intellect, but the ordering of the functions of the bodily dimension, heart, intellect, and spirit within the single self under the authority of truth.

As the aspects of the self come into greater accord and harmony under truth, the self becomes more integrated and gathered, while the causes of dispersion and veiling diminish; its tranquillity, steadfastness, and stability increase. This does not guarantee permanent peace of mind or the absence of tension. Facing a gap, seeking help, and working to put it right remain among the means of tazkiya.

Meeting our needs

We come into this world with bodily, psychological, and spiritual needs interwoven in one human being: we need food, drink, clothing, rest, love, knowledge, belonging, and meaning. These needs do not issue from two separate entities named body and spirit, but from the embodied self in its worldly origination.

We engage with the world and what is in it in order to meet these needs: we study, learn, enquire, work, make, and labour, and so meet our needs — and in turn other needs arise, and we remain in perpetual striving, from childhood to death, to meet needs that never come to an end.

To earn your livelihood with dignity and security, you may need to study, work, and face many situations. Your repeated decisions contribute to forming your habits and settled dispositions; but what you inherit is not a completed 'reserve of courage', but differing bodily, temperamental, and psychological forms of preparedness. Courage is a virtue realised when you know where the truth lies and hold firm to it within your practical scope; it may be strengthened by practice, example, and environment, and weakened by fear, habit, and pressure. The same distinction applies to will, wisdom, forbearance, and the other perfections.

So our becoming unfolds through the interaction of what we were given, what befell us, and what we chose. The question is: how do we change a behaviour or a reaction? How do we weaken a harmful habit and build a sound disposition, without attributing everything in us either to choice or to 'programming'?

Changing behaviour

Stephen R. Covey holds, in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, that efforts directed at modifying attitudes and behaviours directly yield only slight changes however long they continue, and that fundamental change is achieved only when effort

is directed at the basic mental conceptions through which we see things: a change of vision precedes a change of behaviour.

Receptivity is the field of possibility; preparedness is the degree to which that possibility is poised for actualisation; actual capacity is what a person can in fact do or refrain from doing now; and practical scope is what responsibility rests upon in the person's real circumstances, whether through action, restraint, or the preparatory steps available. We may not claim certainty about another person's practical scope from outward appearances. Developing a value or a settled disposition depends on clarity about truth, motivation, practice, repetition, shakila, environment, and what education, treatment, and help are available.

Any conception or quality changes in proportion to how firmly it is rooted in the shakila, and in proportion to the understanding, motivation, action, environment, and time available. Desire alone is therefore not enough; nor is it right to blame a person for what exceeds his knowledge, intention, capacity, and practical scope, or to claim certainty from the outside about another person's practical scope.

The shakila is dynamic yet relatively stable, and it is the accumulated result of the interaction of body, temperament, upbringing, environment, experiences, and choices. The self does not register every stimulus in the same way, and not everything that has come to be within it is of its own making or deserving of praise or blame.

The shakila is the inner lens that makes certain modes of perception and response more likely to arise, without compelling the person to act upon them: 'Say: If you possessed the treasuries of my Lord's mercy, you would withhold them for fear of spending' (Q 17:100).

You may look at the sea and take in its beauty and stillness; the sight of it may stir in you a fear bound up with an earlier

experience; or you may hold both together. This difference is affected by shakila, experience, temperament, and circumstance — not by an independent entity called 'the psychological environment'.

Changing mental conceptions

The setting of the sun may be for you a source of distress and pain, so that your chest tightens whenever you see it — or it may mean calm, stillness, ease, and beauty.

You may be somewhere and hear someone's phone ring with the very tone your own phone had when you received news of the death of someone dear to you, and feel intense grief; or you may feel ease and happiness, if that was your ringtone during a period when you received a great deal of good news. All of this is bound up with your conceptions and your mental maps.

This is why acts of worship, remembrance, and reflection are concerned with correcting the reference point and building faith and the shakila — not with manufacturing a 'positivity' that casts out every feeling of fear and grief. Feelings may be natural or beneficial; what is required is that they be understood and ordered, and that they not enslave one's orientation: 'God is the protector of those who believe; he brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light' (Q 2:257).

The shakila affects automatic response, but it does not determine it inevitably: 'Say: Everyone acts according to his shakila' (Q 17:84). A person can, in proportion to his knowledge, his actual capacity, and his practical scope, choose an act contrary to what he is used to, and build a new path through repetition and help.

If the shakila is disposed towards good, a sound response may arise more easily; but virtues are not acquired by longing or attention alone. They require knowledge of the truth, a truthful will, repeated action, and a supportive environment,

and they may require treatment or training that increases preparedness and ability.

Repeating an act entrenches habit and disposition, for good or ill, but it does not make a quality entirely unchangeable. Settled dispositions may change through truthful repentance, sustained work, a different environment, treatment, and support from God — even if some trace or difficulty remains.

Take a simple example: you may feel distress at the sight of the setting sun. Begin by noticing the feeling and the circumstances in which it appears, and ask gently about the thoughts and memories bound up with it — without presupposing a single hidden cause, and without forcing yourself to recall what you cannot bear.

Set aside a limited time for reflection and writing, then return to your life. Do not turn the enquiry into repeated rumination or an attempt to keep the mind working while you sleep. If the distress grows severe, or is bound up with trauma, or obstructs your life, it is better to seek the help of a specialist.

A particular connection may become clear; or the cause may remain complex or unknown. What matters is not to make the discovery of a past story a condition of improvement: some responses change through learning new skills, regulating the body, and safe graduated exposure, even without knowing a single decisive cause.

You might notice, for example, that the colour orange became linked for you with a harmful experience at work, or that sunset became linked with an old fear of the night. These are hypotheses that need evidence; they are not confirmed explanations merely because they seem plausible.

The feeling may also arise from other causes — bodily, psychological, or circumstantial. An experience is therefore considered as it presents itself, and diagnosis is left to a specialist when symptoms recur or intensify.

An emotional association may become entrenched over time, but it does not necessarily become a fixed and unchanging part of you. Its effect varies with memory, body, environment, support, and practice.

Understanding a possible association may help to weaken it, but it does not guarantee that the link will be severed at once. The self may need training, treatment, or a change of environment, together with patience with gradual progress.

You then have elements with which to work: a truthful desire, an initial understanding, a level of preparedness that varies, and safe practice within your practical scope. No exercise guarantees the removal of every 'residue' or complete control over the inner life.

If the distress is mild and not bound up with trauma, you can pair watching the sunset with a safe and welcome experience, such as walking with a friend, gradually and without forcing yourself. But if the feeling is severe or provokes strong symptoms, do not attempt harsh self-directed exposure; seek the help of a specialist.

An old association may weaken over time, and new and safer meanings may come to be; but the change is not automatic, and its speed and degree differ from one person to another.

Learning this approach may increase your understanding of your shakila and your ability to order your responses, but it does not enable a person to act as his own therapist in every respect, nor does it allow the maps to be changed by desire alone. Knowledge, practice, treatment, environment, and divine support are complementary causes.

The will: agency within practical scope

Knowledge alone is not enough for change, and the will is not the sole secret. An act arises through knowledge, motivation, intention, ability, environment, decision, and practice, and a

person may stumble despite a truthful will because of illness, habit, or an obstacle that requires treatment or help. Strength answers: how steadfast can you be? Truthfulness answers: in what cause do you hold firm?

The will is a function of the self's agency through which it gives preference to a possible act and moves to bring it about within its practical scope. Its strength is a partial existential perfection that increases the capacity for decision and steadfastness; its truthfulness concerns orientation — whether it serves truth and servanthood or desire and arrogance. It is a genuine cause within the network of causes, not absolute control and not a guarantee of the outcome.

God Almighty says: 'And those who strive for us — we shall surely guide them to our ways' (Q 29:69). The verse gives good news of guidance to those who strive; it does not confine all striving to the treatment of habits. Changing the shakila does not happen at a single stroke, but through repeated effort, repentance, and review, and through God's grace and support.

Conclusion

At the end of this journey, we have recognised that personality is not a rigid mould; its becoming unfolds through the interaction of heredity, body, environment, experiences, and choices. We have also learned that the self uses its awareness, the work of the intellect, and its will to take part in changing what falls within its practical scope — without creating itself unaided or cancelling the effect of conditions it did not choose.

But this change is not haphazard; it requires inner truthfulness: that the aspects of the self should come into mutual accord under truth and fitra. Knowledge, self-accounting, repentance, reform, and changes in habits and environment are then used to establish this accord and to narrow the gaps that appear within practical scope.

Inner truthfulness opens the way for a courageous review and a feasible corrective step, but it does not endure through desire alone. Its continuance requires action, repetition, a supportive environment, self-accounting, renewal, and God's aid. As mutual accord takes root, the self's tranquillity and steadfastness increase, while pain and stumbling may remain.

And now, having understood how our becoming unfolds, we move to a new stage in which we explore our role in the universe and our responsibility as vicegerents upon the earth.

A reflective question

Am I taking part consciously in shaping myself, or am I living only under the influence of what environment, experience, and habit have formed in me? Take a few moments to reflect on your daily conduct, and ask yourself:

- Do my actions and reactions spring from real awareness, or are they merely automatic responses to what I have grown used to?
- Are there behaviours I repeat daily even though I know they do not accord with the truth or the good that has become clear to me?
- How can I review my shakila and build the knowledge, habit, and environment that will bring me closer to fitra, to truth, and to the purpose for which God created me?



CHAPTER FIVE

Vicegerency and Integration

Having determined our purpose in life in the previous chapter, we now face the most important question: how do we walk the path that pleases God, and seek along it happiness and tranquillity in their Islamic sense?

The answer lies in understanding the close relationship between us and this universe in which we live. God, glorified and exalted, did not create us or create this universe in vain; he created us for a great purpose — servanthood before him and nearness to him — as has already been said.

To realise this purpose we need to understand God's established patterns in the universe, to take up lawful means within our practical scope, and to refer both ability and outcome back to him. In this chapter we shall learn how this understanding is ordered within the path of servanthood, of vicegerency, and of a non-spatial nearness to God.

Vicegerency and the human role in the universe

The human being is a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth. Vicegerency is a trust and a general, distinctively human charge to cultivate the earth and bear the trust in accordance with divine guidance and God's established patterns; its realisation in human perfection and ethical character unfolds by degrees according to fidelity to servanthood, justice, and the trust. God Almighty says: 'When your Lord said to the angels: I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth' (Q 2:30). This role calls for the human being to realise, in a manner befitting a creature, the effects of the most beautiful names — knowledge, mercy, justice, and wisdom — without likeness to the Creator or independence from him.

In other words, the human being was entrusted with vicegerency: to build up the earth, to establish justice, and to render what is due, in accordance with divine guidance — not as an independent owner or an unbounded master. It requires knowledge, competence, and cooperation, and the careful, responsible use of resources.

In this role God grants the human being a created power of choice and a responsibility within his practical scope, and tries him so that the effect of what he chooses may appear — not so that God may learn something previously unknown to him. Vicegerency demands the wise care of nature, of resources, and of rights, without any claim to absolute ownership or unbounded power. God Almighty says: 'We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and were afraid of it; but the human being bore it' (Q 33:72). The verse sets out the gravity of the trust; it does not mean that the heavens and the earth 'abandoned' a charge identical to the human being's.

Because the human being is a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, he bears a responsibility to reform, defend

the wronged, and work to build a society founded upon justice and beneficence. He does not content himself with personal happiness, but seeks the good of others according to his knowledge and practical scope, without claiming absolute authority over the world or over people's inner states.

Nor is the trust fulfilled through outward action alone. It requires the tazkiya of the self and the ordering of its interwoven aspects — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — under the authority of truth. These aspects are not independent parts but avenues for reading the work of the single self.

A person is thus required to strive for justice and to discharge the trust within his society, and to review and purify himself so as to fulfil his responsibility as far as he is able. The ordering of his functions and his rights under the authority of truth helps him to hold spiritual ambition and worldly duty together — without any requirement of inner completeness before he begins to work.

In this way, as a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, a person bears the trust of cultivation, justice, and spreading good within his practical scope. His fulfilment of it unfolds by degrees according to his knowledge, intention, and action, and these responsibilities are ordered within the purpose of servanthood and non-spatial nearness to God.

Cosmic opposition: the journey of human integration

In the world of choice God created oppositions and tensions that open a space for movement, disclosure, and becoming. But they do not drive a person automatically towards perfection: he may respond to them with truth or may deviate, and his act is understood in the light of his knowledge, his intention, and his

practical scope. Life is therefore a field of trial and striving, not a machine that guarantees development.

To vary the fields of trial, God created us male and female, made us peoples and tribes that we might know one another, and favoured some of us over others in certain gifts and degrees as a test of the trust. He created the human being in the finest constitution, and his worldly presence may be read through the four aspects of the self — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — though this does not mean that the Qur'an lays down an independent fourfold model. God Almighty says: 'When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of my spirit' (Q 15:29).

This is why God has made subject to us what is in the heavens and the earth by way of trust, and has commanded us to strive and worship. We are not kings over the universe, but servants entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, bearing a charge and answerable for the trust, justice, and mercy.

And because we are called to this trust and charged with bearing it, God has set out for us the landmarks of the way in revelation, and has commanded us to strive towards him and to vie in good works. We are not 'partners in a divine strategy'; we are servants under command, possessing choice and responsibility within his established patterns and within our practical scope.

The human path across the four worlds

This world is one station on a human path that passes through the phases of the womb, this world, the barzakh, and the hereafter. The same person continues, while his mode of appearance and embodiment changes as befits each origination. The transition is not an automatic spiritual development, nor a gradual transcending of matter towards pure spirit; in the hereafter

what a person has come to be is made manifest, in happiness or in misery, within God's justice and mercy.

What distinguishes the human being is that the worldly phase is the sphere of religious obligation, work, and choice, in which he takes part in forming his self and bearing the trust of vicegerency. The remaining phases are not to be understood through the same mechanisms as this world, and nothing is to be claimed of them beyond what has been established of the unseen.

A person does not move between the worlds according to a system that raises him automatically; in each phase there appears what God has prepared for him and what has followed from his becoming and his work. This world is an arena of examination and responsibility — neither a merely material experience nor an automatic programme for raising one's spiritual level.



The human path across the four worlds

Grasping the extent of this path therefore makes a person more aware of his daily deeds. The acts he adopts and repeats, and the knowledge, intention, and choice that accompany them, may contribute to his becoming and his orientation. A passing thought or an unchosen act, however, is not on a par with an adopted path, and practical scope governs the measure of responsibility.

God Almighty says: 'We created the human being from an extract of clay; then we made him a drop in a secure lodging; then we formed the drop into a clinging form, and formed the clinging form into a lump, and formed the lump into bones, and clothed the bones with flesh; then we brought him forth as another creation. So blessed is God, the best of creators. Then, after that, you will surely die. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will surely be raised' (Q 23:12–16).

The first stage: the world of the womb

In the womb, the becoming of the worldly body begins in a 'secure lodging'. This stage rests upon material and biological causes in which the foetus makes no conscious choice. It reminds us that a great part of a person's beginning and of the gifts he receives is not of his own making and provides no grounds for praise or blame.

The second stage: the world of this life

In this world a person is addressed and held responsible in proportion to the clarity that has reached him and to what lies within his practical scope, and his will operates within the body, the environment, ability, and God's established patterns. He chooses between obedience and deviation, but not every circumstance or outcome is attributed to him.

This world is the field of becoming, tazkiya, and labouring. Labouring is the existential movement inseparable from the human being across time towards meeting God and one's final end before him. How a person comes to be along this course — near or far, perfected or deficient — is determined by what takes shape within the self and by the orientation of its response to truth, in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope. In this world a person

acquires knowledge, habits, and settled dispositions; puts right what he can; renders what is due; and prepares for the final end through the revealed law, striving, and repentance.

The third stage: the world of the barzakh

When the life of this world ends, a person passes to the barzakh, the intervening phase that lasts until the Day of Resurrection. The same person continues, retaining the identity of the self, with an embodiment suited to that origination, under God's decree. We do not assert that his spirit 'goes on perfecting itself' there by some continuous mechanism; we affirm only what revelation has indicated of the human being's persistence, of the traces of his deeds, and of his awaiting his final end.

The barzakh offers no fresh opportunity for the work of religious obligation as it exists in this world, though the effects of certain deeds continue — charity, knowledge, and righteous offspring — and God's mercy opens its doors as he wills. The details of experience and change there remain part of the unseen, about which one should not elaborate without evidence.

The fourth stage: the world of the hereafter

In the hereafter, the existential form the self has come to assume becomes manifest, shaped by the knowledge, loves, intentions, settled dispositions, and orientation realised within it. God apportions responsibility justly according to knowledge, intention, and practical scope. Illnesses, injuries, and constraints that a person did not choose are not moral defects; nor are happiness and misery reducible to a single outward result.

The matter resembles a latent preparedness whose effect does not appear fully in its first phase but becomes manifest

when conditions change. In the same way a person may be heedless of certain realities of his final end, and when the Resurrection comes there is disclosed to him what was not present to his awareness, as God Almighty says: 'You were heedless of this, so we have removed from you your covering, and your sight today is keen' (Q 50:22). This does not mean that every person lives in heedlessness to the same degree, nor that the image describes the mechanics of the unseen in detail.

Sayyid al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī pointed to the connection between what a person faces in the hereafter and the reality of his deeds. Knowledge, intentions, deeds, and settled dispositions enter into the self's becoming and existential form, and their realities and effects are made manifest in the hereafter in a manner suited to that origination, through God's disclosure and judgement. Recompense is therefore not reduced to a mechanism independent of him, nor does this exhaust the dimensions of reward, punishment, forgiveness, and intercession. God Almighty says: 'Do not make excuses today; you are recompensed only for what you used to do' (Q 66:7).

A person participates, through his will and choices within what God has enabled him to do, in shaping the existential form with which he meets the hereafter. God's creation, guidance, support, and enabling grace precede this participation; it is not independent of him.

When we picture the Garden, we may imagine a tedious, monotonous material life in palaces and lush gardens, enjoying rivers, wine, and honey, surrounded by fair, wide-eyed companions and served by ageless youths. Some ask: shall we remain permanently immersed in these material pleasures? And was all this effort in the world to gain spiritual and intellectual strength to end in a purely material reward?

But the truth is that what the Qur'an relates of the bliss of the Garden is only one aspect of it, and what is hidden is greater.

God Almighty says: ‘They shall have whatever they wish for therein, and with us is yet more’ (Q 50:35). In the Garden there is what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived. God Almighty says: ‘No self knows what comfort of the eyes has been hidden for them, as a recompense for what they used to do’ (Q 32:17).

The Garden is a world of bodily, spiritual, and intellectual bliss suited to the origination of the hereafter, and the greatest thing in it is God’s good pleasure and a non-spatial nearness to him. It is not right to picture that good pleasure as a spatial connection or a union; it is the perfection of servanthood and the gift and honour bestowed by God.

This world is a limited phase of the human path; the hereafter is the abiding abode in which the final end appears and in which God grants the people of the Garden a good that is never cut off. We do not fully comprehend the nature of that world, nor describe it by the mechanics of this world or by analogy with virtual-reality games, nor do we regard a creature as unlimited in itself. God Almighty says: ‘This worldly life is nothing but diversion and play; the abode of the hereafter is truly the life, if only they knew’ (Q 29:64).

The life of the Garden is a gift unending, its bliss renewed by God’s favour. One may speak of an increase in knowledge and love to the extent that the texts allow, without constructing detailed mechanisms for the changing of things or for a ‘development of the spirit’ for which there is no evidence.

In the end, what appears in the hereafter is the outcome of what a person came to be in this world, within God’s justice, mercy, and favour. What he has built of truthfulness, servanthood, perfections, and right actions is not separate baggage that he carries; it enters into the very quality of his self and its traces — while the final judgement belongs to God alone.

Exercises and reflective questions

A reflective question:

Do my personal goals accord with my trust as a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, or am I seeking a success that severs me from purpose and rights? Take a few moments to reflect on your current goals, and ask yourself:

- Am I living by a vision that brings me success alone, or do I weigh my success against truth and rights and against its effect upon my self and upon people?
- Are my goals ordered within my purpose and my servanthood, or are they temporary stations that do not reflect the truth that has become clear to me?
- How can I achieve a balance between personal success and social responsibility?

Exercise 1: Applying the concept of vicegerency

Think about your daily life: how can you apply the concept of vicegerency in its various aspects? For example:

- In your relationships with others: how can you contribute to spreading good and justice among people?
- In your work: how can you carry out your work with trustworthiness and excellence, and make it a means of serving others?
- In your use of natural resources: how can you protect the environment and use resources wisely?
- In your learning and self-development: how can you invest your knowledge and abilities in the service of humanity?

Exercise 2: Achieving integration

What are some of the ways in which you can achieve integration between the different aspects of your life? For example:

- How can you reconcile your work, your family life, and your worship?
- How can you set aside time to care for your bodily, psychological, and spiritual health, without treating them as separate entities or making one the enemy of another?
- How can you balance material ambition with striving for the hereafter?



CHAPTER SIX

The Journey to God

On our journey to God, paths and stations become clear, leading us onwards in inner truthfulness and tazkiya. The journey to God is neither a theoretical orientation nor an isolated individual practice; it is a path in which daily life is interwoven with the needs of the embodied self and its aspects: the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit. It brings together divine guidance, fitra, and striving, and it calls for the ordering of bodily, psychological, and spiritual needs under the purpose of servanthood.

In this chapter we shall examine, unhurriedly, the axes of the journey to God: beginning with the moderate ordering of human needs, passing through self-development and knowledge, and arriving at the transcendence of self-interest for the sake of God. We move from theory to practice through the principles of the journey: love, trust in God, sincerity, remembrance, and action. And as we take up these paths we shall dismantle some common fallacies, so as to grasp how the

details of life may enter into the response to truth and servanthood.

Inner truthfulness: the key to the journey to God

Some people imagine that the journey to God is confined to outward acts of worship. Its reality is wider: the whole of a person's life is ordered through the powers and perfections realised in the self and through the orientation of its response to truth and servanthood. Inner truthfulness is one of its gateways: the mutual accord of the aspects of the single self under truth and fitra, not a balancing of independent elements.

The journey to God is not acts of obedience detached from life, but the ordering of knowledge, love, intention, action, and rights within servanthood. Ontological dependence is universal to every creature; servanthood is the conscious, chosen orientation towards God; and worship is the embodiment of that orientation in intention, obedience, and action. Lawful work may become worship in the broad sense when intention, end, and means are sound and rights are preserved, without thereby becoming a juristic ritual.

This is why we find that the Noble Qur'an does not tie the journey to God to outward acts of worship alone; it ties it also to inner effort and to striving against the self. God Almighty says: 'And those who strive for us — we shall surely guide them to our ways' (Q 29:69).

The journey to God is therefore neither a passing decision nor a path that requires you to reach inner perfection before you begin. It is renewed fidelity to servanthood, illuminated by God's words: 'Indeed, those who say: Our Lord is God, and then remain upright' (Q 46:13). In the light of the covenant of fitra, we understand uprightness as continuing in what the acknowledgement of God's lordship requires: you come to know the truth, do what lies within your capacity, and return when you

stumble. This connection is one the project draws by reading the texts together; it is not a direct interpretation of the covenant verse through the verse on uprightness.

Inner truthfulness explains a central aspect of this fidelity: that the aspects of your self should come into mutual accord under truth and fitra, and that you should address the gaps that appear. It is practised during the journey, not awaited in a completed form before it begins. Habit may lag behind intention, or illness and circumstance may limit capacity; these conditions are not equivalent to knowing the truth and then acting against it while shielding the violation with justification. Self-accounting, repentance, learning, treatment, and action remain means of establishing mutual accord within practical scope.

The Qur'an warns against forgetting God in a way that affects a person's relationship with himself: 'Do not be like those who forgot God, so he made them forget themselves' (Q 59:19). Review here is a return to one's point of reference and to the trust one bears, not merely an improvement in one's self-image. Stumbling does not close the door of return. The question remains: how do I respond now to the truth that has become clear to me?

The journey of inner truthfulness

God, glorified and exalted, says: 'We have made the night and the day two signs; we effaced the sign of the night and made the sign of the day one that gives sight, that you may seek bounty from your Lord' (Q 17:12). The verse sets out the ordering of night and day in a way that opens space for stillness, for striving, and for seeking God's bounty. The project draws on this in distinguishing the guidance of revelation from the formative conditions within which a person works — without attributing to the verse alone the establishment of two complete 'methods' of self-development.

To realise the existential purpose — servanthood and a non-spatial nearness to God — we need to bring together the guidance of the revealed law and God's established patterns in creation: we come to know the truth, use lawful means, do all that lies within our practical scope, and refer the outcome to God. Value lies not in the intensity of movement alone, but in the soundness of the orientation, the means, and the response. This is why Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) said, when he was struck: 'By the Lord of the Kaʿba, I have succeeded.' For success in his eyes was the fulfilment of a covenant and a purpose, not a merely worldly victory.[1]

The path of inner truthfulness is wider than correcting beliefs alone. Knowledge, heart, imagination, intention, will, speech, and action are fields that disclose the degree to which the aspects of the self come into mutual accord; self-accounting, repentance, reform, and changing conditions and habits then establish that accord within practical scope. We build a supportive formative environment as far as possible, not by 'sterilising' the senses and emotions or fleeing reality. God Almighty says: 'God is the protector of those who believe; he brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light...' (Q 2:257).

Ṣiddīqiyya is the graduated summit of the path of inner truthfulness, in which the accord of the self's aspects and their ordering under truth and servanthood reach their highest possible degrees. It also admits of degrees, does not mean infallibility, and does not allow us to judge people. The gathering of the heart in devotion to God is a fruit of the maturity of this path, not the whole definition of ṣiddīqiyya. The Shaʿbaniyya Supplication says: 'My God, grant me the perfection of

1 See al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, vol. 1, in the account of the striking of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him); and al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 42.

wholehearted turning to you…' Wholehearted turning is the heart's freedom from competing, independent attachment — neither indwelling nor union.[2]

To understand the journey to God, we use a non-numerical, relational Nearness Equation with two interacting dimensions: what has actually been realised in the self — knowledge, understanding, will, powers, settled dispositions, and perfections — and the orientation of its response to the truth made clear to the person, whether in acceptance and obedience or in refusal and arrogance, in light of the clarification available to them and within their practical scope. Knowledge or power may therefore be employed in obedience or in arrogance; the two dimensions are not combined arithmetically and do not become a scale for ranking people.

The axes of the journey to God

This book orders the journey to God into interwoven axes that appear in daily life, drawing upon what revelation makes clear, what fitra prepares us for, and what the intellect discriminates. These axes are an interpretive formulation that aids reading and action; they are not an exhaustive enumeration of the paths of the journey laid down by the revealed law. Nor do we reach in this world an 'absolute servanthood' in the sense of a final, closed endpoint; we advance by degrees in servanthood and truthfulness, while our dependence and our need of God remain.

2 From the Shaʿbāniyya Supplication related from the Commander of the Faithful and the Imams among his descendants (peace be upon them); related by Ibn Ṭāwūs in *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*.

The first axis: ordering bodily and psychological needs with moderation

Islam acknowledges a person's bodily, psychological, and spiritual needs, and calls for each need to be met to the extent, at the time, and in the manner that truth requires — without excess, neglect, or suppression. The body is a rank of the human being and a trust, and a natural need may enter into worship if the intention and means are sound and rights are preserved.

The importance of achieving balance in meeting needs

Meeting basic needs is a necessity for human survival and a good in its place, and it may enter into worship if the intention is sound, the means lawful, and rights and moderation preserved. But meeting such needs does not thereby become a 'spiritual engine', and satisfying them is no evidence of nearness. God Almighty says: 'Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of God which he has brought forth for his servants, and the good things of provision? Say: They are for those who believe, in the life of this world, purely theirs on the Day of Resurrection' (Q 7:32).

This verse affirms that the good things of life are lawful for believers, and that God has permitted people to benefit from the blessings he created for them — on condition that these good things do not become an entry point to heedlessness and to distance from the great spiritual purpose: 'Men whom neither commerce nor trade distracts from the remembrance of God, the establishing of prayer, and the giving of alms' (Q 24:37). This balance gives a believer the capacity to benefit from the pleasures of this world without their governing his orientation or severing his bond with God: 'Whoever desires the reward of this world — with God is the reward of this world and of the hereafter' (Q 4:134).

Qur'anic guidance on diet and healthy conduct

Islam set out a specific approach to achieving this balance, calling for moderation in eating and drinking and warning against excess in them. God Almighty says: 'Eat and drink, and do not be excessive; he does not love the excessive' (Q 7:31).

Islam gives attention to the regulation of diet, to health, and to the preservation of the body. Moderate consumption of food and drink may support health and reduce some of the harms of excess, but it does not guarantee either protection from illness or inner peace. It preserves for a person something of his capacity for worship and work, while the need for medicine, treatment, and rest remains according to circumstance.

Psychological balance and contentment as basic needs for the journey to God

The matter does not stop at bodily needs. Love, belonging, and security are goods, and legitimate psychological and social needs. Happiness, however, is not a need of the same emotional kind; it is the soundness of the self and its ordering within truth and servanthood. These goods are preserved through moderation and through rights, and are not made independent ends or mechanical means to nearness: 'And those who say: Our Lord, grant us comfort of the eyes in our spouses and our offspring, and make us a model for the God-conscious' (Q 25:74).

The practical ordering of the embodied self's needs

Islam offers acts of worship and practices that help a believer towards tazkiya. Fasting is an embodied act of worship that may refine appetite and train the will when it is performed with due regard for its conditions and meaning — with no automatic effect, and with no neglect of the body. In it the rulings of jurisprudence, the dispensations, illness, and practical scope are all

taken into account; severity of hardship is not the measure of the truthfulness of worship.

Prayer is an embodied act of worship performed by the whole human being: the self knows, believes, and intends; the body embodies compliance in its lawful form; and the effect of the act returns to the heart and to the shakila. It is not a passage from the 'material world' to a separate spiritual entity, but a presence before God within the life of the embodied human being: 'Prayer restrains from indecency and wrong' (Q 29:45).

The effect of ordering needs upon the spiritual path

When needs are ordered with moderation, stability may increase and the self may be freed from the tyranny of certain appetites, so that its space for remembrance and work widens. But contentment and tranquillity are not produced automatically by the satisfaction of needs, and nearness does not mean that a person delves into a 'spirit' independent of his body.

The use of bodily and psychological blessings becomes part of servanthood when it is referred back to God in gratitude, governed by truth, and employed in discharging the trust. Tranquillity may grow along this path, but it is neither a guaranteed result nor permanent emotional peace: 'Those who believe and do righteous deeds — blessedness is theirs, and a good place of return' (Q 13:29).

The second axis: self-development and knowledge as a journey of ascent towards God

In the journey to God, knowledge, the cultivation of virtues, and the use of capacities in truth are important fields, but they are not praised merely for expansion or achievement. What remains a receptivity, resource, or circumstance that widens action is instrumental expansion; what becomes knowledge, understanding, will, a skill, or a settled power is an actual

quality in the self and enters into actualised perfection. The orientation of the response then determines its ethical and spiritual value. God Almighty says: 'Just as we sent among you a messenger from among you, reciting to you our signs, purifying you, teaching you the Book and wisdom, and teaching you what you did not know' (Q 2:151).

First: character — perfections within the self

Character is not merely an outward appearance; it consists of perfections that come to be within the self and appear in one's stance and action. The Prophet (may God bless him and his family) said: 'I was sent only to perfect noble character.' Mercy, truthfulness, and humility do not bring a person near merely by their outward form, but when they are realised in their proper manner, issue from a lawful purpose, preserve rights, and are ordered within servanthood.[3]

Tolerance, mercy, courage, truthfulness, and humility are existential perfections when placed in their proper settings with truth and wisdom. Gentleness is not always mercy, and boldness is not in itself courage. God Almighty says: 'And they enjoin upon one another truth, and enjoin upon one another patience' (Q 103:3). A virtue is known by its reality, its orientation, and its effect — not by feeling or appearance alone.

Second: strength of will and resolve — standing firm against the winds

When challenge comes, both the strength and the truthfulness of the will appear. Strength answers: how steadfast can you be? Truthfulness answers: in what cause do you hold firm? A will may be strong in falsehood, or truthful yet weak in execution

3 Reported by al-Bayhaqī in *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* and *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, and by Aḥmad in the *Musnad*; it appears in al-Ṭabrisī's *Makārim al-Akhlāq* and in al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-Anwār*.

because of illness or environment. Strength is therefore not a complete virtue unless it is ordered in the direction of truth. Constancy is understood within practical scope, not as a guarantee of emotional peace or success.

Third: awareness and maturity — the heart's insight and depth of understanding

Awareness is the self's presence to itself or to something in a way that permits attention, understanding, and response; it is not an independent power or a measure of every perfection. The intellect helps to distinguish end from means, to reflect upon the Qur'an, and to understand consequences. Not every event is a private message from God; we reflect upon its general meaning and the patterns at work in it, and we return to evidence and to specialist expertise.

Fourth: wisdom — the pearl of illumined hearts

Wisdom is a perfection that brings together sound knowledge, good judgement, the placing of things in their proper settings, and the linking of means to ends — and then the translation of all this into action. It does not mean reading private 'hidden messages' into every occurrence, nor claiming knowledge of God's detailed purposes. God Almighty says: 'He grants wisdom to whom he wills…' (Q 2:269).

Fifth: knowledge — the key to arrival and the instrument of ascent

Knowledge opens the way to understanding, and may help a person to read God's signs and to distinguish end from means. But it does not automatically turn into awe or into wisdom: a person may know and yet his heart may not assent, or he may not act. God's words 'It is only those of his servants who have knowledge who stand in awe of God' (Q 35:28) set out the rank of the knowledge that discloses God's greatness and bears the fruit

of awe — they do not imply that every piece of information guarantees this effect.

Conclusion of the axis: the path of integration and drawing near to God

The journey to God through self-development is not a temporary undertaking but the tazkiya of the single self: the cultivation of perfections, the correction of orientation, and the ordering of the functions of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit. It brings together the love of God and the good of his creation; striving and trust in God; and patience, contentment, and submission — without demanding of a person that he be content with injustice or that he deny his pain.

Through this integration, the journey to God becomes a continuous tazkiya that may open for a person a share of stillness and meaning — without the soundness of the path being measured by feeling alone, and without assuming that fatigue and disturbance will disappear.

The third axis: transcending self-interest and cultivating a culture of giving and reform

Islam calls us out of the centrality of the ego into the breadth of responsibility, so that giving becomes part of one's purpose and the reform of reality an extension of the tazkiya of the self. Transcending self-interest is not the abolition of the self or the surrender of what is due to it; it is the freeing of the self from the tyranny of personal advantage, so that it may discharge its trust towards God and towards people.

First: giving — the language of pure hearts and the way of the God-conscious

Giving in Islam is not merely an act; it is an expression of mercy and of responsibility. God Almighty says: 'You will not

attain righteousness until you spend of what you love' (Q 3:92). It does not require abundant wealth: it may be a good word, or help, or lawful giving according to one's practical scope. When a believer gives truthfully, the tyranny of the ego recedes and the sense of trust and love grows stronger in him — without his abolishing himself or forfeiting an obligatory right.

Second: reform — a truthful call to light the way for others

Islam makes reform a responsibility graduated according to knowledge, ability, and practical scope. God Almighty says: 'You are the best community brought forth for humankind: you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong' (Q 3:110). Reform is not confined to counsel; it includes the restoration of rights, the prevention of harm, and the building of conditions that safeguard the good. It may prompt the reformer to review himself, but it does not purify him automatically merely because he is occupied with others.

Third: transcending self-interest — the self's liberation from the tyranny of the ego

Transcending self-interest means that action is ordered towards God as its end, so that people's praise or worldly gain does not become a governing point of reference. If we use the expression 'annihilation in God', what is meant is the annihilation of a rival will and of an independent attachment — not indwelling, not union, and not the abolition of the servant's identity. God Almighty says: 'Whoever is guarded against the avarice of his own self — those are the successful' (Q 59:9).

Fourth: social solidarity — a society living in the spirit of brotherhood and mutual support

Transcending self-interest and giving are not merely individual feelings; they are translated into responsibility and solidarity

that preserve people's dignity and their rights. The Prophet (may God bless him and his family) said: 'The believers in their mutual affection, mercy, and sympathy are like a single body: when one limb complains, the rest of the body responds with sleeplessness and fever.' In this sense a compassionate society comes into being — without the call to giving turning into exploitation, or into the neglect of the body, the family, and rights.[4]

Fifth: preferring others — the highest degree of giving for the sake of God

Preferring others (īthār) means putting another before oneself in a lawful setting and to a degree that does not forfeit an obligatory right or bring oneself to harm. It is a degree of generosity, not an abolition of the self nor a standing obligation always to put others first. God Almighty says: 'And they prefer others above themselves, even though poverty be their own lot' (Q 59:9). Preferring others is an act of worship when its intention, its means, and its regard for rights are sound, and when it falls within one's practical scope.

Conclusion of the axis: nearness to God through giving and reform

The journey to God through giving, reform, and the transcending of self-interest opens up meaning and purpose for the self. But it does not require the abandonment of oneself, nor making others happy at the expense of rights and practical scope. The more the heart is freed from the governing ego, and the more a person discharges his duty with mercy and justice, the more truthful he becomes in servanthood.

4 Agreed upon: reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from al-Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr.

The fourth axis: the remembrance and worship of God — the presence of the reference point in heart and life

Remembrance is a pillar of the journey to God. It is the presence of God, his names, his signs, his command, his promise, and the purpose of servanthood within the awareness and the heart of the self — a presence that shapes understanding, love, intention, and action. It is not the mere repetition of words, although remembrance upon the tongue is a genuine degree of it and a way of teaching the heart.

First: the remembrance of God — the presence of the reference point and the life of the heart

God Almighty says: 'Those who believe, and whose hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of God — truly, in the remembrance of God hearts find tranquillity' (Q 13:28). Tranquillity is the self's becoming settled at its true point of reference and resting in God; it is not merely a feeling of ease or the absence of fear and grief. Remembrance restores that point of reference when the self is scattered; calm may accompany this, but pain may remain alongside it.

The formulas affirming divine oneness, seeking forgiveness, offering praise, and giving thanks are not mechanical utterances; they take effect in proportion to the presence of their meaning, the faith of the heart, and their translation into action. Seeking forgiveness asks for pardon, but it does not remove the need for repentance, desisting, reform, and restoring what is due.

Second: prayer — a daily meeting and a renewal of the covenant with God

Prayer is among the greatest acts of worship, and it is an act of the whole embodied human being: the self knows, believes, and

intends, and the body embodies compliance in the form God has laid down. A believer may find in it ease and stillness, as in the Prophet's words (may God bless him and his family): 'Give us rest through it, Bilal.' But the absence of that feeling at some time does not invalidate the prayer, nor does it by itself indicate a corrupted heart.[5]

And because prayer is distributed across the day, it renews the presence of God as our point of reference throughout the day's hours and activities, and cultivates humility and discipline in proportion to the heart's presence, to repetition, and to action. It does not mean a 'permanent connection' in the sense of an uninterrupted feeling, nor is it a mechanical technique for calming the self. God Almighty says: 'Seek help through patience and prayer; it is indeed hard, except for the humble' (Q 2:45).

Third: reflecting on God's creation — reviving the sense of greatness and reverence

Reflecting upon the universe and upon God's signs is an integral part of worship. It is a deliberate attentiveness that seeks meaning, relationship, and consequence, and then weighs its conclusions against truth. God Almighty says: 'Say: Look at what is in the heavens and the earth' (Q 10:101). What is meant is not the mere quieting of the mind, nor the reading of a particular wisdom into every occurrence.

Reflection does not stop at a material view of creation; it refers the scene back to the Creator and awakens gratitude, awe, and responsibility. Every scene is an invitation to consider its general meaning and significance, while preserving the

5 *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book of Manners, no. 4985, with the wording: 'O Bilal, establish the prayer; give us rest through it'; and *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 23088, with the wording: 'Rise, Bilal, and give us rest through the prayer'.

limits of evidence and not turning imagination into a description of the unseen.

Fourth: supplication — the servanthood of dependence and the seeking of help

Supplication is the servanthood of dependence and the seeking of God's help in weakness and need. God Almighty says: 'Your Lord has said: Call upon me, and I will answer you' (Q 40:60). It returns the heart to God and renews its hope; stillness may accompany it, or it may not. A delay in what is asked for does not mean the absence of care, and the one who supplicates is not thereby given knowledge of the form of good that God chooses for him.

Supplication is worship, request, and recourse to God — not merely a means of having needs met. One who supplicates may find ease and stillness when he is truthful in hope, and pain may yet remain; the measure is the turning towards God and the response to him, not any particular feeling. God Almighty says: 'And when my servants ask you about me — I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls upon me. So let them respond to me and believe in me, that they may be rightly guided' (Q 2:186).

Fifth: glorification and seeking forgiveness — declaring God's transcendence and renewing one's return

Glorification declares God's transcendence, and seeking forgiveness asks for his pardon and mercy. Both help a person to return, but seeking forgiveness is not the whole of repentance: repentance is acknowledgement, remorse, desisting, and truthful resolve, and it is embodied in reform and in the rendering of what is due, in accordance with the revealed law and with one's practical scope. God Almighty says: 'And seek forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to him in repentance' (Q 11:3).

Seeking forgiveness may teach a person humility and the renewal of his return, but it does not remove the need for repentance, desisting, reform, and the restoring of rights. Glorification declares God free of all deficiency, and may deepen one's perception of his greatness when its meaning is present in the heart and in action; the utterance alone has no automatic effect.

Conclusion of the axis: the remembrance and worship of God — the life of the heart and the renewal of orientation

The remembrance and worship of God are life for the heart and a reference point for the intellect and for action. Through remembrance a believer renews his faith and seeks help in facing challenges, trusting in God's wisdom, justice, and mercy. But he does not claim that any particular event is a manifest good for him, or that he knows its particular wisdom; nor does he make every act a step towards nearness unless its direction and its means are sound.

Conclusion of the axes of the journey to God

God has established the universe upon patterns and causes that open a space for understanding and action, and has made what is in it subject to the human being by way of trust. These patterns do not lead him automatically to God: a person may respond to truth or may deviate, and his responsibility remains within the clarity given him and within his practical scope.

The roads that lead to God: personal journeys towards divine nearness

The gateways to nearness vary with duties, levels of preparedness, and circumstances — but the path is not purely subjective. What brings a person near must be lawful, must render what is

due, and must be appropriate to priorities and practical scope; it is not merely whatever he feels to be closest to his heart.

First: individual particularity in the journey to God

God created people with differing levels of preparedness, environments, and abilities, and so the cost and the forms of striving differ. What brings one person near may not suit another — but the measure remains truth, the revealed law, rights, and practical scope, not particularity alone.

Second: adapting one's striving to circumstances and challenges

Challenges are not always means specifically intended to develop the one who undergoes them, but they may become occasions of patience, learning, repentance, and reform if he responds to them with truth. We do not specify the particular divine wisdom in an illness or a loss without evidence.

Third: the diversity of acts of worship and the gateways to nearness

The gateways of obedience and of good are many, and what is feasible differs from person to person according to their bodies, their roles, and their practical scope. A right action may enter the path of nearness if the intention is sound, its end and its means are lawful, and rights and priorities are preserved. The Prophet (may God bless him and his family) said: 'Deeds are only by intentions.' Intention gives an act its direction, but it does not make lawful what is forbidden or unjust, and it does not guarantee acceptance or outcome.[6]

The multiplicity of acts of worship and of good works opens for a person gateways suited to his ability and his circumstance,

6 'Deeds are only by intentions' is agreed upon, and is a foundation in the chapters on intention in both traditions; in *al-Kāfī*: Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on intention.

but he does not choose among them on the basis of pleasure alone. Obligations, rights, and priorities come first; then he draws near through supererogatory acts and through permissible acts, according to his intention and his practical scope.

Fourth: the sweetness of striving — a possible state, not a measure

A believer may find in his striving towards God a spiritual sweetness and a deep meaning; he may also pass through dryness, fatigue, and long struggle. The soundness of the path is not measured by sweetness, and one who does not find it is not to be blamed. The supplications of Imam ʿAli Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him) describe one of the states of love: 'My God, who is there that has tasted the sweetness of your love and then sought another in your place? And who is there that has found intimacy in your nearness and then sought to turn away from you?'[7]

A wayfarer may find a spiritual sweetness in worship, and may travel for a time without it, or with anxiety and grief. The measure is not the continuance of feeling but the truthfulness of direction and of action; and tranquillity is the settling of the reference point, not the absence of feeling.

Fifth: how striving towards God is reflected in psychological happiness

The journey to God gives meaning, hope, and spiritual support, and may strengthen resilience. But it is not a 'psychological treatment' that removes depression and anxiety, and it is no substitute for specialist care, medication, and treatment when these are needed. Nearness to God does not prevent illness, and it does not make one who is ill any less a believer.

7 From the Fifteen Intimate Supplications related from Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him); see *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, the Supplication of Those Who Love; and *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 91.

Summary

In this way worship is transformed from an external obligation into a beloved meaning — yet we do not promise everyone who strives permanent ease and contentment. Love may be accompanied by hardship, longing, fear, and hope, and its truthfulness is measured by adherence and respect for rights, not by feeling alone.

The Principles of the Journey to God

The journey to God is a spiritual journey of servanthood that includes the renewal of intention, the reform of conduct, and working in life with love, awareness, and moderation. The details of life become places of striving and remembrance when the orientation is sound. Happiness, meanwhile, is the soundness of the self and its perfection in truth, and tranquillity is its settling in God — not merely success or a comfortable mood.

The first principle — love of God: the great motive for journeying towards him

Fitra prepares a person to know truth in outline, to be drawn towards absolute perfection, and to be oriented towards servanthood in his original constitution, as God Almighty says: 'So set your face towards the religion, inclining to truth: the fitra of God upon which he originated people' (Q 30:30). This does not mean that every inclination towards beauty or success is a conscious love of God, nor that love of him is complete in the self without knowledge and faith. Love grows through revelation, intellect, remembrance, and action, while desire, heedlessness, and habit may veil the effects of fitra.

Here the importance of knowing the reality behind our worldly desires becomes clear. Every form of beauty and perfection we seek points to God as the source of perfection, and every good comes from his mercy and kindness. The more our knowledge of him grows, the more aware we become of our dependence upon him, and the more the self is gradually freed from governing attachments, so that love of him becomes a motive for action. What a believer sees of the traces of the divine names in creation implies neither indwelling nor union; it is the creature's pointing to its Creator.

Gratitude to God — God's ownership and the gratitude due to him

God is our Creator and our true owner, and every blessing subsists by his favour: 'O people, you are the ones in need of God, and God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy' (Q 35:15). Recognising a blessing opens the door of thanks, and from thanks there may grow love and a servant's nearness — but this requires knowledge, assent, and action, and it does not make emotional ease the measure of thankfulness or of nearness. God described Noah (peace be upon him) in his words: 'He was a thankful servant' (Q 17:3).

The sweetness of servanthood — servanthood as a source of ease and delight

For one who loves, worship may become a source of joy and longing, as the supplications of the lovers of God express. But this is a graduated state that does not accompany every act of worship or every believer. A person may worship in dryness, in fatigue, in fear, and in hope, and his worship remains truthful if his intention and his obedience are sound. Imam al-Sajjad (peace be upon him) says: 'O you whose lights of holiness

delight the eyes of those who love you… O utmost hope of those who love.'[8]

Knowledge of God — the key to rising in his love

Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) says in Nahj al-Balagha: 'The beginning of religion is knowledge of him; the perfection of knowing him is assenting to him; the perfection of assent to him is affirming his oneness; and the perfection of affirming his oneness is sincerity towards him…' When knowledge becomes assent, submission, and following, it cultivates love and sincerity, and may open the way to the sweetness of worship. Bare information, however, does not guarantee this transition.[9]

To awaken the love of God we seek truthful knowledge, reflect upon his signs, remember his blessings, and translate this into action. The more a person grows in sound knowledge of God's greatness and of his own dependence, the more his longing and his striving increase. Reflection or learning alone is not enough if it does not become faith and following.

Turning to God as the axis of life — love of God and the motives of living

Love of God does not abolish natural and lawful motives; it reorders them under the purpose of servanthood. Work, success, relationships, and bodily needs can enter into the journey when intention and means are sound and rights are preserved. The spiritual and the bodily are gathered in one self, without any promise of permanent emotional peace.

In this way love of God becomes a higher motive towards the human perfections that befit a creature and point to the traces of the most beautiful names — not towards a 'divine perfection'

8 From the Fifteen Intimate Supplications related from Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him); see *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, the Supplication of Those Who Love; and *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 91.

9 *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon One.

by which a person passes from matter to eternity or comes to resemble the Creator.

The second principle — trust in God: the axis of the journey towards tranquillity and peace

The journey begins with God's guidance and his support, and a person's striving accompanies it. God's kindness may appear in a blessing, an insight, a person, a source of strength, or the disclosure of an error. But we may not assert that every affliction was sent because it 'suits us' or fulfils some particular need that we know; the particular wisdom belongs to God.

Trust in God returns the heart to its true point of reference and may help it face its fears and hold its orientation. But it does not abolish natural fear or clinical anxiety, and it is not measured by emotional calm; it appears instead in taking up the means without relying on them independently.

Affliction may be a gateway to patience, mercy, and guidance if a person responds to it with truth — but it is not in its essence always a 'hidden mercy' that we are able to specify. God Almighty says: 'We shall certainly test you with something of fear and hunger… and give good news to those who are patient' (Q 2:155–157). The verses praise the response; they do not abolish the reality of pain and loss.

Certainty in God: safety in the midst of storms

The sounder our knowledge of God, of his mercy and his wisdom, the more trust and hope may grow. But knowledge does not have this effect on its own: the heart must bind itself to it and translate it into reliance and action. We trust in God's wisdom in his ordering of affairs without claiming to know the particular wisdom in every event. God Almighty says: 'Say: To whom belongs what is in the heavens and the earth? Say: To God. He has prescribed mercy upon himself' (Q 6:12).

Trust requires certainty in God and in his wisdom, but it does not abolish the natural fear of losing provision, health, or security. It prevents fear from becoming a final reference point, and it impels a person to take up means and to supplicate: 'And when my servants ask you about me — I am near…' (Q 2:186).

Submission to God: the wisdom of giving and withholding

What we do not wish for may come to pass, and God knows best the wisdom of his ordering. We trust in his justice and his mercy without claiming that any particular deprivation is the best thing for us, or that the delay in the fulfilment of every desire was intended to strengthen patience. We continue in lawful striving, review the means, and then entrust the outcome to God.

Rejecting Satan's whisperings and strengthening faith

Satan seeks to sow despair and ill thoughts about God, so a believer needs to bring to mind the breadth of God's mercy: he is more merciful to his servants than they are to themselves; he guides to the good, makes it clear, and opens the means to it — without our specifying the form of the good or the particular wisdom in all that occurs. In the Supplication of Those Who Hope, Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him) says: 'How could I hope in any other than you when all good is in your hand? And how could I set my expectation upon another when creation and command belong to you?'[10]

Reliance and trust in God: the principle of setting out and the depth of faith

Trust in God frees the self from attachment to means and strengthens reliance upon God. This reliance does not mean

10 *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, the Supplication of Those Who Hope; see also *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 91.

passivity or the abandonment of effort; it holds striving and work in a deep balance with complete confidence that the outcome is in God's hand alone. It is related from the greatest Messenger (may God bless him and his family): 'Tie it, and trust in God.'[11]

The faith to which the prophets called was not a mere feeling; it was a commitment to relying upon God alone, and to keeping clear of excessive attachment to any power or means other than him: 'And we gave Moses the Book and made it a guidance for the Children of Israel: take no guardian besides me' (Q 17:2).

The effect of trust in God upon our daily lives

In challenge, in hope, and in disappointment we draw from trust in God hope and a capacity to return — not absolute immunity from despair or anxiety. The sounder a person's reliance, the more able he becomes to use means, to seek help and treatment, while referring the outcome to God.

The third principle — sincerity towards God: the essence of true nearness

Your social, professional, and developmental activities may enter into servanthood if the intention is sound, the end and the means are lawful, and rights are preserved. Good intention alone does not make a corrupt act sound, and sincerity does not convert every activity into nearness mechanically; it refers a lawful action back to its highest purpose.

Sincerity means that God's pleasure is the governing point of reference for intention, with lawful subordinate purposes —

11 Reported by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmiʿ*, Book of the Description of the Resurrection, Heart-Softening Reports and Scrupulousness, no. 2517. Its meaning — joining the taking up of means to trust in God — is widely attested in the reports of the Prophet's household (peace be upon them).

provision, benefit, excellence — ordered beneath it. It is among the conditions of an act's acceptance and its perfection, but it is not a formula guaranteeing a particular answer, feeling, or worldly result; God's favour and mercy are not confined to a single cause that we can measure.

Sincerity is to be with God in every heartbeat

Sincerity is the purification of the intention and the governing orientation of an act from purposes that rival God as its highest end, so that his pleasure is the governing point of reference and natural, lawful purposes are ordered beneath it rather than standing independently of it. It does not mean the absence of every passing thought or subordinate purpose, and it does not make a false means sound. God Almighty says: 'They were commanded only to worship God, sincere to him in religion' (Q 98:5).

The effect of sincerity upon the fruits of action

The texts point to the greatness of intention and the weight of sincerity, and a small act may be greater before God than a large one if their orientation and their truthfulness differ. But we do not calculate degrees of nearness or of acceptance, nor do we use the reports to rank people. The meaning of the saying 'A believer's intention is better than his action' is that the soundness of the inward and of the orientation is a foundation for which the size of the act cannot compensate.[12]

Sincerity makes permissible acts part of servanthood when the end and means are sound and rights are preserved. God may grant blessing and acceptance through them — but it is not right to promise ease 'without limit' or a particular worldly

12 al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on intention.

result; sincerity does not guarantee the form of the outcome and does not abolish hardship.

Sincerity as a road to true happiness

Sincerity may free the heart from some of its enslavement to people's expectations and unify its orientation towards God, but it does not guarantee a permanent feeling of safety or contentment, and it does not abolish lawful subordinate purposes. It teaches a person, rather, to review what he gives priority to when God's pleasure and his own image or interest come into conflict.

In the end, sincerity is a pillar of nearness to God, but it is not measured by the size of an act or by its concealment, and it does not remove the need for sound action and respect for rights. True happiness is wider than intention alone: it is the soundness of the self and the ordering of its knowledge, its love, its will, and its action within truth and servanthood.

The fourth principle — balance: the basis of perfection and integration in the journey to God

Just as the body needs measured care, the functions of the self and the claims of life need to be ordered with wisdom. Perfection is not that every aspect should grow to the same degree, but that each field should perform its function in the time and manner that truth requires, without excess, neglect, or disregard of rights. God Almighty says: 'And the sky he raised, and he set the balance — that you may not transgress in the balance' (Q 55:7–8).

Often in life we see someone concentrating on a single aspect and neglecting the rest. Some devote themselves entirely to learning and study, considering it the highest work, while neglecting the tazkiya and reform of themselves, or losing sight of their social role. Others direct most of their attention to

developing their professional careers, forgetting the spiritual, social, and family aspects of their lives. Others devote their lives to caring for their families and lose sight of their role beyond that circle.

Excess and neglect in meeting bodily, psychological, and spiritual needs

We came into life as embodied selves with interwoven needs: food, shelter, rest, love, knowledge, belonging, and meaning. What is required is that these needs be ordered within the single human being under truth — not that we balance two separate entities called body and spirit.

The balance to which Islam calls is not confined to the practice of worship; it extends to every aspect of our lives, and urges us to reject a monasticism that calls for suppressing our bodily needs. God Almighty says: 'Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of God which he has brought forth for his servants, and the good things of provision? Say: They are for those who believe, in the life of this world, purely theirs on the Day of Resurrection' (Q 7:32). God's blessings bring adornment and beauty to our lives, and we have the right to use them and to enjoy them with moderation and balance, without becoming attached to them.

Balance in the practice of life and in self-development

Not every aspect can be practised every day, and time need not be divided equally. Moderation is placing each function in the measure, the time, and the manner that truth and circumstance require. This supports health and happiness, but it is not a 'foundation' that guarantees them; illness and trial may remain alongside good ordering.

The guidance related from Imam Musa al-Kazim (peace be upon him) on dividing one's time sets out the wisdom of ordering worship, livelihood, relationships, and lawful pleasure.

What is meant is the ordering of needs and roles within a unity of orientation — not their arithmetical equality, and not the manufacture of permanent emotional harmony.[13]

Striving towards God requires that knowledge, needs, relationships, and roles be ordered under the authority of truth, and that a person make the fullest effort within his practical scope without demanding of himself a single level of performance in every state. This ordering may help him towards constancy and awareness, but it does not guarantee emotional strength or complete balance.

The fifth principle — gentleness towards oneself: the necessary balance in the journey to God

The journey to God is a meaningful undertaking that requires a self combining sincerity, longing, intellect, and action, without exhausting the body or exceeding one's practical scope. Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) said: 'Indeed, your Imam has contented himself, of his world, with two worn garments, and of his food with two loaves. You cannot do the same; but help me through restraint, striving, chastity, and rectitude.'[14]

A person may be tempted by what he hears of the wonders granted to the friends of God, or by a passing sweetness he finds, and so burden himself with acts of worship and works that overtax his body, compromise his rights, and exceed his practical scope. This is a formative danger that may lead to exhaustion or to flagging. The measure of nearness is not an abundance of hardship, but the truthfulness of servanthood, the lawfulness of the act, and the safeguarding of what has been entrusted.

13 *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl*, the testament of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (peace be upon him) to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, on the division of one's time.

14 *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 45, to ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf.

The noble Prophet (may God bless him and his family) counselled us to be gentle, saying: 'Gentleness is never placed in anything without adorning it, and never removed from anything without disfiguring it.' The self and the body have limits of attention and ability, and presence may weaken with exhaustion; rest, variation, and the seeking of help therefore belong to good management, not to a break in the journey. The saying that hearts should be given respite from time to time directs us to take account of our state, not to picture the heart as an organ with a fixed quantity of energy.[15]

Gradual progress in the journey to God and the avoidance of excess

The journey to God does not need haste; it needs wisdom and gradual progress. Gentleness towards oneself does not mean falling short or passivity; it means travelling with balance, being open to the good things of life, and adhering to the teachings of the revealed law with truthfulness and gentleness. It is related that the Messenger of God (may God bless him and his family) said to ʿAli (peace be upon him): 'O ʿAli, this religion is firm, so enter into it gently, and do not make the worship of your Lord hateful to yourself. The one who drives his mount to exhaustion — meaning one who goes to excess — neither preserves a back to ride nor covers the ground.' From this it is clear that the road to God calls for reasonableness and moderation: we are commanded to worship and to work within our practical scope, not to manufacture hardship or to override the body.[16]

15 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Virtue, Good Relations and Manners, no. 2594.

16 Reported by al-Bazzār in his *Musnad* and by al-Bayhaqī in *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* (vol. 3, p. 18) from Jābir, within the report: 'This religion is firm, so enter into it gently…' Hadith scholars have questioned its chain of transmission. al-Kulaynī reported in *al-Kāfī* (vol. 2, p. 86) from Imam al-Bāqir (peace be upon him): 'This religion is firm, so enter into it gently'.

Mastering the art of travelling slowly and steadily

Gentleness towards oneself means taking one's practical scope into account: neither burdening oneself beyond one's actual capacity nor making rest an excuse for abandoning what is true. The journey requires patience, support, and gradual progress; rest, treatment, and seeking help may themselves be part of the trust rather than signs of weakness.

Gentleness towards oneself, then, means walking in truth within one's practical scope, taking account of one's body, duties, and the gradual formation of one's habits, without excess or neglect. Calmness of feeling is not the measure of the soundness of the path; the measure is the truthfulness of orientation, the soundness of action, and review.

Common fallacies about the journey to God

God created the self upon a fitra that turns towards truth and servanthood, and placed within it natural appetitive and irascible powers that need refining, not abolition. Life is not a struggle between 'good spiritual forces' and an evil self; the agent is one self, which desire may overcome or which may respond to truth. God Almighty says: 'We created the human being, and we know what his self whispers to him…' (Q 50:16).

A person may encounter widespread ideas and whisperings that scatter the self and hinder its truthful response, weakening resolve or making justification attractive. These are treated through knowledge, truthfulness, reflection, remembrance, action, and recourse to competent help when needed — not by picturing the spirit as an independent current that is dammed or released.

To meet whisperings and misleading thoughts we need recollection, reflection, and the testing of a thought against revelation, the intellect, and reality — not 'autosuggestion'. Some whisperings are pathological and intrusive and are not

treated by repeated exhortation alone; they need a specialist and appropriate treatment.

We shall take up a number of fallacies that have become widespread about the journey to God, attempting to dismantle them and to offer alternatives that are brighter and truer — in the hope that they may help everyone striving towards God in his love and his nearness, with a deeper awareness and a more firmly rooted faith.

The first fallacy: worshipping God out of fear or desire for reward

This fallacy errs when it reduces worship to fear of punishment or desire for reward — and equally when it despises these two motives as though they were false. Fear, hope, and love are lawful motives of faith that balance one another and rise by degrees; a person may worship at one stage out of fear or hope and then grow in love. We have no right to judge people's inner states or their ranks.

Some believers worship God with a manifest love; in others hope or fear predominates; and these states may be gathered in the same self. Love of the noble Prophet (may God bless him and his family), of his household, and of the righteous belongs to religion when it is for God and in truth — not merely a matter of affiliation or of emotion.

Fitra is a distinctive mode of human creation. It comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood. It is neither detailed conceptual knowledge nor completed religious awareness; its manifestation and the identification of its object therefore require revelation, intellect, and tazkiya. Not every worldly love is therefore a conscious love of God, nor is love complete in the self without knowledge, faith, and following.

Love of God may grow in the heart through knowledge, faith, remembrance, and following, and it appears in the ordering of what one loves and in action when these conflict. It is not measured by warmth of feeling or abundance of words, and it is not to be assumed that it actually governs all a person's motives merely because of the root of fitra.

Heedlessness, desire, habit, and attachment to the world may veil the effects of fitra and of love; disclosing and cultivating them comes through tazkiya: truthful knowledge, present remembrance, graduated action, repentance, and reform. What is required is not merely lifting a covering from a love already complete, but forming a heart truer in its orientation.

The second fallacy: that a pure environment of faith is necessary for the journey to God

Some accounts circulate a cultural image suggesting that the journey to God is possible only within a highly protected religious environment, almost free of temptation, while those living among the demands of work and family and the pressures of daily life can scarcely manage more than the minimum of their religious practice.

In an environment charged with material concerns and pressures, a person may feel that habits, social expectations, and the demands of earning a living drain his attention, or that relationships and conflicts at work awaken anger and a desire to retaliate. This is a possible experience, not a description of every environment or every working person, nor a judgement that an ordinary environment inevitably corrupts the self.

The problem with this image is that it may weaken initiative: a person persuades himself that, so long as he does not live in an ideal environment, there is no point in attempting serious tazkiya. A truer reading acknowledges the obstacles, seeks what can be protected and changed, and asks for support when it is needed.

The formative environment is not merely an external backdrop. It is a network of conditions, relationships, messages, models, incentives, opportunities, and obstacles that participate over time in the whole of a person's becoming, without determining him inevitably or cancelling his agency. We therefore read its effect realistically and develop what we can in foresight, planning, skill, and support, without blaming the self for every outcome.

Nor is it right to assume that an ordinary environment is always healthier than a protected one, or that exposure to corruption automatically builds immunity. Environments differ: they may build capacity or wound it, and coercion and harm may occur within them. A person is asked to choose well where able, and to protect the self and rights.

Our environment may be a field of learning and striving, while some of its aspects may be harmful and require change, protection, or reform. We do not regard every environment as ideal for human development; we read its effect and the person's practical scope, and build conditions that are more just and merciful as far as we can.

Labouring towards God is a universal reality in the human path towards meeting him: 'O human being, you are labouring towards your Lord with great labour, and you shall meet him' (Q 84:6). All are labouring towards that meeting. Nearness and distance, perfection and deficiency, are determined by the quality of what takes shape in a person and the orientation of his response to truth, in light of the clarification available and within practical scope — not through the amount of movement or pain.

Nearness is not read through the intensity of felt humility, poverty, or withdrawal from the world. A non-numerical equation reads it through the knowledge, will, powers, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through its response to

truth, in acceptance or refusal, according to clarification and practical scope. What remains a gift or an initial resource assists action; what has become a settled skill or power in the self enters the first dimension, without guaranteeing a sound orientation.

A narrow monastic or scholarly image of one who knows God sometimes circulates too, suggesting that spiritual stations belong only to those who have withdrawn from public life. This is a cultural image in need of correction, not a judgement upon religious or scholarly environments themselves. Work, family, and society may be fields of servanthood, just as a person may need to withdraw from harm, seek treatment, or change his environment.

Engaging realistically with life may be a rich arena for servanthood if the orientation and the means are sound, but it is not the 'fastest road' for everyone. It may be one person's duty to confront a situation, and another's to withdraw from harm, or to seek treatment, or to change his environment.

In a believing environment we may learn to turn to God when challenges come, but this does not happen every time or in the same form. The more truthful the supplication and the more it is accompanied by lawful striving, the more servanthood and reliance are renewed — without any claim of certainty about a particular form of relief or a particular feeling.

To benefit from challenges, we read them as part of the formative environment that has befallen us, not as a special programme which we know God designed for each individual in this particular form. We then ask: what is true and right in this situation? What lies within my practical scope by way of protection, learning, reform, or patience? And what environmental condition can I change, or seek support in addressing?

The third fallacy: that absolute purity is a condition of the journey to God

Among the widespread fallacies is that you cannot journey to God unless you have ceased committing every sin and abandoned every vice. This fallacy may prevent the great majority of us from so much as thinking about journeying to God, given what we know of the sins and wrongs we commit.

An occasional stumble may not block the root of one's orientation if a person acknowledges it, repents, and strives. But sins and harmful conduct leave traces in the shakila and affect rights, and it is not said that they 'never hinder at all'. The measure is the self's stance towards its error and its striving towards repentance and reform.

A person may advance by degrees in the ranks of perfection while a weakness remains in some aspects of him. It is related from the Prophet (may God bless him and his family): 'Through excellence of character, a believer attains the degree of one who fasts and keeps night vigil.' This shows the weight of character, without implying that it removes the need for worship, respect for rights, or striving.[17]

A person may discover that he has become accustomed to lying or backbiting, and feel pain as he sees its effect upon his self and the rights of others. The good does not lie in the sin itself, nor is it enough to be troubled by it: he may justify it, or he may acknowledge it and begin repentance and reform. Returning is not merely the seeking of ease and forgiveness, but desisting, truthful resolve, and the rendering of what truth requires, in accordance with the revealed law and within practical scope.

Here we must not confuse the distress of turning away with the pain of returning. A person may be truthful in his repentance and his orientation may change, while resisting the habit

17 *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book of Manners, no. 4798.

remains difficult or its effects persist for a time. The continuance of pain does not prove that repentance is untruthful, just as its disappearance does not prove uprightness. Suffering may also have other causes that feeling alone does not disclose. We therefore neither search for a sin behind every pain nor seek pain as a path to tazkiya.

Some texts draw attention to the fact that self-admiration may be more dangerous to a person than a sin that awakens him to repentance — not that sin is good in itself or that disobedience is a desirable path. The saying of Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him), 'God knew that a sin is better for a believer than self-admiration…', is to be understood in the context of warning against self-exaltation and of opening the door of return: a sin requires repentance and reform, while self-admiration requires knowledge of one's dependence upon God.[18]

It is related in Sahih Muslim that Hanzala al-Usayyidi complained to the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) that his state changed between attending the assembly of remembrance and attending to family and livelihood, and the Prophet said to him: 'Hanzala, an hour for this and an hour for that' — explaining that if the state they were in with him were to last, the angels would shake their hands. The meaning is that the variability of the human state is not the same as hypocrisy, and that a believer returns, repents, and renews his orientation.[19]

The more a person turns towards God in knowledge and in action, the more he may grow in strength, clarity, and resolve, so that he becomes better able to leave certain sins. But the change does not occur automatically, nor always without

18 al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on self-admiration.

19 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Repentance, the chapter on the merit of constancy in remembrance and in reflection upon the matters of the hereafter, no. 2750.

awareness; it requires self-accounting, repentance, reform, and repetition, and difficulties may remain that call for help and treatment.

Nearness to God and servanthood before him help a person to review his weakness and to build his capacity, but they do not reduce every difficulty to willpower and do not guarantee its removal. Some stumbling may require training, treatment, or a change of environment, and may remain alongside truthful faith. Among the effects of embodied worship upon the self is what God's words indicate: 'And establish prayer; prayer restrains from indecency and wrong' (Q 29:45).

Degrees of nearness do not make freedom from sins and from poor character automatic. Even with firmly rooted faith, one who is not infallible remains liable to err and able to return, and his responsibility for watchfulness and repentance increases. And we do not judge people's ranks from the outward appearance of their states.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey to God is a renewed course of servanthood and tazkiya within dependence upon God. Nearness within it is read through the powers and perfections realised in the self and through the orientation of its response to truth — in acceptance or refusal — in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope. Not every pain, need, or act is in itself an opportunity for nearness; an act acquires its value from its orientation, lawfulness, and preservation of rights.

The journey to God gathers this world and the next in a single embodied self: needs and functions are ordered within servanthood, and work, tazkiya, worship, and giving are brought into integration. As the aspects of the self increasingly come into mutual accord under truth, its tranquillity and

constancy increase as a graduated fruit, while pain, illness, and the need for treatment may remain.

Exercises and reflective questions

A reflective question:

Do the aspects of my self come into mutual accord in my journey to God, or do I content myself with professed values that are not embodied? Do I weigh my path by truth and practical scope, or make emotional calm a condition for accepting myself? Take a few moments to reflect, and ask yourself:

- What does my intellect understand of the truth in a present situation? What does my heart assent to? Towards what purpose does my spirit turn? And how does my body embody it in speech and action?
- Where does accord appear among these aspects, and where does a gap appear that calls for self-accounting, repentance, learning, treatment, or a change of environment?
- What is due in this hour, and what possible step within my practical scope would connect my life more fully to servanthood and trust?

Exercise 1: Circles of influence

- Draw circles representing the different fields of your life (family, work, community, and so on).
- Identify the effect you would like to leave in each field, and how you can bring benefit to others in accordance with your responsibility as a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth, and according to your knowledge, your practical scope, and the rights of those around you.
- How can you employ your abilities and talents to contribute to improving these fields?
- What specific goals do you aspire to achieve in each field?
- How can you track your progress and measure your impact in those fields?



CHAPTER SEVEN

Understanding the Self in Order to Achieve Balance

Knowing oneself occupies an important place in tazkiya and in action, for every person has a shakila, a history of experience, and levels of preparedness that mark out his own path. Awareness is the self's presence to itself, or to what occurs within it, in a way that permits understanding and response; it does not by itself guarantee the soundness of interpretation or the attainment of happiness. It includes noticing one's characteristics, aspirations, emotions, and decisions, and then weighing them against truth and reality.

Inner balance is not psychological ease or outward harmony; it is the ordering of the functions of the self under the authority of truth. It begins with understanding oneself truthfully, but it also requires knowledge of duties, of rights, and of reality; a person may know his needs and yet err in ordering them, or make them a higher reference point.

God Almighty says: 'Rather, the human being is a witness against himself' (Q 75:14). This insight calls a person to face his excuses, but it does not make the self the greatest source of wisdom independently of revelation, of the intellect, and of experience. A person may know his inner presence and err in interpreting it, and so he reviews himself in the light of truth and of evidence.

In this chapter we examine self-knowledge through the reading of shakila, orientation, values, abilities, and practical scope, drawing upon the texts and upon psychological studies within the limits of their field. We explain watchfulness and self-accounting without obsessive scrutiny, and show how awareness turns into repentance, reform, and action — not into withdrawal into oneself or a promise of happiness.

Why self-awareness?

Every human self has its own features, levels of preparedness, and experiences. Its becoming unfolds through the interaction of heredity, body, upbringing, environment, trial, and choice. Not every thought or feeling leaves an equal trace, and part of what comes to be within a person was not chosen by him; responsibility is therefore read within knowledge, intention, and practical scope.

The self is not an instrument owned by some other person; it is the single human being considered from the standpoint of his perception, his choice, and his becoming. The shakila is his relatively stable inner structure, making certain responses more likely to arise without compelling him to act upon them: 'Say: Everyone acts according to his shakila' (Q 17:84).

The variety of the stories in Sura al-Kahf shows the variety of the settings of right action — but rightness is not defined by what accords with passion or with some 'essential self' alone. A right action is one that accords with truth, renders what is due,

and is sound in its intention and its means; its forms then vary according to preparedness, competence, and practical scope. So choose your path in the light of obligation and of reality, and make your talents a trust rather than an independent reference point.

Self-knowledge therefore helps in directing behaviour, not in guaranteeing harmony. A person's presence may be read through the aspects of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — interwoven functions of the single self, not parts that carry equal weight in every situation. The aim is that they should be ordered under fitra and truth, so that truthfulness and insight may grow.

It is related from Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him): 'Whoever knows himself knows his Lord.' The meaning is that knowledge of one's dependence, limits, and fitra opens onto knowledge of the Lord and of one's purpose — not that introspection alone discloses God. The nearness intended is non-spatial: it is read through the knowledge, will, powers, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through the orientation of its response to truth — in acceptance or refusal — according to clarification and practical scope.[1]

Self-awareness: its definition and its importance

Objective self-awareness theory is useful in drawing attention to the measuring of behaviour against standards — but the 'internal standards' themselves need to be weighed, since they may be shaped by desire or environment. The Islamic conception therefore brings together self-review, revelation, the intellect, rights, and reality, and does not treat the control of emotion as an independent end.

1 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, no. 7946.

The more a person's knowledge of himself increases, the better his capacity for review and planning becomes in certain areas; but this does not guarantee control over thoughts and behaviour, and it does not remove constraints. Success begins with truthfulness about what is actually the case, then with building capacity, seeking help, and working within one's practical scope.

In a practical account of research and surveys on self-awareness, Tasha Eurich linked some of its forms to organisational and relational outcomes such as clarity of communication, learning, and leadership. These are associations within specific samples and fields, not evidence of human worth or of nearness to God, nor an equation of self-awareness with existential happiness.

How well do people know themselves?

Self-knowledge may seem self-evident, but estimating it accurately is difficult. In survey work presented by Tasha Eurich, many participants said they were self-aware, while she and her team estimated that a smaller proportion met their criteria. This is a finding based on particular definitions, instruments, and samples, not a fixed worldwide figure or conclusive evidence that most people live in 'illusions'.[2]

Epistemic humility grows more important here. The self's thoughts and feelings may be present to it directly, yet the interpretation of their causes and their significance remains liable to error. Eurich notes that extensive inward probing may generate interpretations that seem truthful to the one who holds them

2 Tasha Eurich, "What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It)," *Harvard Business Review*, 4 January 2018. The article is a practical presentation of research and surveys conducted by her team, not a single peer-reviewed study; the citation here is therefore limited to the results she presents and to the limits of her criteria and samples.

and yet do not correspond to reality. Understanding oneself therefore needs evidence, self-accounting, counsel, and the balance of truth — not introspection alone.

Self-awareness is not a matter of presence or absence but a varying level of perception. Each of us possesses some degree of awareness, but it is rare for anyone to reach complete and absolute knowledge of himself.

How can a person strengthen his knowledge of himself?

Strengthening awareness requires practice and truthfulness, together with caution against self-deception and conceit. The self is not evil in itself; but it may command evil when desire and justification overcome it, just as it possesses the receptivity to repentance and tazkiya through God's mercy.

Practices that strengthen self-awareness

Identifying values, principles, and goals

Give yourself time to clarify your values and your goals, then weigh them against revelation, truth, and rights; write them down and discuss them with trustworthy, knowledgeable people. Do not try to 'review them in your sleep' or force them to penetrate the unconscious; they take root through understanding, faith, remembrance, action, repetition, and a supportive environment.

Ask yourself: what is the purpose for which I was created? What talents and opportunities can I employ in discharging the trust? Then weigh what you call 'contentment' or 'pride' against revelation, truth, the intellect, and rights — not against feeling alone. And when a truthful orientation becomes clear to you, begin to build your path and to review it: 'Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and

reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord, you did not create this in vain' (Q 3:191).

Studying yourself periodically

Set aside a limited time to study yourself: your history, your levels of preparedness, your habits, your shakila, and your orientation. Record the strengths and weaknesses you notice, without claiming to understand all your motives or to probe every wound. Review these periodically and gently, and seek the help of a specialist if the review brings up pain beyond your capacity.

Seeking counsel and feedback

Counsel is a valuable instrument that helps you to see yourself from a different perspective and reveals aspects that may be hidden from you. Islam has emphasised the virtue and importance of counsel; God Almighty says: 'By the passage of time, the human being is surely in loss — except those who believe, do righteous deeds, enjoin upon one another truth, and enjoin upon one another patience' (Q 103:1–3). It is related from the greatest Messenger (may God bless him and his family): 'Religion is sincere counsel.'[3]

Seeking counsel may give you the view of someone whose knowledge and truthfulness you trust, and help you to put into clear words what is going on within you. It may draw your attention to matters you had not noticed — but counsel does not exempt you from checking what you are told, and it does not make the counsellor a knower of your inner life.

Seek counsel from sincere friends whom you trust, and from those whose sincere concern has stood the test of time. Make sure your questions are specific and objective, and listen to criticism with an open spirit and without taking a defensive

3 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book of Faith, no. 55.

stance; constructive criticism may be your best help on the journey of developing yourself.

Watching yourself in daily activity

Some responses appear automatically through the shakila, the body, and the situation. The one who is aware is the self, not a 'conscious mind' controlling the feelings from outside. The intellect works at understanding an emotion and discerning its meaning and its consequence, while feelings remain states that need ordering, not suppression.

Watching oneself means noticing knowledge, intention, choice, and effect before an act and after it, so that a person may act with awareness. It does not mean complete control over emotion, nor that every emotion prevents thought or must be abolished.

Watchfulness may be defined as the self's presence to what it intends and does in the light of truth, such that it pauses at a point that needs review and chooses what pleases God within its practical scope: 'O you who believe, be conscious of God, and let every self look to what it has sent forward for tomorrow' (Q 59:18).

Avoiding obsessive and excessive inner scrutiny

Useful watchfulness does not pursue every passing thought, and does not judge the self by every emotion. If review turns into compulsive repetition, or increases anxiety and disrupts life, it may be a symptom requiring specialist assessment; and recourse to psychological treatment or medication is not a failure of faith. Trust in God accompanies the taking up of means.

Hold yourself to account

Self-accounting is a truthful and deliberate examination of what the self has known, loved, intended, chosen, and done, and of the effect and course of all this. It compares what has

occurred with truth and with obligation, while taking practical scope into account, so as to identify grounds for gratitude, shortcomings to address, and the need for correction or repentance. It is not a 'technique' that guarantees happiness and ease.

Self-accounting is not self-castigation, nor a total verdict upon oneself; it is a review of act, knowledge, intention, effect, pattern, and practical scope. It may end in thanks and the affirmation of what is good, or in seeking forgiveness, repentance, and reform. A regular time for it is commendable, but it need not be every night for someone whom review only makes more obsessive or more exhausted.

Self-accounting may take place within one's intimate address to God, granting a person clarity and hope and lightening some of his burden. But we do not speak of a 'negative energy' to be discharged and an immense 'positive energy' to be gained, and we do not promise automatic happiness; what we seek is truthfulness, mercy, and correction.

You may speak to God of the good he enabled you to do in your day — thankful, not self-admiring — while in prostration or in your supplication. This may bring joy and hope, or it may not be accompanied by any particular feeling; what is intended is to affirm gratitude and to refer the enabling grace to God.

Then mention to God what you regret having done or having left undone, distinguishing between a sin, an error of judgement, and grief over something that was not within your practical scope. Do not apologise for natural feelings or for something that is not a fault; ask instead for understanding and help, and resolve to reform whatever has become clear to you.

Conclusion of Chapter Seven

In conclusion, self-knowledge is a pillar of a purposeful life when it is bound to truth. It helps in reading the shakila and the

orientation, and in ordering values, goals, and behaviour — but it does not guarantee balance or tranquillity. Nearness to God is not produced by introspection alone; it is read through the powers and perfections realised in the self, and through the orientation of its response to truth — in acceptance or refusal — according to clarification and practical scope.

This chapter has set out means of awareness, watchfulness, and self-accounting, together with limits that guard against obsessiveness and hasty judgement. The aim is not to arrive at a complete 'true self' hidden within, but to see what has come to be within you, bring it into a path of tazkiya, and redirect the self towards fitra and truth, seeking the help of God and of the means he has provided.

Exercises and reflective questions

A reflective question:

Are the aspects of my self — the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — ordered under the authority of truth, or does one function dominate the others, or is a need or duty neglected? Take a few moments to reflect, and ask yourself:

- Do I render to every function and every right in myself and in my life what truth and circumstance require, without excess or neglect?
- Is there an aspect I am neglecting and need to focus on more?
- How do I reorder my life so that each aspect performs its proper function, without demanding arithmetical equality or permanent ease?

Exercise 1: A personal journal

Set aside time each day to write your journal, focusing on your feelings, thoughts, and actions during the day. Which feelings and thoughts have you noticed recurring in your journal? How do these feelings and thoughts affect your daily decisions?

Exercise 2: Self-observation

In a particular situation, record your automatic reaction, then review it later: what thought, emotion, or habit contributed to it? What is the truth, the duty, and the practical scope in this situation? And what practical step would make the response truer to your values as weighed against truth — not merely to your stated goals?



CHAPTER EIGHT

Conceit and Self-Confidence

When a person goes forward in tazkiya and strives to acquire virtues and develop his abilities, some traces of his striving may appear in his conduct and his work, and he may meet with praise or he may not. Neither visible results nor people's admiration is guaranteed, and neither is evidence of one's standing before God. But praise, if it comes, may turn into an inward test if it is not referred back to God's favour and to the trust.

When admiration for our achievements sweeps over us, and praise and commendation are heard again and again, a hidden sense of superiority may creep into the heart and swell until it veils from us the reality of our dependence upon God and of our trust and responsibility. God Almighty says: 'Know that the life of this world is but play, diversion, adornment, mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in wealth and children' (Q 57:20). Outward adornment and external success may become an occasion

of conceit when they are severed from gratitude and from truth.

Conceit: the enemy of true development

Conceit, self-admiration, and an inflated ego are among the gravest dangers to the path of tazkiya. Yet knowing one's actual capacity and practical scope is not conceit; it may be a condition of striving well, so long as that knowledge is realistic, referred back to God, and accompanied by humility and a willingness to review oneself. The error lies not in recognising a blessing, but in attributing it to the self as an independent possession or using it as a pretext for self-exaltation.

God Almighty says: 'Do not turn your cheek away from people in scorn, and do not walk upon the earth exultantly; God does not love anyone self-important and boastful' (Q 31:18). A self-important person is one who sees himself as above others; a boastful person is one who supposes he has reached the summit and has no further need to learn or to develop. Such people do not fall because their abilities are lacking, but because they believe they no longer need to grow.

History is full of examples of people who supposed they had attained greatness while in reality they were walking towards the abyss. Those who fell into the trap of conceit did not fall because they lost their strength, but because they believed themselves to be beyond every test. This is why Islam sets a golden rule for preserving true humility: that a person should find his dignity in his servanthood before God, and not in his own abilities alone.

Consider the intimate address of Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him): 'My God, it is dignity enough for me to be your servant, and honour enough for me that you should be my Lord.' A person is not made self-sufficient by strength; dignity appears through servanthood and dependence upon God. The nearness

intended is non-spatial: it is read through the knowledge, will, powers, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through the orientation of its response to truth — in acceptance or refusal — according to clarification and practical scope. Outward success alone establishes no nearness, just as an outward stumble establishes no distance.[1]

Is self-confidence an illusion or a necessity?

When you succeed or excel in a bodily, intellectual, or professional ability, it is natural to develop practical confidence in what you can do. This confidence is beneficial when it rests on realistic knowledge of actual capacity, preparedness, and limits, and remains open to learning and review. But when it turns into an absolute verdict upon oneself or a guarantee of results, it comes close to illusion and conceit.

Confidence in one's ability may help a person to take initiative, but it may turn into self-deception if it is not tested against evidence and feedback. Self-assessment is liable to bias and error; inner feeling alone is therefore not enough. We need experience, review, the opinion of those with expertise, and the comparison of performance with reality — without exaggeration and without self-abasement.

However precise your knowledge of yourself may be, you are an agent within a network of causes: body, environment, opportunities, other people, God's established patterns, and what lies beyond your ability. Receptivity is the field of possibility; preparedness is the degree to which that possibility is poised for actualisation; actual capacity is what you can in fact do or refrain from doing now; and practical scope is what your responsibility rests upon in your real circumstances — acting,

1 Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*, vol. 20, among the sayings attributed to the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him).

refraining, or taking the preparatory steps available. We may not claim certainty about another person's practical scope from outward appearances.

The danger of excessive confidence

Conceit arises when a person relies upon his abilities as though they were independent, or imagines that they suffice on their own, or neglects the means, the constraints, and the need for review. The self is not evil in itself; but desires and justifications may take command of it, just as it may respond to truth and be purified through God's mercy.

Realistic confidence in one's ability is not in itself a danger; the danger lies in its becoming inflated, or in its being severed from dependence and self-accounting. God's words 'I do not declare my self innocent; the self is indeed prone to command evil, except as my Lord has mercy' (Q 12:53) remind us that the self may command evil when desire overcomes it — not that it is pure evil or incapable of tazkiya.

A transmitted supplication says: 'O God, it is your mercy that I hope for, so do not entrust me to myself for the blink of an eye; and set right for me all my affairs. There is no god but you.'[2]

A saying attributed to Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) states: 'Self-confidence is among the surest opportunities of Satan.' It warns that confidence, when severed from dependence upon God and from review, may turn into conceit and arrogance.[3]

The realistic measure of confidence in one's ability

If self-confidence does not guarantee the outcome, what is required is not to abolish a person's knowledge of his abilities,

2 *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book of Manners, no. 5090, with closely similar wordings.

3 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, no. 4733.

but to put it in its place: limited, practical knowledge that serves striving and is governed by reliance upon God. Reliance gives the heart its reference point, while knowledge of ability and of reality helps in choosing the appropriate means.

> **The comprehensive answer is this: know what you are able to do, take up the means, and rely upon God**

To understand this balance, let us gather its elements: knowing one's actual capacity and circumstances; identifying the practical scope that includes available preliminary steps; doing what lies within that scope through lawful means; depending upon God in one's heart; and then reviewing one's striving and entrusting to him what lay beyond one's power. We do not judge another person's practical scope from appearances.

The first component: objective knowledge as the basis of any successful beginning

The first step in striving is neither blind confidence nor self-castigation, but knowledge. A person comes to know his receptivities, levels of preparedness, actual capacity, and practical scope, and examines the reality within which he works. Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) said to Kumayl: 'O Kumayl, there is no movement in which you are not in need of knowledge.'[4]

Every step, then, requires insight, not a bare feeling of capability. And knowing the blessings God has granted us is done with truthfulness and moderation, without exaggeration and without denial: 'And as for the blessing of your Lord, speak of it' (Q 93:11).

Likewise, when God's prophet Joseph (peace be upon him) put himself forward to administer the storehouses of Egypt, he

4 *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl*, the testament of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) to Kumayl ibn Ziyād.

did not rely upon a mere subjective sense of capability but upon a real knowledge of his skills and his experience, saying: 'Set me over the storehouses of the land; I am a knowing guardian' (Q 12:55).

A person should come to know his strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and obstacles before him, and what falls within his practical scope. Planning tools such as SWOT analysis may help him, but this knowledge informs a decision and does not guarantee an outcome; it is part of a wider network of causes.

The second component: confidence in one's ability does not guarantee the outcome

Even if a person possesses precise knowledge of his abilities and expends effort in developing himself, this is not enough to guarantee success, because there are external factors that cannot be controlled. We are only one element within a complex network of causes and effects, in which other forces and factors affect the achievement of goals — economic circumstances, unforeseen events, even the decisions of other people.

Indeed, even if all the apparent factors were to come together for something to happen, the final decision remains in God's hand. The universe does not run solely according to the abilities of individuals, but according to God's will and his decree. God Almighty says: 'His command, when he wills a thing, is only to say to it: Be — and it is' (Q 36:82).

This is confirmed by the Qur'an in its description of the weakness of all other powers before God's absolute power: 'O people, a parable is set forth, so listen to it. Those you call upon besides God will never create a fly, even if they gathered together for it; and if the fly should snatch something from them, they could not retrieve it from the fly. Weak are the seeker and the sought' (Q 22:73).

Absolute reliance upon oneself is therefore unrealistic and may breed frustration when results run contrary to expectation. Reliance upon God does not abolish knowledge of one's ability or planning; it frees the heart from depending upon them independently, and restores them to their proper place as causes and as trusts.

The third component: know your ability, and depend upon God

When a person strives to achieve success in his life, he needs two complementary elements:

- Developing his abilities and talents, and building what he can of the conditions of action within his practical scope.
- The heart's dependence upon God, together with the use of means, and referring back to him whatever aspects of the outcome one does not control.

Nearness to God is neither an emotional experience nor a distance. It is a non-numerical, relational designation read through the interaction of the knowledge, understanding, will, powers, settled dispositions, and perfections actually realised in the self with the orientation of its response to the truth that has become clear to it — in acceptance and obedience or refusal and arrogance — according to clarification and practical scope. Knowledge of God deepens awareness that our abilities are gifts and trusts, not independent powers.

God Almighty says: 'O people, you are the ones in need of God, and God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy' (Q 35:15). This ontological dependence is a general reality in every creature; it does not negate agency but places it where it belongs: genuine causes subsisting by God, and a responsibility discharged within one's practical scope.

God therefore calls us to strive and work according to the law of causality governing the universe, while at the same time

commanding us to rely upon him alone and to take no other as our support. He says: 'Take no guardian besides me' (Q 17:2). Reliance upon God is one of the requirements of conscious servanthood, not a substitute for work and planning.

Trust in God governs confidence in one's ability

A believer does not attach his heart to himself or to means independently, yet he knows his ability, works, and plans. Reliance is the heart's dependence upon God before striving, during it, and after it, together with the use of lawful means according to his knowledge and his practical scope: 'Whoever desires the reward of this world — with God is the reward of this world and of the hereafter' (Q 4:134).

Whoever seeks worldly or otherworldly success pursues the means to it, knowing that the root of ability, the operation of each cause, and the outcome are all in God's hand. As the tradition says: 'Tie it, and trust in God.' Reason is not replaced by reliance, and reliance is not postponed until after the work is done.[5]

Reliance does not mean abandoning the means, nor does it mean a guarantee of the form of outcome a person desires; it means serious work together with the heart's dependence upon God and the surrendering to him of what lies beyond one's practical scope: 'Say: Nothing will befall us except what God has decreed for us; he is our protector' (Q 9:51).

Trust in God under trial: a wisdom whose details we do not claim to know

We trust in God's justice, his wisdom, and his mercy, and seek his help in success and in trial. But we do not claim that every

5 Reported by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmiʿ*, Book of the Description of the Resurrection, Heart-Softening Reports and Scrupulousness, no. 2517. Its meaning — joining the taking up of means to trust in God — is widely attested in the reports of the Prophet's household (peace be upon them).

door that has closed has been replaced by a better road that we know, and we do not specify the particular wisdom in every event. We are commanded to strive, to supplicate, and to reform, and then to refer what is hidden from us back to God.

God Almighty says: 'He has prescribed mercy upon himself' (Q 6:12). This mercy is a foundation of our hope and our trust, but it does not turn every pain into a good manifest in itself, and it does not cancel the duty of resisting injustice, seeking treatment, and removing harm.

Reliance strengthens power, tranquillity, and dignity

Reliance may steady the heart and strengthen resolve, because it frees a person from the illusion of complete control and returns him to God. But it does not make the heart immune to all disturbance, and it does not abolish human weakness or the need for help; the strength here is the constancy of one's orientation together with doing what lies within one's practical scope.

Notice the stance of God's prophet Moses (peace be upon him) when he found himself trapped between the sea and Pharaoh's soldiers. His people said: 'We are surely overtaken' (Q 26:61); but his trust in God was firmly rooted, and he answered them: 'No indeed. My Lord is with me; he will guide me' (Q 26:62).

Reliance is not wishful thinking, nor complete freedom from anxiety about outcomes. It is certainty in God as the heart's point of reference that impels a person to act, and helps him not to make the outcome the sole measure of his worth. Fear or grief may remain, while the heart continues to return to God.

In the saying of Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him), 'The root of the heart's strength is reliance upon God', there is an indication that the heart draws its constancy from its reference point, not from having a complete grasp of all the causes. This

does not mean that a believer feels no anxiety or needs no treatment and support; it means that reliance accompanies his taking up of means and prevents him from worshipping control.[6]

Reliance steadies you when results run contrary to your wishes

A believer's strength does not rest upon a guarantee that his wishes will be fulfilled, but upon his trust in God and the truthfulness with which he fulfils what is required of him. If an outcome runs contrary to his plan, he reviews the cause, remedies what can be remedied, and does not make the outcome a final verdict upon his worth or upon God's mercy.

A believer hopes for good from God, but does not claim to know the form in which it ought to come. He is therefore not shattered by the mere failure of a plan, nor does he forbid himself grief; he combines review, patience, and hope: 'Do not lose heart and do not grieve; you shall be uppermost, if you are believers' (Q 3:139).

The dignity that comes with faith does not mean unshakeable strength or an outcome that never disappoints; it means that a person is not enslaved to anything other than God, and that he remains able to return to truth after stumbling: 'To God belongs all dignity, and to his Messenger, and to the believers' (Q 63:8).

Trusting God's wisdom without claiming to know the particular good

It is related from Lady Fatima al-Zahra (peace be upon her): 'Whoever raises up to God his sincere worship, God, mighty and majestic, sends down to him what best serves his good.'

6 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Tamīmī al-Āmidī, p. 197; and *Mīzān al-Ḥikma*, al-Rayshahrī, vol. 10, no. 22248.

This teaches a believer to purify his worship and to refer what is best back to God — not to assure him that he can himself discern 'what is best' in every outcome, or that it will match his present desire.[7]

The fourth component: humility before God — recognising blessings as a responsibility

Every blessing God grants you — whether a talent, the fruit of upbringing, the result of striving, or a gift brought about by God's decree — is a trust and a responsibility. Differences in gifts do not determine a person's worth, but widen the field in which he can benefit others and for which he may be held accountable, within his knowledge and practical scope.

The perfections actually realised within the self remain real, while personal merit and responsibility are read according to what a person did with what he was given, within his knowledge, intention, and practical scope.

Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) said: 'Everything has its alms, and the alms of the intellect is bearing patiently with the ignorant.'[8]

Abilities and advantages are not independent possessions, but gifts within the trust. What remains an initial capacity or resource is instrumental expansion; what becomes knowledge, understanding, will, or a settled skill is an actual quality in the self. Thankfulness consists in recognising these gifts, developing them as needed, and employing them in good — without turning them into a measure of superiority or a burden beyond practical scope.

7 *ʿUddat al-Dāʿī wa Najāḥ al-Sāʿī*, Ibn Fahd al-Ḥillī, p. 233; and cited from it in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, p. 249.

8 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Tamīmī al-Āmidī.

True humility comes from a sense of responsibility, not from denial

When a person recognises that his abilities are gifts subsisting by God, humility arises without any denial of blessings. Humility is not a claim of incapacity; it is knowledge of one's limit, the discharge of the trust, and a readiness to learn from others.

The wider a believer's abilities and responsibilities grow, the greater his need of guidance and help — but he does not infer a spiritual rank from success, or distance from a stumble. He thanks God, holds himself to account, asks for rectitude, and fulfils, as far as he can, the obligations that come with the blessing.

God Almighty says: 'If you are thankful, I shall surely increase you' (Q 14:7). Thankfulness is knowing the blessing, referring it back to the one who gave it, and using it in truth. The form of the increase and its timing belong to God, and are not mechanically tied to what a person imagines he has 'deserved'.

Inward humility strengthens one's relationship with God

We see, then, that the more a person's standing among people grows, the more he needs to increase in humility before God, so that he may not be deceived about himself. This profound idea is embodied in the supplication of Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him) in the Supplication on Noble Character, where he says: 'My God, do not raise me a single degree among people without lowering me as much in my own eyes, and do not bring about for me any outward dignity without bringing about for me a corresponding inward lowliness in my own sight.'[9]

Humility, then, does not mean denying God's favour and his blessings; it means recognising that all we have is an

9 *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication Twenty, the supplication on noble character.

outpouring from God, and that rendering the due of these blessings requires sincerity and continuous effort.

True thankfulness never comes to an end

Yet however much effort a person expends, he remains unable to render the full due of thanks to God, because God's blessings are greater and vaster than can be counted.

Consider the words of Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) in the supplication of the Day of ʿArafa, where he says: 'Were I to try and to strive across the ages and the epochs, were I granted such a lifespan, to render thanks for a single one of your blessings, I could not do so — except by your own favour, through which you have laid upon me a thankfulness ever new and a praise ever fresh and ready.'[10]

This deep understanding makes a person live in a state of continual humility: not the humility of weakness, but the humility of recognising that God is the possessor of all favour, and that however much a person gives thanks, God's blessings upon him surpass any thanks.

Humility does not breed a sense of inadequacy; it breeds a truthful awe of God

With this understanding, humility becomes part of a believer's character: he does not deny his ability, nor does he boast of it; he sees in it a trust and asks how to render its due within his practical scope, rather than how to prove that he stands above others.

This is reflected in the intimate address of Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him): 'My God, to you I complain of a self prone to command evil, quick to fall into wrongdoing, eager to disobey you, exposing itself to your displeasure; it leads me along the paths of ruin and makes me the most

10 The supplication of Imam al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) on the Day of ʿArafa; see *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*, Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs.

contemptible of the perishing before you; full of failings, long in expectation; if good touches it, it withholds, and if evil touches it, it is distressed; inclined to diversion, filled with heedlessness and forgetfulness.'[11]

However much a person grows, he remains a creature dependent upon God, not immune from error, and in need of review and repentance. This dependence does not demolish his practical confidence; it prevents it from turning into a claim of perfection or of independence.

We are servants of God and vicegerents upon the earth; our abilities, our starting points, and our environments differ, and none of this determines our human dignity or our standing before God. Each trust is discharged according to what has reached a person and what lies within his practical scope.

The fifth component: humility towards people — a recognition of reality

We may not judge people's merit or their nearness from the outward appearance of their abilities and their results. Knowledge, wealth, or health may be made easy for one person and withheld from another because of body, environment, or opportunity; a just assessment remains bound to what was known, what was chosen, and the effort made within one's practical scope.

Outward ability is not a complete mirror of the shakila or of the heart, and achievement is no certificate of purity of intention. A person with limited means may carry a truthful response to truth, while another possesses extensive means and does not direct them well.

Nor does weakness, illness, or disorder mean any deficiency in one's humanity or one's faith. These are states that affect the cost of action and one's practical scope; they may not be turned into a moral or spiritual verdict upon the one who bears them.

11 *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, the Supplication of Those Who Complain.

This is why we need humility when we read other people: we see the outward effect and safeguard rights, but we do not claim to know the clarity that reached them, nor their intentions, nor their practical scope, nor the coercion and the injury that have befallen them.

A quiet person may be forbearing or may be afraid; a bold person may be courageous or may be reckless; a successful person may be trustworthy or may be exploitative. A virtue is not known from appearance alone, but from its reality, its orientation, and the manner of its realisation — and God knows best what is hidden within.

Knowing that starting points differ does not abolish responsibility; it makes it more just. We ask of a person what he knew, intended, chose, and was able to do — not what he was not given or had no realistic way of attaining.

Nor do we disparage abilities that came easily; they are genuine goods and trusts. But their possessor's moral merit is not equal to their raw measure. Virtue appears in how they are directed and in how they serve truth and people.

Hence the useful comparison is not: who is more intelligent, or wealthier, or calmer? It is: how do I use what I have been given? And what falls within my practical scope by way of learning, reform, and rendering what is due?

As for ranking people in degrees of nearness and of final outcome — that is not our work, because God alone knows in full the circumstances of a person's becoming, the clarity that reached him, his practical scope, his intention, and his striving. Our part is to be just in outward judgement, to show mercy, to counsel, and to safeguard rights.

So do not make your success an argument against anyone else, and do not take another's stumble as evidence of laziness or of weak faith. Offer help, build a more merciful formative environment, and leave the knowledge of what is inward to God.

A humble believer does not look upon people from above; he looks upon them with mercy and regard, aware that true precedence is not in his hands but is a matter for God alone.

Exercises and reflective questions

Exercise 1: Identifying the marks of conceit

Watch yourself first of all: how do you receive praise? Do you refer your ability back to God and render its due? As for others, judge actions and rights by what is apparent, and do not make humility a pretext for diagnosing their hearts or ranking their stations.

Exercise 2: Practising humility

Choose at least one situation each day in which to practise humility — whether by helping someone in need, listening patiently to someone speaking, offering an apology when you are wrong, avoiding interrupting others while they speak, or expressing gratitude to someone who helps you. Afterwards, write in your journal what you learned from the experience. How did you feel while practising humility? Did you notice an effect on others? How can you develop this into a habit that becomes part of your daily conduct?

Exercise 3: Reflecting on God's blessings

Set aside a quiet time to reflect on some of God's blessings upon you — whether outward blessings such as health, family, and provision, or inward ones such as intellect, heart, and faith. Write a list of these blessings and reflect on them deeply: how do they affect your life? Which blessings had you not noticed before? How can you thank God for them through your work and your conduct? And finally, how can the certainty that these blessings come from God help you to avoid conceit and to strengthen humility?

Exercise 4: Keeping a journal

Set aside a notebook for writing about your attempts to overcome conceit and strengthen humility. Record the thoughts and situations you encountered during your day, and how you dealt with them. Did you find humility difficult in some situations? What feelings came over you when you tried to master conceit? How can you develop your way of handling these challenges? Make this an ongoing exercise, and notice how your awareness and your conduct change over time.

Conclusion to Section One

True Greatness

You are a human being whom God has honoured, a servant entrusted with vicegerency upon the earth and a bearer of the trust. He has made subject to you such of the universe as helps you live and work — not to make you the centre of existence or its owner, but so that you may learn, build, and act justly. The nearness you seek is non-spatial: it is read through the powers and perfections actually realised in the self, and through the orientation of its response to truth — in acceptance or refusal — in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope.

It is as though a traveller, having lost his way, comes to recognise his dignity, his trust, and his orientation. He does not possess a 'kingdom' that is his by mere lineage; rather, he recovers the meaning of his life when he knows who he is, what he has been entrusted with, and where he is going.

Thankfulness is the first response to this knowledge: that you see the blessing, refer it back to God, and use it in truth. Thankfulness is not a step towards deserving a station in itself; it is servanthood and responsibility, which open the door to further guidance and further work.

When a person recognises that what he has is a divine gift, he no longer regards blessings as independent possessions but as a trust that calls for thanks and for use in truth. Thankfulness may

deepen his awareness of dependence and of belonging to God, but it does not guarantee any particular or permanent feeling.

A person may taste the sweetness of gratitude to God for his blessings, and he may thank him in a state where he finds no manifest sweetness at all. Thankfulness is knowledge of the blessing, its attribution to the giver, an assent of the heart, and its use in obedience — not an emotion alone. God Almighty says: 'And be thankful for the blessing of God, if it is he whom you worship' (Q 16:114).

With knowledge, remembrance, and action, thankfulness may grow into a deeper love that makes God the highest beloved and reorders the rest of what one loves without abolishing it: 'Among people are those who take others besides God as rivals, loving them as they should love God; but those who believe are stronger in love for God' (Q 2:165). This is growth by degrees, not an automatic transformation through which everyone passes in the same way.

Fitra is a root in the human constitution that prepares a person to know truth in outline and to seek perfection and servanthood, but its effects may be veiled. Revelation, the intellect, and tazkiya disclose something of what it requires — so we do not equate every inner feeling with the voice of fitra.

Love of God is not confined to feeling; it appears in following, in the ordering of intentions and of what one loves, and in action. It is a higher motive that directs ambitions once it takes root, but it does not make enthusiasm permanent, and it does not animate every area of life without knowledge, habit, environment, and striving.

Vicegerency is an honour and a charge to build up the earth and bear the trust within God's established patterns — not a 'natural right' of sovereignty over the universe or over people. It binds the tazkiya of the self to the service of creation, to justice, and to the safeguarding of resources.

You are not the heir of a cosmic kingdom; you are a servant made vicegerent, and a trustee. Everything in your care — body, wealth, knowledge, relationships — has a due and a limit, and does not become an absolute privilege.

Faith gives a person a reference point, meaning, and a capacity to endure, but it does not erase the pain of killing, imprisonment, or poverty, and it does not place a believer beyond fear, grief, and disturbance. His strength appears in the truthfulness of his return and of his work within what he is able to do.

Tranquillity and constancy may grow as certainty and reliance take root, without a calm feeling being required in every situation. God Almighty says: 'Say: Nothing will befall us except what God has decreed for us; he is our protector, and in God let the believers put their trust' (Q 9:51).

Love of God may help a person to resist rancour and the centrality of competition, but it does not erase emotion at a stroke. What is required is that he restrain his anger, pardon where pardon is appropriate, and safeguard justice and rights: 'Those who restrain anger and pardon people — God loves those who do good' (Q 3:134).

Through this love, personal hostility is refined, so that desire does not become the standard of loyalty and disavowal, while resistance to injustice and falsehood continues within the bounds of truth and mercy. And it is of the guidance of prophethood that you keep ties with the one who severs them, give to the one who withholds from you, and pardon the one who wrongs you — while safeguarding rights and averting harm.[1]

Fear, anxiety, and grief are human states, not foreign bodies to be expelled in order to prove one's faith. The meaning of the tradition is that a believer is able to turn both ease and hardship

1 Related with closely similar wordings in the hadith collections; among the Imami sources: *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on pardon.

into an occasion for thankfulness or for patience and seeking God's reward — not that every emotion disappears from him.

A challenge may become a field of growth if a person responds to it with truth and seeks help, treatment, and reform — but it does not bring about tazkiya automatically, and we do not always know its particular wisdom.

Nor does every act or step constitute nearness in itself; striving brings a person near in proportion to the soundness of its end and its means and the truthfulness of its response to truth and servanthood, with the clarity given and the practical scope available taken into account.

A believer fears that his appetites may overcome him, that his temper may sweep him away, or that the impulses of the self may weaken him; and so he remains watchful, re-examining his acts and purifying them. He also fears falling short in rendering what is due to God, fully aware that however much he multiplies his thanks and his obedience, he does not match the greatness of even one of God's blessings upon him — as Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) says in the supplication of the Day of ʿArafa: 'I bear witness, my God, by the reality of my faith, that were I to try and to strive across the ages and the epochs, were I granted such a lifespan, to render thanks for a single one of your blessings, I could not do so except by your own favour, which lays upon me the obligation of thanking you for ever.'[2]

Tranquillity does not contradict fear and hope: a settled orientation towards God may coexist with pain or with natural fear. It is not measured by outward calm, and it does not remove the need to seek treatment and support.

Your relationship with God is one of dependence, servanthood, and love; there is in it neither indwelling nor union.

2 The supplication of Imam al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) on the Day of ʿArafa; see *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*, Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs.

From it you learn to show mercy to his creation and to safeguard their rights — not because they are extensions of yourself, but because they are his servants, his creatures, and his trusts.

A believer makes God's pleasure his highest purpose, and doing good may become part of the path to nearness when its intention and its means are sound and rights are preserved. The outward appearance of giving is not enough to judge sincerity or standing. The Qur'an described the giving of the Prophet's household (peace be upon them): 'They give food, despite their love of it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive: We feed you only for the face of God; we desire from you neither recompense nor thanks' (Q 76:8–9).

And from here the next journey begins: how does this vision become practical laws that govern striving, build faith, cultivate perfections, and bind a person's success to the service of God's creation and to servanthood before him?



SECTION TWO

The Laws of Islamic Origination

From the Islamic Theory of Origination Project

Introduction to Section Two

From Knowing Yourself to Facing the Questions

If you have reached this page, I hope Section One has helped you to see yourself in a way closer to your reality — not because you now have more information about yourself, but because you may have begun to look at yourself from a different angle: seeing your fitra as guidance rather than a burden, and your weakness as a reminder of the source of your strength rather than a cause for despair or defeat.

These laws do not regard the human being as a set of adjacent parts, but as a single embodied self read through the aspects of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit. A person's worth is not determined by achievement alone, but by the perfection realised in him and by how he responds to truth and to servanthood within his practical scope.

If Section One paved the way for this vision, Section Two begins from the question that vision naturally raises: how does a person live in the light of what he has come to know about himself?

From reflection to questioning

When a person begins to know himself, his journey does not end; it begins. No sooner does his identity become clear to him than he finds himself before a world filled with ideas, promises,

and programmes offering him different roads to building himself and achieving success and happiness.

New questions then arise that cannot be evaded: how do I develop myself without moving away from my fitra? How do I achieve success without losing my purpose? And do these theories really lead me to what I am searching for, or do they take me only part of the way?

The need for a compass is therefore no longer an intellectual luxury but a necessity. The issue is no longer simply knowing oneself, but also knowing how to assess what is offered, and how to distinguish what helps him on the journey from what cuts him off from it.

A critical reading: between glittering promises and deferred questions

Self-development is no longer merely an intellectual trend; it has become one of the currents that shape a person's awareness of the self. It addresses a widespread desire for progress, success, and a better life. But this desire is not to be equated with fitra or with the attainment of perfection. Fitra comprises a general presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood; contemporary goals must be weighed against revelation, intellect, and tazkiya.

There is no doubt that many of these models have offered useful tools and helped to draw attention to important aspects of the human psyche, and this should not be denied. Yet at the same time they have left behind questions too large to neglect: what is the human being in the first place? What is the purpose of his existence? And what does success mean if it is severed from the purpose for which a person was created?

These are not marginal questions; they are the questions upon which everything after them depends. In our view,

therefore, the problem was not that these theories came from the West, nor that they contained elements of error, but that they became the reference through which the human being is understood — until the vision that revelation offers of the human being, of life, and of the purpose of existence disappeared from view.

From here arises the need to reread these theories in the light of revelation and fitra: to understand each theory in its strongest form, to accept what has been established within its proper field, and to place it within a wider vision. We do not ask science to establish the purpose of the human being, nor ask a religious model to replace specialised science in explaining mechanisms.

The method of this section: from Western theories to the Laws of Islamic Origination

This is where the idea of this section came from. We do not read these theories in order to attack them, nor do we read them in order to submit to them. We read them because a contemporary Muslim lives with them every day, and has a right to know where they were correct, where they fell short, and how the Islamic vision offers a more comprehensive conception of the human being.

This method finds a guiding root in God's words: 'So give good news to my servants — those who listen to what is said and follow the best of it' (Q 39:17–18).

The verse calls for listening, discernment, and following what is best. As for the steps of reading that we adopt here — understanding, fairness, critique, and then rebuilding — these are an interpretive arrangement in the service of this section; we do not attribute this template itself to the Qur'an.

We begin by reading a theory as its own proponents present it, understanding it in its context, identifying its strengths, and

doing justice to the useful tools it has offered. Then we ask the question that cannot be avoided: does it offer a complete picture of the human being?

If we find that it was right in one respect, we affirm that; and if we find that it overlooked another, we set that out. Then we move to the step upon which this whole book rests: reframing the question from within the Islamic vision, and not from within the theory itself.

These theories, therefore, will not be the axis of the journey but its stations. We shall read each through sources that represent it, accept what has been established in its field, and then set out its limits and place it within a wider Islamic vision. The purpose of the section is to offer laws that help us understand human becoming and orientation without turning them into empirical claims that replace the sciences.

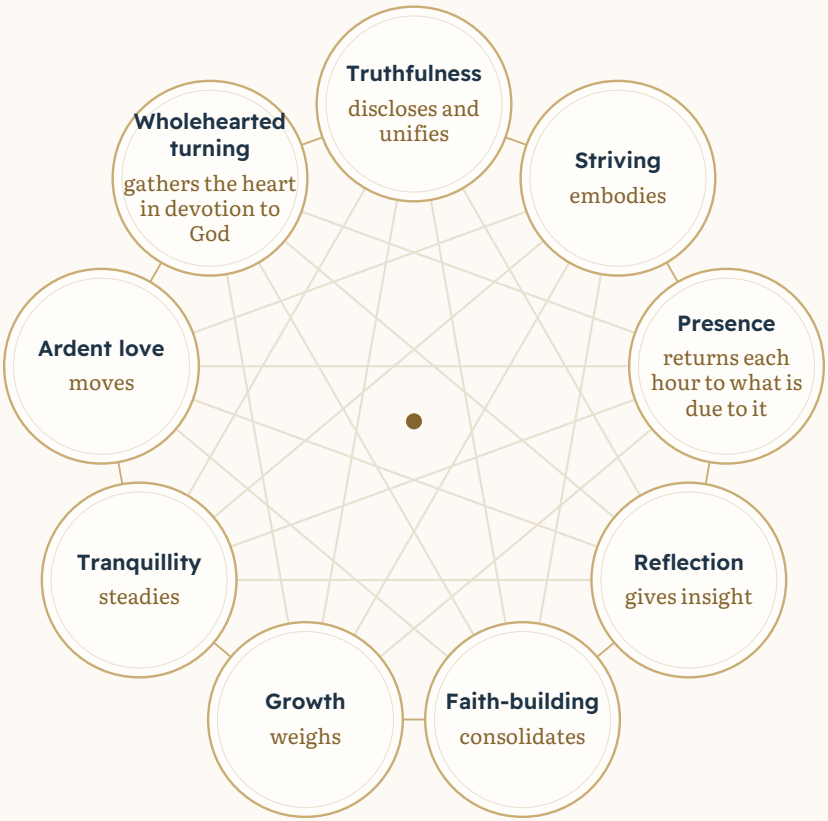
What are 'the Laws of Islamic Origination'?

A reader may ask: what are these laws that are spoken of repeatedly in this section?

We use the name 'the Laws of Islamic Origination' for formative, guiding, conditional principles formulated by the theory in the light of the reality of the human being as revelation discloses it, and of fitra, purpose, and God's established patterns. They do not promise mechanical outcomes, but set out the orientation, conditions, and limits of action.

The Laws of Origination are governing principles that disclose conditional regularities in human becoming and direct understanding and action without determinism or any guarantee of a result. They form a system of interacting functions rather than a sequence of stages: truthfulness discloses and unifies; striving embodies; presence returns each hour to what is due to it; reflection gives insight; faith-building consolidates; growth weighs; tranquillity steadies; ardent love moves;

and wholehearted turning gathers the heart in devotion to God.



The Laws of Origination: a system of interacting functions rather than a sequence of stages

If Section One paved the way for this journey by introducing us to the human being, his fitra, and the purpose of his existence, this section formulates the relations that ordered that journey in the form of laws which help to explain it, to connect its parts, and to disclose its inner logic — so that the journey to God does not remain merely a set of sincere feelings, but becomes a

conscious vision by which a person understands himself and comprehends his life.

These laws are neither scattered topics nor mechanical links in a single chain, but an interacting network. Their functions differ according to their subject: some are guiding, some normative, and some motivational. They need not operate in a fixed order, and no single law guarantees the outcome; each illuminates a function in the self's becoming, orientation, and striving.

What this book offers is not the full exposition of the Islamic Theory of Origination, but a practical gateway to some of the project's laws in the field of human development and the critical reading of the best-known theories of self-development. The theory itself, with its foundations and its complete structure, has been given a separate book of its own.

The laws appear in this section in the following order:

1. **The Law of Inner Truthfulness**
   a reading beyond Maslow's hierarchy.
2. **The Law of Striving and Trust in God**
   a reading beyond the law of attraction.
3. **The Law of Purpose-Led Presence**
   a reading beyond The Power of Now.
4. **The Law of Conscious Reflection**
   a reading beyond meditation and mindfulness.
5. **The Law of Faith-Building**
   a reading beyond neuro-linguistic programming.
6. **The Law of Growth through Tazkiya**
   a reading beyond the growth mindset.
7. **The Law of Inner Tranquillity**
   a reading beyond positive psychology.

8 **The Law of Ardent Love of God**
a reading beyond self-determination theory.

9 **The Law of Wholehearted Turning to God**
a reading beyond flow theory.

Redefining the concepts from their roots

When we present the Islamic vision in this section, we are not trying to add a spiritual dimension to existing models, nor to replace a Western theory with an Islamic one. The matter is deeper than that.

The distinctiveness of the Islamic vision begins before the conclusions, and before the means — indeed before the questions themselves. We do not first ask: how do I succeed? We ask: what is success? We do not ask: how do I achieve presence? But: what is presence? We do not ask: how do I grow? But: what is it in a human being that truly grows? We do not ask: how do I increase my motivation? But: what ought to move a human being in the first place?

The difference therefore begins at the roots, not at the branches. The Islamic vision differs from these theories not in means alone, but in its conception of the human being, of the purpose of his existence, of the meaning of success, and of the nature of the movement he lives through in this world.

Fear and hope remain two functional wings of the journey: fear awakens a person to the consequence of falling short, without despair; hope opens the heart to God's mercy, without conceit. Love and tranquillity gather them both under the authority of servanthood.

For this reason too, Islam does not come to compete in the arena of success; it comes to redefine it. The aim is not that a person should achieve greater success, or wider influence, or higher productivity, if all of that takes him away from the

purpose for which he was created. The aim is that success itself should be a step in the journey to God, and not a veil before it.

An invitation: to travel with the eye of truthfulness, not the eye of fascination

I hope you will read this section with the eye of one searching for truth, not the eye of one searching for victory. The aim is not that we should emerge from this journey more dismissive of modern theories, nor that we should emerge more impressed by them, but that we should become better able to read them in the light of a wider vision of the human being.

Our question in each chapter will therefore not be: is this theory right or wrong? For such a question, important as it is, is not sufficient on its own. The question that will accompany us on this journey is rather: what picture of the human being does this theory offer? What does it see clearly? What is absent from it? And then: where does what it got right belong within the vision that revelation offers?

The comparison in this section, then, is not only between competing ideas, but between frameworks that differ in their definition of the human being and of his purpose. Some modern theories stop at motivation, or performance, or wellbeing within a particular field, whereas the Islamic vision refers these fields back to God, to servanthood, and to one's final end. Partial conclusions may agree without the starting points or the limits being identical.

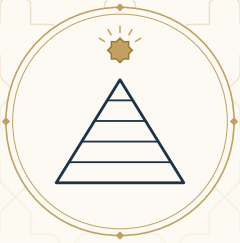
I hope you will notice, as you read the coming chapters, that we do not judge modern theories by their fame or by the success they have achieved, but by the question that precedes all of that: do they help a person to know himself as God created him? And do they lead him to the purpose for which he was created? Or do they give him some of the means and then leave him alone before the larger question?

When you finish this section, I hope the greatest thing you take from it will not be a new verdict upon a theory, but a new way of reading. Understand a theory in its strongest form; accept what has been established in its field; identify its limits; and place it within a wider vision. Do not ask science to prove the human being's purpose, and do not ask a religious model to replace science in explaining specialised mechanisms.

Then the question will no longer be: what do I read? But: how do I read? And your concern will not be to gather the greatest possible number of ideas, but to place every idea in its proper setting, taking from it what helps you on the journey and leaving what cuts you off from it.

If you come out of this journey holding this compass, you will have become able — God willing — to read every new theory, every new idea, and every new promise without losing clarity of vision or forgetting the purpose for which you were created.

We ask God to make this work purely for his noble face, to bring benefit through it to those who read it, and to make it a help towards truthfulness in striving and towards a non-spatial nearness to him.



CHAPTER NINE

The Law of Inner Truthfulness

A Reading beyond Maslow's Hierarchy

Entry: why do we begin with Maslow?

We begin with Maslow's pyramid not because it is the deepest of models in understanding the human being, but because it is the most firmly embedded in modern consciousness. This pyramid has become an almost universal map for explaining motivation, taught in education, in management, and in self-development programmes, until many people have come to see themselves through it without realising it. Discussing it is therefore not a theoretical luxury but a necessity for anyone who wants to understand the human being in a way closer to his reality.

The human being was created from clay, and God breathed into him of his spirit. This attribution confers honour; it does not indicate a part of God's essence or an independent thing

dwelling in the body. A human being is a single self possessing a spiritual station, embodied in his body — not a composition of two independent entities.

From this difference at the root, every subsequent difference branches out. We shall therefore present the model as its own proponents understand it, do justice to what is sound in it, and pause at its limits as psychology itself has disclosed them, before moving on to the Law of Inner Truthfulness — not as another ordering of needs, but as a redefinition of the human being who carries them.

The importance of this discussion is that Maslow's influence did not remain within the lecture halls of psychology; it seeped into the way we think about success, happiness, upbringing, and work. Many today defer meaning until security is assured, tie their worth to what they have achieved, and suppose that stillness awaits them at some summit they will one day reach. If the model has attained such a presence, then reviewing it is not a discussion of an old theory but the correction of a compass that still directs millions of people.

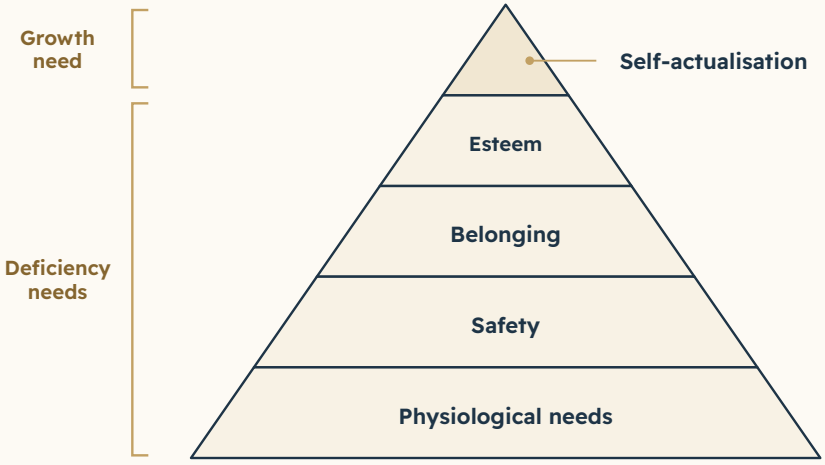
First: Maslow's hierarchy as its proponents present it

In the middle of the twentieth century Abraham Maslow presented what later became known as the hierarchy of needs[1], one of the most widespread and influential of psychological theories. The idea appears simple: human needs are ordered in ascending levels, and a person does not ordinarily turn to a higher level before what lies beneath it has been satisfied. Hence the shape of the pyramid, as though a person climbs step

1 The theory was first presented in A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–396; Maslow later developed it at length in *Motivation and Personality* (1954).

by step from survival, to security, to relationship, to esteem, and then to self-actualisation.

At the base of the pyramid lie the physiological needs: food, water, sleep, air, and whatever sustains the body's survival. Once a person is assured of his survival, he moves to the needs of safety, seeking stability and physical, medical, financial, and social security. After that the needs of belonging appear, as a person searches for love, relationship, acceptance, family, friendship, and a community to which he feels he belongs.



Maslow's hierarchy as its proponents present it: human needs ordered in ascending levels

Then comes the level of esteem, which has two faces: a person's esteem for himself through a sense of competence, independence, and confidence; and the esteem of others for him through respect and the recognition of achievement. At the top of the pyramid Maslow places self-actualisation, where a person reaches the utmost of his potential, expresses his uniqueness and his creativity, and lives — as the model sees it — the highest version of himself.

Maslow holds that failure to satisfy one of these levels generally hinders movement to what lies above it, and that self-actualisation does not become a realistic demand until the needs beneath it have been satisfied. He therefore divided needs into two kinds: deficiency needs, which are the first four levels, since they arise from lack and a person seeks to meet them so that the tension may subside; and the growth need, which is self-actualisation, since it is not satisfied in the same way but expands the further a person advances in it.

This model gained wide currency because it is easy to grasp, simple to apply, and offers a graduated explanation of behaviour. A hungry person is not usually occupied with creativity; someone in fear for his life does not generally seek esteem; someone lacking security is not free to pursue the higher meanings of achievement. The pyramid thus became a common instrument in education, management, motivation, and the design of workplaces and learning environments, until it settled into general awareness as though it were a self-evident fact rather than a hypothesis open to review.

The point of the model's attraction is also the point of its weakness. It is clear, orderly, and close to daily experience; but at the same time it reduces the human being to a linear ladder, as though his life moved only from lower to higher, and as though meaning could not appear until all the needs had been settled. And here begins the question that will accompany us through this chapter: is the human being really a pyramid of needs, or a being wider than this whole arrangement?

Second: the empirical support and its limits

Maslow's pyramid was not, in its origin, built upon large-scale empirical studies; and yet it found its way quickly into education, management, human resources, and motivational programmes. The reason is clear: the model is easy, orderly, and

usable. A teacher can understand a student's needs through it, a manager can read an employee's motives, and a trainer can explain the course of growth. This is an undeniable advantage, but it is not by itself enough to make the model a law for understanding the human being.

Later studies attempted to test this hierarchy and produced findings more qualified than its popular image suggests. In a global study covering more than sixty thousand people in a hundred and twenty countries, Tay and Diener found that the satisfaction of needs is generally associated with wellbeing, but without establishing the strict ordering Maslow assumed[2]: some people may be content with their lives, or pursue meaning and growth, even though some of their other needs have not yet been met. This alone is enough to tell us that life is broader than a single ladder can always accommodate.

Other models have therefore tried to modify the picture. Alderfer proposed a simpler model, known as ERG[3], which condenses needs into three domains: existence, relatedness, and growth. Its advantage is that it does not hold a person captive to a single ordering; it acknowledges that needs may operate together, and that a person may seek relationship, meaning, and growth at a time when some conditions of safety or comfort are still incomplete.

We may therefore say that the strength of Maslow's pyramid lies not so much in its empirical grounding as in its simplicity and usability. It is an approximate map that helps to order some motives, but it is not a law governing the human self. And there is in it what deserves to be acknowledged: a person is indeed

2 L. Tay and E. Diener, "Needs and Subjective Well-Being around the World," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 2 (2011): 354–365. The study drew on Gallup World Poll data (2005–2010) and covered 60,865 participants in 123 countries.

3 C. P. Alderfer, "An Empirical Test of a New Theory of Human Needs," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 4, no. 2 (1969): 142–175.

affected by his needs, and hunger, fear, and deprivation leave their mark upon the self and upon behaviour. But the error begins when this sound observation is turned into a rigid ordering, and when it is forgotten that within the human being there is a dimension deeper than all his needs.

Third: criticism from within the field itself

For our critique to be fair, we must distinguish two things. The problem is not in saying that a person has needs which affect his behaviour — that is hardly disputed. The problem is in turning these needs into an inevitable pyramid in which a person moves from one level to another only after he has satisfied the needs below it. This is the point at which the model has met wide criticism, not only from outside psychology but from within it.

Empirically, Wahba and Bridwell, in a review of a number of studies, found only partial support for the idea of the hierarchy, without sufficient evidence for the strict ordering for which the model became famous.[4] People do not always move as the pyramid moves: a person may seek relationship and meaning while in material straits; he may pursue a higher value while deprived of some conditions of comfort; and he may rise from the heart of fear rather than after its disappearance.

Culturally, the model appeared closer to an individualist Western temperament than to a general human nature. In many cultures — such as the collectivist societies of China, Japan, and India — belonging, family, community, and duty may take precedence over personal independence and individual esteem. This means that the ordering of needs is not a

4 M. A. Wahba and L. G. Bridwell, "Maslow Reconsidered: A Review of Research on the Need Hierarchy Theory," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 15, no. 2 (1976): 212–240. The review covered thirteen studies: ten using factor analysis and three using a ranking method.

fixed human template but is affected by the picture of the human being carried by the culture that produced the model.[5]

Methodologically, part of Maslow's conception was built upon reflections and biographies of people he considered self-actualised, such as Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Lincoln. These are inspiring examples, but they are not enough to build a general theory of the human being: they are a small elite sample, selected by a particular intuition rather than by precise operational criteria that could be tested on a wide scale.

Criticism from neuroscience has further complicated the picture. Studies, among them the work of Lieberman and Eisenberger, have shown that social rejection activates regions of the brain associated with the processing of physical pain.[6] This means that belonging is not a late need that comes after safety and the body, but may in its effect upon a person be close to physical pain itself. A person does not live his needs in separate strata; he lives them interwoven, each affecting the others.

Currents in positive and evolutionary psychology add that a person may seek meaning and value in the heart of deprivation rather than after transcending it. He may endure for the sake of a cause, sacrifice for the sake of a principle, and choose an apparent loss in order to preserve a meaning he considers higher than comfort. Indeed, some researchers have attempted to rebuild the pyramid itself on an evolutionary basis, placing at its summit other motives such as acquiring a mate and

5 See G. Hofstede, "The Cultural Relativity of the Quality of Life Concept," *Academy of Management Review* 9, no. 3 (1984): 389–398; and P. A. Gambrel and R. Cianci, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Does It Apply in a Collectivist Culture?" *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship* 8, no. 2 (2003): 143–161.

6 N. I. Eisenberger, M. D. Lieberman, and K. D. Williams, "Does Rejection Hurt? An fMRI Study of Social Exclusion," *Science* 302, no. 5643 (2003): 290–292.

raising offspring[7] — which shows that the summit of the pyramid is not agreed upon even within the field itself.

The conclusion we draw from this criticism is not that Maslow's pyramid is without value, but that it is narrower than the human being. It describes some of what a person seeks, but it does not explain the whole person. It helps us to read some behaviour, but it is not fit to be the final reference for building a picture of the human being. It is a partial model, conditioned by a particular culture, useful within its limits, but it does not reach the reality of the human being and does not resolve the mystery of his existence.

The limits of the model are therefore not incidental, to be remedied by adding a new level or reordering one of the pyramid's steps; they are limits within the framework itself, because it regards the human being as a series of needs to be satisfied rather than as a being possessing fitra, spirit, and purpose.

Fourth: the Law of Inner Truthfulness



The Law of Inner Truthfulness is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that the self is purified and integrated to the extent that its four aspects — spirit, heart, intellect, and bodily dimension — come into mutual accord and harmony under the governing reference of truth and the requirement of fitra: the intellect understands truth and discerns it, the heart accepts it,

7 D. T. Kenrick, V. Griskevicius, S. L. Neuberg, and M. Schaller, "Renovating the Pyramid of Needs: Contemporary Extensions Built upon Ancient Foundations," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 3 (2010): 292–314.

> the spirit turns towards God and the purpose of servanthood, and the person embodies it through the body in word and deed. This accord becomes established through tazkiya, which comprises facing the self, disclosing its gaps, self-accounting, repentance, and reform within practical scope.

But the problem, as you have seen, does not lie in the ordering of needs alone; it lies in the question that precedes all ordering: who is the human being who has these needs?

Here the real difference begins. The Islamic vision does not offer an alternative pyramid that reorders the same steps, nor does it compete with Maslow over which need precedes which. It begins from the reality of the human being and his purpose as revelation discloses them, and then reads his needs, his body, his environment, his relationships, and his choice within a single network. It makes neither the inward alone nor the outward alone the source of change; it asks rather: who is the human being, and what is the purpose within which all these conditions are ordered?

Inner truthfulness is therefore not merely a moral exhortation or a name for inner coherence, but the mutual accord of the aspects of the self — spirit, heart, intellect, and bodily dimension — under the authority of truth and the demands of fitra. Facing gaps, self-accounting, repentance, and reform are processes of tazkiya that establish this accord within practical scope.

Inner truthfulness is not following whatever lies within you, but the mutual accord of the aspects of the self under truth and fitra, followed by work to address the gaps that appear within practical scope. The intellect understands truth and discerns it; the heart assents to it; the spirit turns towards God and the

purpose of servanthood; and the person embodies it through the body in speech and action. Knowledge, imagination, intention, will, speech, and action disclose the degree of this accord; they do not constitute a parallel definition of it.

The agent is a single self, not four parts contending with one another. A gap may appear between what the intellect understands and what the heart accepts, or between the purpose towards which the spirit turns and what the body embodies. Acknowledgement, self-accounting, repentance, and reform then strengthen mutual accord; they do not define the whole of truthfulness.

Self-actualisation, in this perspective, is not the discovery of a complete essence hidden within, but the tazkiya of what has come to be within the self, the cultivation of its perfections, and the correction of its shakila and its orientation within servanthood.

The Law of Inner Truthfulness therefore sets out a real direction, not an automatic promise: as the aspects of the self come into greater accord under truth, its tranquillity, steadfastness, and stability increase. This may not appear quickly as emotional calm because of the body, pain, or illness; the spiritual station is deeper than a passing feeling.

Our reading rests upon three interconnected levels: fitra as the original constitution and a general criterion; the four dimensions as aspects of the single self's activity; and needs as fields to be ordered under truth and purpose, not rigid steps.

Fitra: the axis of the law and the compass of truthfulness

Fitra is a distinctive mode of human creation. It comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood. It is neither detailed conceptual knowledge nor

completed religious awareness; its manifestation and the identification of its object therefore require revelation, intellect, and tazkiya.

The effects of fitra may be veiled by upbringing, desire, habit, and environment, without every wish or aversion becoming evidence of it. A person therefore needs revelation to clarify, the intellect to discriminate, and a heart refined through tazkiya to assent.

Inner truthfulness is thus not following everything within, but facing what is within and weighing it. A feeling may be truly present yet wrongly interpreted; an intuition may be an alert that calls for examination rather than a final proof.

Fitra does not abolish individual variety or the effect of body and environment, and it does not impose an automatic path. It is a root of the constitution that opens a direction, while the shakila's becoming unfolds through what a person was given, what befell him, and what he came to know, chose, and repeated.

Hence we speak of 'what fitra requires' and of 'the acquired structure's accord with fitra'; we do not say that fitra is a fifth organ or a geometric centre around which the parts of the human being revolve.

And if what a person calls 'the voice within' conflicts with revelation, with demonstration, and with rights, he may not invoke fitra to override them; truthfulness requires reviewing the interpretation, not sanctifying the sensation.

From here we can understand why truthfulness is 'inner' without making the self the source of truth: 'inner' identifies where truthfulness is realised, not where truth originates. A person is not truthful merely because he has obeyed his feeling, but when he understands the truth that has become clear to him, accepts it, directs his intention towards it, and embodies it in action. Fitra remains a general compass, needing the clarification of revelation, the discernment of the intellect, and tazkiya

— not a detailed proof that removes the need for evidence and specialist expertise.

In the light of the covenant of fitra, this mutual accord may be read as an inward dimension of truthful fidelity to the pledge. The Qur'an connects truthfulness with fidelity in the words: 'They were true to what they pledged to God' (Q 33:23). The law explains one aspect of uprightness and becoming; it does not reduce them to itself. As for ṣiddīqiyya in the project's terminology, it is the graduated summit of firmly rooted mutual accord among the aspects of the self under truth and servanthood. It is not infallibility, not a name for the summit of becoming as a whole, and not a synonym for tranquillity.

The four dimensions: the aspects through which the single self acts

The four dimensions are a functional model that reads the presence of the single human self in its worldly origination through interwoven aspects: the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit. These are avenues of analysis, not parts, not entities, and not adjacent substances; nor are they identical in their mode of existence.

The bodily dimension is the body itself, regarded within this model from the standpoint of a person's embodied presence, his sensory receptivity, and his action in the world. The body is a rank of the person, not an alien covering or an adversary of the spirit; it has needs and rights that are safeguarded under moderation and servanthood.

The ordering of the bodily dimension therefore lies neither in neglecting it nor in giving its appetites free rein, but in ordering bodily needs in accordance with truth and within the practical scope available. It is not a 'servant' of some other entity dwelling within it; it is the field of the embodied self's action and of its worship in this world.

The heart is the self considered from the standpoint of its inward and evaluative perception, its assent and refusal, its love and aversion, its faith, its intention, its orientation, and its tranquillity. It is not the sum of the emotions, nor an independent measure of truth: its contraction or its inclination may need review by the intellect, by revelation, and by reality, just as it may be affected by illness and by injury.

The intellect is the self considered from the standpoint of its reasoning, understanding, discernment, judgement, review, and linking of means to ends. It is not the brain or intelligence, and not every act of reasoning is wisdom: a person may use his intelligence in self-justification, whereas the intellect is sound when it seeks demonstration and submits to truth.

In the terminology of this model, the spirit is the human self itself considered from the standpoint of its spiritual station, the irreducibility of its reality to matter, and its openness to truth, perfection, and the purpose of servanthood. This is a functional, non-exclusive usage; the spirit, heart, intellect, and bodily dimension are overlapping aspects of the action of the single self, not independent entities and not aspects identical in their mode of existence.[8]

These aspects are interwoven within a single self, and they do not revolve as circles around a geometric centre. Harmony among them is the ordering of their functions and their cooperation under the authority of truth, the requirements of fitra, and the purpose of servanthood — not their equality or the absence of all tension.

Here the law parts company with a rigid reading of the hierarchy of needs: a person does not ascend from a ‘lower part’ to a ‘higher part’; he orders his needs and his functions at one and

8 Sūrat al-Ḥijr, verse 29; the same wording also occurs in Sūrat Ṣād, verse 72.

the same time, with priorities differing according to truth, circumstance, and practical scope.

God Almighty says: 'God is the protector of those who believe; he brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light' (Q 2:257). Guidance does not merely add information; it redirects knowledge, heart, intention, and action, so that the self is ordered within truth without the multiplicity of its functions being abolished.

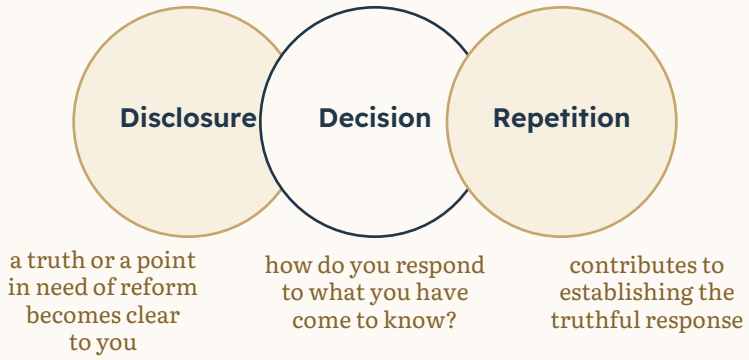
A person is not made complete by the domination of one function over the others, nor by mere psychological consistency — for he may be consistent around falsehood. He grows when the aspects of his self cooperate under truth, and when his knowledge, his faith, his intention, and his action become embodied truthfulness.

How truthfulness takes root: disclosure, decision, repetition

The movement of truthfulness becomes easier to grasp when we distinguish three interwoven movements: disclosure, then decision, then repetition. Disclosure here means that a truth or a point in need of reform becomes clear to you, not merely that you feel distress. A verse, a word of counsel, a blessing, or an experience in ease or hardship may alert you; but noticing a problem is not the same as understanding it. You need clarification and indications to know what has actually been established, and you do not have to know the cause of every pain in order to correct an error that has become clear to you.

Then comes decision: how do you respond to what you have come to know? You may accept it and begin the work of reform, or protect your self-image by resorting to justification; you may also need knowledge or help before you are able to act. A gap caused by the slow establishment of a new habit, a real constraint such as illness or coercion, and a violation one has

knowingly adopted and shields with excuses are not equivalent. Self-accounting is therefore proportionate to knowledge and practical scope, not merely to the distance between what you wish for and what you do.



How truthfulness takes root: three interwoven movements

Repetition then contributes to establishing the truthful response, together with knowledge, intention, a supportive environment, and God's aid. Action arises from a shakila that has taken shape and, in turn, helps to shape it. Your orientation may change through truthful repentance before your habit changes. Someone accustomed to answering too quickly may begin to listen while still finding it difficult to restrain his anger. This is a path of gradual change, not in itself evidence that his return is untruthful.

These movements are not a machine that works on its own. Pain does not guarantee disclosure; disclosure does not guarantee response; and repetition alone does not guarantee that virtue will take root. The law explains, rather, how a person participates in remaining faithful to what has become clear to him, seeking the help of God and of the means available to him.

The Integrative Needs Model: reading needs within the Islamic vision

Maslow's needs are usually presented in steps beginning with bodily needs and safety, then belonging and esteem, and arriving at self-actualisation. This picture draws attention to the multiplicity of needs, but it becomes too narrow when it is understood as a strict ordering that forbids the seeking of meaning or the making of sacrifice before the lower satisfactions are complete.

The Integrative Needs Model reads human needs as real, overlapping fields whose priorities vary with circumstance. It weighs their pursuit against fitra and orders them, when they conflict, in the light of purpose and servanthood. The Law of Inner Truthfulness asks a different question: how do the aspects of the self come into accord as they respond to these needs — what does the intellect understand, what does the heart accept, towards what does the spirit turn, and what does the body embody?

We therefore do not ask only which need comes first, but: what is the truth in this circumstance? What is the priority? And is the need met through lawful means and to an extent that does not enslave the self? A person may satisfy a need and yet wrong himself or others, and he may be deprived of it and still be answerable for what remains within his practical scope.

1 The body is a trust and a rank of the person

In Maslow's pyramid, bodily needs come at the base. In the Islamic vision the body is not a lower step to be got rid of, nor an outward vessel for a separate spirit; it is a rank of the person and the field of his presence and of the self's action. Its nourishment, its sleep, its health, and its movement are safeguarded in accordance with truth and within the practical scope available.

The Qur'an rejected the forbidding of good things in the name of religiosity: 'Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of God…' (Q 7:32), and governed their enjoyment with God's words: 'Eat and drink, and do not be excessive' (Q 7:31). The body is preserved and not despised; its powers are refined and not disabled.

Truthfulness with the body is to give it its due, to seek treatment when needed, and to use it in work and in worship, without making pleasure, appearance, or strength a higher point of reference. It is neither an adversary of the spirit nor a foreign instrument serving it; it is the human being himself in his embodied rank.

2 Safety is tranquillity, not walls

In the Western model, safety comes after bodily needs and is often understood as outward stability: financial, medical, occupational, or social security. All of these are important, and Islam does not make light of them. But in the Law of Inner Truthfulness safety is not completed from the outside alone: a person may be surrounded by means of protection while his heart remains afraid, or circumstances may close in around him while he finds within himself a tranquillity the causes do not explain.

Outward safety is a genuine good and a real condition of agency, even though the heart does not take the causes as its final point of reference. In the stance of Moses (peace be upon him) — 'No indeed. My Lord is with me; he will guide me' (Q 26:62) — the perception of danger was joined with trust in God and with action, not with a denial of reality or a dispensing with means.

Truthfulness in seeking safety therefore joins the provision of real means with reliance upon God. As the tradition says: 'Tie it, and trust in God.' Reliance does not justify abandoning

protection, just as it does not make the rope an independent source of safety. A person makes what effort he can, depends with his heart upon God, and revises his plan if reality changes. [9]

A person works, saves, plans, and takes precautions, and then entrusts what lies beyond his practical scope to God. Tranquillity is not equivalent to control over the future, just as submission does not abolish planning or the remedying of a fault; it prevents the means from becoming the heart's final reference.

Material safety may coexist with anxiety or depression for multiple bodily, psychological, and social reasons, and it is not right to attribute this automatically to a lack of certainty. Faith may give meaning and help, but it does not prevent disorder and does not remove the need for specialist treatment.

3 Belonging is a purpose, not the filling of a lack

Maslow regards belonging as a social need arising from a person's desire for love, acceptance, and relationship, and this captures a real aspect of human life. The Islamic vision, however, places belonging within a wider reference: servanthood before God, purpose, truth, and mercy and rights within the community. It does not make other people merely those who fill an individual's lack, and it does not make belonging a final end.

God Almighty says: 'The believers are but brothers' (Q 49:10). Brotherhood here is not merely a social affection but a bond resting upon faith, meaning, and responsibility. And God Almighty says: 'that you may come to know one another; the most honoured of you before God is the most God-conscious of

9 Reported by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmiʿ*, Book of the Description of the Resurrection, Heart-Softening Reports and Scrupulousness, no. 2517. Its meaning — joining the taking up of means to trust in God — is widely attested in the reports of the Prophet's household (peace be upon them).

you' (Q 49:13). Belonging is not built upon boasting, nor upon partisanship, nor upon a need for applause, but upon mutual acquaintance and God-consciousness.

A person is therefore not truthful in his belonging if he makes other people a mirror in which he searches for his worth, or a refuge into which he flees from his own emptiness. He is truthful when he sees his relationships as a field for tazkiya, a space for service, and a bridge to God. People are not sought merely to make up for what a person lacks, but to share with him the bearing of the trust, to remind him of truth, and so that he may be a help to them as they are a help to him.

Whoever lives out this sense of belonging is freed from the anxious need for acceptance. He loves people but does not dissolve into them. He serves them but does not derive his worth from them. He belongs to them, but does not forget that his first belonging is to God, and that every relationship which does not bring him nearer to truth stands in need of review.

4 Esteem is an innate dignity, not outward recognition

In Maslow's pyramid, esteem comes from a person's sense of his own worth and from the recognition of others. There is no doubt that a person is affected by people's respect, is hurt by contempt, and is gladdened by the acknowledgement of his effort. But the flaw begins when a person's worth becomes hostage to what people see in him, or to what they applaud, or to the standing they grant him.

In the Islamic vision, by contrast, the principle is that a person's dignity precedes his achievement. God Almighty says: 'We have certainly honoured the children of Adam' (Q 17:70). He did not say: we have honoured the successful, or the strong, or those of high standing; he honoured the children of Adam. Dignity here is a root in the human being, not a prize obtained after excelling. Hence truthfulness with oneself is that a person

should keep this dignity in view rather than beg for it in the eyes of others.

This meaning is needed by people today more than at any time before. Many have come to measure themselves by numbers of followers, numbers of likes, degrees of visibility, and what is said about them in a space that never settles. The more a person takes his worth from outside, the more his disturbance grows, because the outside is changeable and never stable. But whoever knows that his dignity is from God is only made more thankful by people's praise, and is not diminished by their blame if he is truthful with his Lord and his fitra.

This does not mean that a person should be indifferent to people's respect or make light of his standing among them, but that he should place it where it belongs. Outward esteem is a blessing when it bears witness to a good, but it turns into a fetter when it becomes the source of worth. The difference between the two is that a believer works in order to be truthful, not in order to be seen, and seeks acceptance with God before he seeks recognition from people.

5 Self-actualisation is a fruit, not a summit

Maslow places self-actualisation at the summit of the pyramid, in the sense of developing and expressing one's potential. The Islamic vision distinguishes what remains a receptivity or resource that widens action from what has become knowledge, skill, or settled will within the self. Tazkiya-Oriented Aspiration develops powers, competences, and achievements and extends one's impact within the purpose of servanthood and trust, so that capacity does not become a final end or, in itself, a sign of nearness.

The self is not actualised when it is severed from God, when the ego triumphs for its own sake, or when a person accumulates achievements until he feels complete. It is realised when it

knows its purpose, places its gifts where they belong, and lives in the light of servanthood. God Almighty says: 'I did not create jinn and humankind except to worship me' (Q 51:56). Servanthood here is not the opposite of the self; it is the road by which the self comes to know its reality, for a person does not find himself by separating from God, but by belonging to him truthfully.

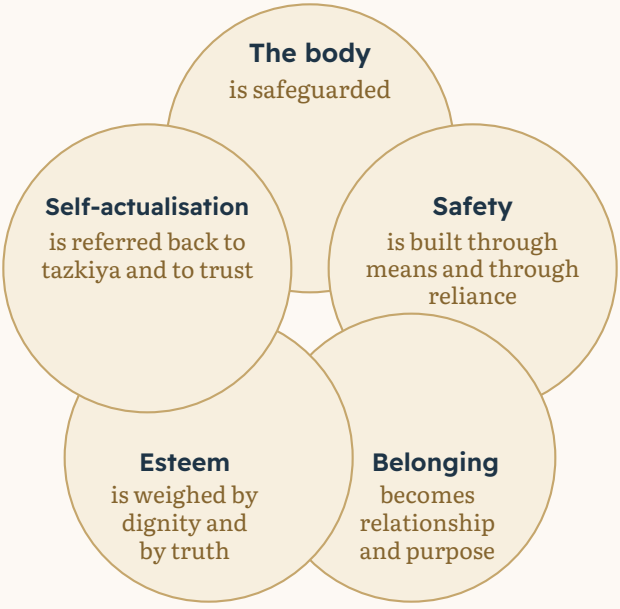
A report attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) states: 'Servanthood is a jewel whose inner reality is lordship.' What is meant is not a divine lordship belonging to the servant, nor indwelling, nor union, but that the perfection of servanthood frees a person from enslavement to anything other than God, and that knowledge, justice, mercy, and strength of self appear in him in a manner befitting a creature.[10]

Self-actualisation in the Law of Inner Truthfulness is therefore not a project of display or a competition to excel, but a trust to be discharged. You work, learn, achieve, and create — not to inflate your image of yourself, but to draw nearer to the purpose for which you were created. God Almighty says: 'You are labouring towards your Lord with great labour, and you shall meet him' (Q 84:6). The human being is in perpetual labouring, but the value of this labouring lies not in the amount of movement, but in its orientation.

Self-actualisation thereby becomes a possible fruit of tazkiya, not a substitute for it. The single self safeguards its body, purifies and cultivates its heart, guides its intellect, and opens towards its purpose through the aspect of its spirit. These aspects fall into order under fitra and truth, so that perfection

10 *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharīʿa*, Chapter One Hundred, on the reality of servanthood (attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him). The passage continues: 'Whatever is lost from servanthood is found in lordship, and whatever is hidden from lordship is attained in servanthood'. The attribution of the book has been the subject of well-known debate among scholars; Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs regarded it favourably in *Amān al-Akhṭār*.

appears together with a truthful response and non-spatial nearness to God.



The five needs, transformed from a rigid ladder into interwoven fields

The five needs are thereby transformed from a rigid ladder into interwoven fields: the body is safeguarded; safety is built through means and through reliance; belonging becomes relationship and purpose; esteem is weighed by dignity and by truth; and self-actualisation is referred back to tazkiya and to trust.

One who lives inner truthfulness is not guaranteed permanent emotional steadiness, but becomes more able to review himself and return to truth. Difficult circumstances or a disorder requiring treatment may remain with him. Tranquillity is the gradual settling of one's orientation in God, not the

completeness of circumstances or the absence of pain: 'Truly, in the remembrance of God hearts find tranquillity' (Q 13:28).

Fifth: living examples — truthfulness when the guarantees are absent

If the common presentation of Maslow's hierarchy makes the satisfaction of lower needs an almost necessary condition for moving towards meaning, human experience offers documented examples of steadfastness in purpose despite severe deprivation of certain needs. This neither glorifies deprivation nor denies the effect of safety, food, and relationships; it prevents their ordering from becoming a rigid law.

Two examples are enough to make the meaning clear without judging people's inner states or ranks: the stance of Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) after Karbala, and certain stances of the early Muslims under hardship. Both show that meaning may be present alongside pain — not that pain produces nearness or that human needs have no claim to be met.

- Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) in the assembly of Ibn Ziyad: after Karbala, she stood bearing the pain of loss and the injustice of captivity, and answered his provocation by saying: 'I saw nothing but beauty.' We need neither deny her grief nor judge from a single episode a rank we cannot encompass; it is enough for us to see in her stance a model of truthfulness, of faith, and of a steadfast orientation towards God alongside the human pain that remained.[11]
- In the lives of the early Muslims there are documented examples of steadfastness under siege, poverty, and harm: Bilal, the family of Yasir, and Musʿab ibn ʿUmayr held firm to the truth that had become clear to them. We do not infer the

11 *al-Luhūf ʿalā Qatlā al-Ṭufūf*, Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664 AH), Dar al-Uswa edition, p. 201; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, al-ʿAllāma al-Majlisī, vol. 45, pp. 115–116.

degree of their tranquillity or nearness from an outward stance, nor make deprivation something to be sought. We see, rather, that responding to truth does not await the complete satisfaction of every need.

- In our own time too, individuals and groups may hold firm under severe pressure, while others may break down or need protection, treatment, and support. We neither generalise about peoples nor judge the inner states of those who suffer. The lesson is that needs are real and influential, but they do not exhaust the meaning of the human being or make the path of response inevitable.

These examples disclose that wellbeing and the satisfaction of needs are not equivalent to spiritual greatness. Deprivation may become an occasion of patience, truthfulness, and growth if a person responds to it with truth; but it is not automatically a gateway to tranquillity, and a person does not seek pain or neglect the means of relieving it.

Sixth: a methodological comparison

Having presented Maslow's hierarchy, we first compare it with the Integrative Needs Model: the former arranges needs in a sequence of priority; the latter reads them as overlapping fields whose priorities vary with circumstance and are ordered, when they conflict, in the light of purpose and servanthood. This is a comparison of the structure of needs, not a definition of the Law of Inner Truthfulness.

The Law of Inner Truthfulness then asks about the self's response to these needs: does the intellect understand truth, does the heart accept it, does the spirit turn towards God, and does the body embody this in speech and action? The law reads the mutual accord of the aspects of the self, while the model reads the fields of need and their priorities.

Point of comparison	Maslow's Hierarchy	The Integrative Needs Model in the Islamic Vision
Philosophical starting point	Satisfying needs from lower to higher	Real, overlapping needs read within fitra, purpose, and servanthood
Structural model	An ascending pyramid from the body to self-actualisation	A functional model of the needs of one embodied self, not a rigid ladder
Concept of self-actualisation	The summit of growth through independence, distinction, and creativity	Developing potential and capacities within tazkiya-oriented aspiration, not an independent end
Priority of needs	Needs arranged in ascending levels, beginning with bodily needs	Priorities vary with circumstance and, when they conflict, are ordered by truth and practical scope
Place of the spirit	Absent from the model	Spiritual need is present through the self's openness to God and purpose
Relation to others	Belonging as a way of meeting the need for acceptance and support	A need, a good, and a field of rights, tazkiya, and responsibility
Esteem	A need met by external recognition	A lawful need sought without reducing dignity to people's recognition
Source of worth	Achievement, recognition, and superiority	Bestowed dignity, with needs met in due measure within servanthood
Worldview	No clear purpose of existence	The human being labours towards God, and needs are ordered within purpose and trust

It becomes clear, then, that needs are real, overlapping goods that are not to be neglected, and that a person is not required to wait for all of them to be fully met before responding to the truth that has become clear to him. The question of purpose and the source of value in the Islamic vision differs from the question of developing potential alone: the pursuit of needs and capacities is ordered within servanthood and trust.

Why is Maslow's pyramid not enough for a Muslim?

Maslow's pyramid may help you to understand one aspect of human behaviour: why a hungry person seeks food before many other demands, why a person needs safety, and why he searches for love and esteem. These are useful observations within their limits, and there is no need to deny them.

But it is not enough to serve as a final reference for understanding the human being, because it explains him from within his needs, whereas the Islamic vision explains him from within his fitra, his servanthood, and the purpose of his existence. It describes how a person moves among some of his desires, but it does not ask the prior question: why was the human being created? Where is he going? And what makes his life meaningful even when his needs are straitened and his circumstances incomplete?

A Muslim therefore reads this model fairly, neither with fascination nor with outright rejection. He takes from it what helps him understand certain behaviour, but does not make it the final measure for building the human being. Maslow's hierarchy is a partial map, useful in its place; the building of the human being, however, does not rest on a map of needs alone, but on a wider vision that brings together fitra, servanthood, purpose, and the journey to God.

Conclusion: when the self undergoes tazkiya within the network of life

A Muslim may benefit from Maslow by naming some needs and noticing the effects of their deprivation, but he places this within the Integrative Needs Model, not within a rigid pyramid. He then uses the Law of Inner Truthfulness to examine how his self responds to those needs under truth and fitra.

The Integrative Needs Model clarifies the overlapping domains and what takes priority when they conflict, while the Law of Inner Truthfulness clarifies the degree to which intellect, heart, spirit, and bodily dimension come into accord in seeking them. In this way the function of the model is not confused with the function of the law.

This does not mean that bodily needs have less dignity, that the spirit is a separate entity, or that every desire is an expression of fitra. The body is preserved as a trust; needs are weighed by truth; environment, actual capacity, and practical scope are taken into account; and then the effects of the response upon the self and upon others are considered.

A Muslim therefore reads the model fairly: he accepts what explains some behaviour within its proper field, rejects determinism and rigid ordering, and places needs within a wider purpose. He then returns to the Law of Inner Truthfulness, making the accord of the self's aspects — not mere satisfaction — the criterion of work through tazkiya.

A practical review: where am I true to what I have come to know?

Choose one situation, not your whole life. What truth has become clear to you, and on what evidence or indication? What has your intellect understood, what has your heart accepted, towards what purpose does your spirit turn, and what does your body embody in speech and action? If a gap appears, ask:

do you need learning, help, or a change in some condition, or do you need to relinquish a justification you have come to recognise?

Choose a feasible response: apologise, restore what is due, correct a piece of information, or seek help. Then repeat the truthful action and review what has changed in practice and what obstacles remain. Do not make your calmness alone the sign of a successful review. The aim is to be truthful in your response to truth within your practical scope, not to scrutinise every passing thought or continually condemn yourself.

There remains after this a question no less weighty: if a person knows who he is, what is the power that moves him? Where does his motivation come from? Does he make his reality by his thought alone, as some theories promise him, or must he strive, rely upon God, take up the means, and then return his heart to the one in whose hand all matters lie? To this question we turn in the next chapter.





CHAPTER TEN

The Law of Striving and Trust in God

A Reading beyond the Law of Attraction

Part One: The Law of Attraction between the Concept and the Scientific Debate

Entry: why discuss the law of attraction?

On the journey of knowing and purifying oneself, it is not enough for a person to reflect on the nature of his self; he also needs to examine consciously the ideas that have come to shape his view of himself and of his striving. Among the most prominent of these ideas in recent decades is what is known as 'the law of attraction', which has offered large numbers of people a promise of apparent simplicity: that a person can attract success, wealth, and happiness whenever he concentrates his thinking upon them and holds them within himself as though they had already come to pass.

So great has this law's presence become that many people now look at themselves and their futures through it without realising it. Some defer action while waiting for the right energy; some tie their worth to their capacity to manifest; and others fear anxiety itself, as though it alone could spoil their dreams. When an idea reaches such a scale, it is no longer reasonable to accept it as it stands, nor to reject it without understanding it. It must first be presented as its own proponents present it, and then weighed in the balance of both knowledge and faith.

But the deeper question is not: is positive thinking useful? That question has its place. The question is rather: from where does a person draw his hope, what are the limits of a thought's effect, and who owns the outcome? We shall therefore present the law of attraction fairly, and then consider what supports it and what is criticised in it, before moving on to the Law of Striving and Trust in God as this book formulates it in the light of revelation and fitra.

The aim of this chapter is not to teach the law of attraction, but to free the useful observation within it from the claim mixed into it, and then to build the Law of Striving and Trust in God from its Islamic foundations. Presentation and critique are therefore given only so far as they serve this aim, and the law does not emerge as a derivative of the model with which it is compared.

The reality of the law of attraction and its mechanisms

The law of attraction is presented as one of the pillars of the philosophy of positive thinking, and its essence is that a person draws into his life the events, opportunities, and outcomes upon which his mind is focused. Thought, as its literature says, is an energy that affects reality; and the clearer the mental image and the stronger the feeling of its fulfilment, the greater

the likelihood of its appearing outwardly. Hence this law encourages a person to imagine his goals deeply, to live in the feeling of success before it occurs, and to keep away from doubt and anxiety because, in this conception, they scatter the energy and delay the manifestation.

Activating this law, as its proponents present it, rests upon three successive steps. The first begins with clarity of desire: that a person should formulate his goal precisely, positively, and in detail, because a scattered desire, according to this conception, sends out disordered signals that hinder the outcome. Here a distinction must be drawn from the outset between two things. Defining a goal is a useful psychological and managerial instrument, because it focuses attention, helps in making decisions, and increases the likelihood of practical movement towards what is intended.[1] But regarding it as an energetic signal that summons circumstances from a cosmic field is a different claim altogether, for which it is not enough that goal-setting should be psychologically useful.

Then comes the second step, mental visualisation: that a person should call to mind a detailed scene of success and repeat it in his awareness until it is as though he were living it. This rests upon the assumption that the brain does not entirely distinguish between an experience that occurs and an experience that is imagined, and that imagining can redirect mind and behaviour as though the goal had been achieved. There is something sound in this when we speak of mental rehearsal or of preparing oneself for performance: some research in cognitive neuroscience has shown that mental training may activate neural pathways associated with

1 On the psychological and managerial effect of precise goal-setting, see E. A. Locke and G. P. Latham, "Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goal Setting and Task Motivation: A 35-Year Odyssey," *American Psychologist* 57, no. 9 (2002): 705–717.

performance[2], and it is therefore drawn upon in certain fields of training, among them athletic performance. But moving from improving performance in such fields to saying that imagination attracts money, or a job, or a relationship, or an external outcome, is a move that the mere effect of visualisation upon the self does not establish. Between preparing the mind and shaping reality there is a distance that imagination alone does not cross.

The third step is emotional charging. In this conception a person is not content to think about his goal; he is asked to live the feeling of its fulfilment as though it were an established fact. Positive feelings are treated here as a magnet drawing events in, while negative feelings — fear, anxiety, doubt — are seen as confusing signals that obstruct manifestation. And here the gravest flaw appears: that feeling should be transformed from an inner factor that helps towards action, which is understandable, into an independent power that makes outward reality without effort, planning, or any grasp of God's established patterns.

These three steps disclose a logic that appears coherent on its surface: a clear desire, then a present mental image, then a strong feeling of fulfilment. We do not deny that this course may produce an effect within a person's inner life, increasing motivation, strengthening confidence, and opening one's eyes to certain opportunities. But the fundamental question remains as it was: is this inner state enough to change outward reality? And do thoughts and feelings pass beyond the limits of their psychological effect to a cosmic authority that makes events independently of work, of established patterns, and of circumstances? At this point begins the necessary distinction between

2 J. E. Driskell, C. Copper, and A. Moran, "Does Mental Practice Enhance Performance?" *Journal of Applied Psychology* 79, no. 4 (1994): 481–492; and J. Decety, "The Neurophysiological Basis of Motor Imagery," *Behavioural Brain Research* 77, nos. 1–2 (1996): 45–52.

what experience supports and what remains a promise resting on insufficient grounds.

A necessary distinction: four levels, not one

Before beginning our critique, a distinction must be drawn that is absent from much of the current discussion. The name 'the law of attraction' usually gathers together different matters that do not belong to the same level. If these levels are confused, judgement upon the law becomes disordered: it may be accepted in its entirety because it contains some psychological truths, or rejected in its entirety because part of it rests upon a metaphysical claim that cannot be established. Fairness requires that we distinguish between them, so that we neither reject what is sound because of what has been mixed with it, nor accept an illusion because it arrived in the company of some psychological truths.

The first level is the law of attraction in its metaphysical sense: the claim that the universe responds to the vibrations of thought, and that the inner energy a person sends out returns to him in the form of events, opportunities, and outcomes. This is the point that requires demonstration, because it does not merely speak of a thought's effect upon the self and upon behaviour; it speaks of an alleged cosmic law governing a person's relation to reality.

The second level is positive thinking as psychology studies it: the effect of optimism, of positive feelings, and of a person's way of interpreting events upon his psychological health, his resilience, and his ability to cope with pressure.[3] This has its evidence, and it is not right to dismiss it merely because some of

3 C. S. Carver, M. F. Scheier, and S. C. Segerstrom, "Optimism," *Clinical Psychology Review* 30, no. 7 (2010): 879–889.

the attraction literature expanded it until it went beyond its limits.

The third level is the commercial literature that became famous in widely circulated books and programmes, such as The Secret and certain books on success and motivation, among them work associated with the name of Jack Canfield.[4] This literature has often exaggerated its promises, until success came to seem a matter of following a quick recipe, and in many places it has been nearer to marketing than to science.

There remains the fourth level: motivational psychology and the study of motivation, where goals, perseverance, planning, and the interpretation of failure and success are studied through methods more closely grounded in testing and measurement. This is a different field from the claim that the universe responds to desires, or that feeling alone is enough to summon an outcome.

The critique, then, is not directed at optimism, or clarity of goal, or the effect of visualisation upon behaviour, but at the claim that thought is a cosmic power summoning outcomes, and at the exaggeration that suggests feelings alone make destiny. When we distinguish the levels, we take what has been established within its own field and leave what has not, and then move on to building striving and trust in God within an independent framework grounded in the Islamic vision.

What science supports — and where it stops

Psychological research does not deny that optimism may have an effect upon a person: studies have linked a positive outlook with certain indicators of health, adaptation, and recovery. Research on the growth mindset likewise suggests that the

4 R. Byrne, *The Secret* (New York: Atria Books, 2006); and J. Canfield and J. Switzer, *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

belief that certain abilities can grow may help a person see challenges as opportunities for learning rather than as verdicts upon his worth.[5] The broaden-and-build theory, meanwhile, holds that some positive emotions may widen attention and support initiative and creativity.[6] These are probabilistic findings within their own fields, not laws that guarantee health or success.

But these findings, important as they are, stop at a clear limit: optimism prepares the inner life for action, but it does not change outward reality automatically. Positive feelings may reduce anxiety, improve one's way of thinking, and increase the capacity to persevere; but they do not remove the need for a plan, for skill, for work, or for an understanding of the circumstances and the established patterns within which life moves. Optimism here is a helpful condition, not a sufficient one: it prepares the self for striving, but it does not remove the need for striving itself.

We may therefore say that what is sound in some of the law-of-attraction literature is sound when it is read as a psychological effect upon motivation and behaviour, not as a cosmic law responding to the vibrations of thought. Clarity of goal is useful because it directs attention; mental visualisation may help in preparation; and optimism gives a person a greater capacity to try again after failure. But that these meanings should turn into a promise that reality will respond to mere desire and feeling is a move that science does not establish.

5 C. S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006).

6 B. L. Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions," *American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (2001): 218–226; on the effect of positivity on perseverance, see A. Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016).

The difference here is subtle but decisive. An optimist may seem favoured by fortune, because he moves more, tries more, endures obstacles longer, and interprets failure in a way that does not break his will. But the secret is not that he drew the outcome from the universe; it is that he remained active when others stopped, and saw stumbling as part of the road rather than its end. This is an intelligible psychological and behavioural effect, not an unseen authority of thought over reality.

From here the parting of ways with the absolute picture of the law of attraction begins. Science helps us to understand the effect of optimism upon a person, but it does not grant thought an independent power to make events. And between preparing the self for striving and making the outcome by feeling alone there is a distance crossed only by work, by means, by God's established patterns, and by what he decrees thereafter.

The methodological criticisms

A number of researchers, from within psychology itself, have directed a fundamental critique at the law of attraction in its absolute form. The object of criticism was not hope in itself, nor optimism when it helps a person to strive, but their severance from work, from established patterns, and from the circumstances within which life moves. This criticism may be traced to three principal objections.

The first objection is that this conception may sever thinking from action. Wishing and visualising, if they are not joined to a plan, to effort, and to confronting obstacles, may give a person a premature sense of accomplishment, so that he settles before he moves and takes ease in an image that has not yet become reality. Oettingen's research has shown that merely imagining an outcome, without attending to the obstacles standing in the way, weakens actual commitment to

goals.[7] This does not mean that mental visualisation is false in itself; it means that it becomes deficient when it turns into a substitute for action.

The second objection is that the law of attraction, in its absolute form, disregards established patterns and circumstances. It is not realistic to tell the marginalised or the poor that success will come to them by thoughts alone, as though reality were not governed by causes, as though social and economic structures exerted no pressure within it, and as though people did not face disparities of opportunity and ability. Barbara Ehrenreich drew attention to the way absolute optimism may turn failure into an individual fault, burdening a person alone with what does not lie wholly within his power and overlooking what is outside his control.[8] Here optimism turns from a source of encouragement into a harsh verdict upon whoever has not reached the outcome.

The third objection is that excessively idealised visualisation creates unrealistic expectations. When a person lives the outcome in his imagination as though it were guaranteed and then collides with the first test, his psychological resilience may collapse more quickly than if he had entered the road knowing that striving requires patience and that obstacles are part of the way. An optimism that does not see difficulty does not build psychological robustness; it may weaken it in the face of the first disappointment.

Taken together, these objections do not overthrow the value of optimism, but they do overthrow the illusion that makes

7 G. Oettingen, *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation* (New York: Current/Penguin, 2014); and G. Oettingen and D. Mayer, "The Motivating Function of Thinking about the Future: Expectations versus Fantasies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 5 (2002): 1198–1212.

8 B. Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

thought alone the maker of destiny. The absolute version of the law of attraction may weaken motivation, confuse the understanding of responsibility, and distance a person from a mature engagement with reality and its patterns. Even so, positive thinking may, when placed in a wider context and weighed against truth and reality, have a psychological effect that helps some people towards striving — but it is no substitute for effort, for planning, or for skill.

What is missing from this conception?

When we gather these criticisms, it becomes clear that the flaw lies not in a person thinking positively, nor in his drawing upon hope to go forward; that is commendable when kept in its proper place. The flaw lies in the foundation on which the conception rests: from where does a person draw his optimism? And who, in the end, owns the outcome? When the law of attraction makes a person the centre of movement, the universe a party responding to his vibrations, and thought a power that makes destiny, it moves him from the station of striving into the illusion of control, burdens him with what he cannot bear, and then makes his tranquillity contingent upon the fulfilment of what he wanted.

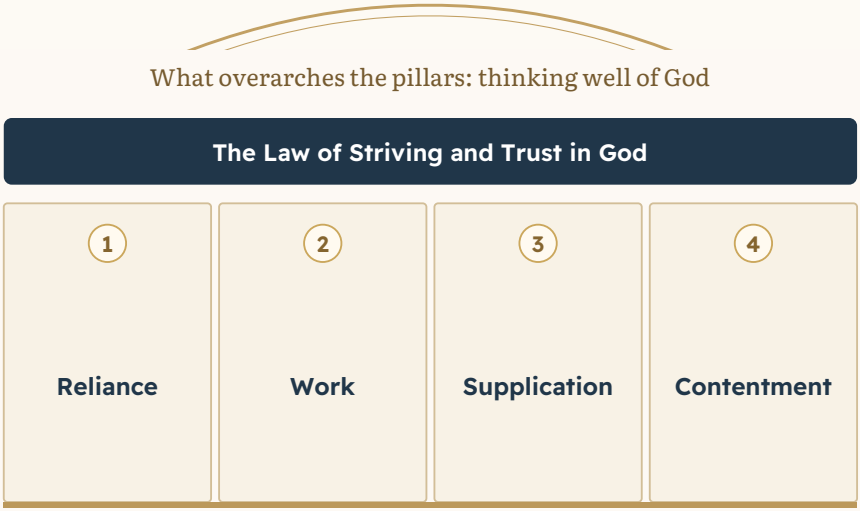
The question is therefore no longer one of psychological means alone, but a question of existence: is the human being a lord over himself and his universe, controlling outcomes through what he sends out as thoughts and feelings, or a servant who strives, takes up causes, and then trusts in a wise Governor? At this point the alternative begins — not as an adjustment to a way of thinking, but as a restoration of the human being's proper place, the source of his strength, and the Owner of the outcome.

Part Two: The Law of Striving and Trust in God — an Integrated Islamic Vision

The Law of Striving and Trust in God is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that a person's becoming unfolds more truthfully when he exerts himself to the full extent of his practical scope towards a lawful end and through lawful means, and takes up causes in accordance with God's established patterns, while his heart relies upon God for the root of his ability, the efficacy of the cause, and the final outcome; he then reviews what lay within his responsibility, accepts with contentment what lay beyond his capacity, and renews his striving.

The law therefore takes the form of a practical cycle: a lawful intention and end; an assessment of practical scope and available causes; well-executed action; supplication and trust in God; review of what lay within responsibility; contentment with what lay beyond capacity; and renewed striving. Contentment is not cessation, and review is not objection to God.

Striving thereby becomes a road of servanthood before it is a road to goals. Outward success is not sufficient testimony to purity of intention or to soundness of path: an unsound means may succeed, and truthful work may falter. Value lies rather in the lawfulness of the end and the means, in truthfulness of response, and in discharging what falls within one's practical scope.



The four pillars of the Law of Striving and Trust in God, and what overarches them

The first pillar — reliance: freedom from attachment, not from work

Reliance is not a vague emotional state, nor a substitute for planning and taking up means. It is a stance that returns the heart to God and frees a person from the illusion of controlling what he does not own. It does not stand opposed to striving; it gives striving its balance, because a believer plans, exerts himself, and does what he is able to do, yet does not attach his heart to an outcome he knows is not in his hand. Hence the command to rely is joined with faith: 'And upon God rely, if you are believers' (Q 5:23). Here reliance parts from the law of attraction: there, a person is asked to regulate his thoughts so as to control what will happen; here, he is asked to strive well and then refer the outcome to God, so that his heart is freed from attachment to it without his work coming to a halt.

The difference between the two lies not in the quantity of psychological strength but in its orientation and its reference. In the law of attraction the self is occupied with trying to regulate the

future, and may be anxious at every negative thought it supposes will spoil what it awaits. In reliance, a person's attention and effort turn towards doing well what he is able to do, and he entrusts what he does not own to the one who owns it. The heart is thus not exhausted in monitoring feelings and fearing their supposed effect; it is freed for truthful striving.

Reliance in Islam was therefore never a call to idleness. The farmer ploughs and sows, and then relies upon God for rain. The physician does his work well, and then knows that healing is in God's hand. The one seeking his provision takes up every lawful means, and then takes ease in the knowledge that the decree is not his. Reliance frees a person from the illusion of controlling the outcome, not from the duty of taking up the means.

The Prophet (may God bless him and his family) summed up this meaning when he said: 'If you were to rely upon God as he should be relied upon, he would provide for you as he provides for the birds, which go out hungry in the morning and return full in the evening.'[9] The birds go out and return, and yet their striving is not independent of God's provision. And God's words 'whoever relies upon God — he is sufficient for him' (Q 65:3) establish the sufficiency of the reference and of the help, not a guarantee of every desire in the form the servant wants. A report states: 'The root of the heart's strength is reliance upon God'[10] — that is, the heart's referring itself to God helps it towards constancy, without preventing all anxiety or disturbance.

The fruit of reliance is that it frees the heart from worshipping the outcome and from the illusion of control, so that a person can continue striving after stumbling. But it does not guarantee permanent emotional tranquillity, and it does not permit

9 *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Book of Asceticism, no. 2344, from ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb; al-Tirmidhī graded it 'good and sound'. It is also reported by Ibn Māja, no. 4164, and Aḥmad in the *Musnad*, no. 205.

10 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Tamīmī al-Āmidī, p. 197; and *Mīzān al-Ḥikma*, al-Rayshahrī, vol. 10, no. 22248.

us to interpret every delay as a particular kindness or every withholding as a mercy whose nature we understand. We trust in God's wisdom and his mercy, review the means, and do what we are able to do.

The second pillar — work: walking upon the earth with the intention of heaven

Work in Islam is not merely a means to ambition. It may become an embodiment of servanthood and worship in the broad sense when intention, end, and means are sound and rights are preserved. It is also one field of the trust of vicegerency; yet a good intention does not make unlawful or unjust work sound, nor does it make every activity a juristic ritual.

Against the promise that tells a person he attracts what he deserves, Islam teaches us that what counts with God is what a person truthfully strives for. God Almighty says: 'The human being shall have nothing but what he strives for, and his striving will surely be seen' (Q 53:39–40). Intention alone is not sufficient if it does not become work, and supplication is not truthful in a person's life if it remains severed from action. Hence the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) said to the man who asked him about his camel: 'Tie it, and trust in God.' Reliance does not mean abandoning the means, nor turning trust in God into an excuse for sitting back; it means that a person takes up what he is able to, and then goes forward knowing that the blessing of his striving and its outcome are in God's hand.

Striving upon the earth is a response to the trust, not merely a road to outward elevation. Success in this law is read from the standpoint of the truthfulness and lawfulness of the work and of the perfection that has been realised in the self — not from the outcome alone. An intellect that plans, a heart that is sincere, work that is well executed, and a reliance that refers the matter to God may all come together, and then the outcome

may come otherwise than was wanted; and this does not annul the value of the striving.

God Almighty says: 'We have made what is upon the earth an adornment for it, that we may test which of them is best in deed' (Q 18:7). The measure is the excellence of the deed, not the power of imagination. A person does not 'build up' an automatic entitlement to the fruit; he discharges his responsibility, hopes for God's favour and acceptance, and knows that recompense and outcomes are not a debt owed by God.

In this lies the answer to the phrase 'you attract what you deserve'. A believer does not await an outcome made by desire; he strives and worships God through his work, and seeks reward and favour without making his work a transaction that guarantees him a particular worldly result. The value of an act may be preserved with God even when its effect is delayed or outwardly absent.

The third pillar — supplication: drawing strength from above

Supplication in Islam is not merely a material request; it is a truthful turning towards God and an acknowledgement that all power is in his hand. It is not an address to the universe, nor an attempt to programme reality by the mind, but an intimate conversation with the Creator by which faith is renewed and the heart remains alive in its need of its Lord. Hence the Qur'an ties the servant's worth to his supplication: 'Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your supplication' (Q 25:77); and brings this meaning close to the heart through God's words: 'And when my servants ask you about me — I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls upon me' (Q 2:186). Supplication here is not a technique for controlling the future but a bond between a dependent servant and a Lord who is near.

Supplication does not abolish action; it restores it to its place. A believer supplicates and strives, and does not imagine that his striving alone is sufficient. If the answer is delayed, hope remains with him, without his claiming certainty about a particular form of response or interpreting a particular event without evidence. It is related from Fatima al-Zahra (peace be upon her): 'Whoever raises up to God his sincere worship, God, mighty and majestic, sends down to him what best serves his good' — that is, he asks, purifies his intention, and refers what is best to God; he does not impose his will upon the decree.[11]

Supplication therefore has an aspect of servanthood and an aspect of practice. It declares the servant's dependence upon God, and may lighten some anxiety and renew hope; but it does not guarantee a particular feeling or a particular outcome. And supplication is accompanied by striving: a person learns, plans, seeks help, and then entrusts what lies beyond his practical scope to God, without sitting back and without conceit.

In supplication a believer asks for what he hopes for, and then opens his heart to God's ordering without claiming that everything that occurs is a particular good whose nature he understands. The outcome may run contrary to his wish; he grieves, reviews what happened, and takes remedial action, while trusting that God is more knowing, wiser, and more merciful, and that it is his own knowledge that falls short of encompassing where things lead.

In God's words 'I am near' (Q 2:186) there is a non-spatial nearness: God hears his servant's call, encompasses him, and answers as he wills. This turns supplication from an address to a deaf power into servanthood and dependence — but it does not make nearness a guarantee that tension will disappear or that the request will be granted in the form requested.

11 *ʿUddat al-Dāʿī wa Najāḥ al-Sāʿī*, Ibn Fahd al-Ḥillī (d. 841 AH), p. 233; and cited from it in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, al-ʿAllāma al-Majlisī, vol. 67, p. 249.

The fourth pillar — contentment: stillness in the presence of wisdom

Contentment is the heart's stillness in God and the absence of resentment and objection towards him, together with trust in his justice, his wisdom, and his mercy. It does not mean justifying failure, or approving injustice, or abandoning whatever remains within one's practical scope by way of treatment and reform. Faith may guide the heart in affliction without changing its outward form or removing its pain.

God's words 'Say: Nothing will befall us except what God has decreed for us' (Q 9:51) return a believer to God's protection; they do not authorise us to assert that every pain is a particular gateway to elevation or a warding off of some greater trial. A supplication asks: 'O God, make me content with what you have apportioned for me…' Contentment is trust in God without any claim to know the particular wisdom; submission, meanwhile, appears in entrusting the matter to him after doing what lies within one's practical scope.[12]

The verse 'then they find within themselves no constraint concerning what you have decided, and submit in full submission' (Q 4:65) speaks of yielding to a true judgement once it has been established. Submission is not identical with contentment, though the two are close: it is the acceptance of God's command and adherence to what it requires, and its perfection lies in entrusting the outcome to him. It does not mean suspending enquiry before the truth has become clear, or surrendering to human injustice.

In a world that magnifies achievement, contentment frees the heart from making its worth contingent upon every outcome. A believer strives with what is available to him, and then trusts that what has happened did not fall outside God's

12 From his supplication (peace be upon him) on noble character and pleasing deeds, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya al-Kāmila*, Supplication Twenty.

knowledge, without ceasing to review and without claiming to have grasped the wisdom. Ambition thus remains a trust rather than an obsession, and a goal a means rather than an object of worship.

Contentment does not ask a believer to deny his pain or to display a tranquillity he does not feel. He may grieve, complain to God, and ask for help, while his heart remains without objection towards his Lord. The continuance of pain or the need for treatment is not a failure of contentment or of faith.

What overarches the pillars: positive thinking is thinking well of God, not programming the universe

The Islamic vision does not deny the effect of optimism, but it does not make 'positivity' a measure of truth. Thinking well of God is a hope built upon his mercy and his wisdom, impelling a person to repentance and to work; it does not mean that every optimistic thought is true or that the universe will bring it about. The divine saying declares: 'I am as my servant thinks of me…' Hope is placed in God, not in vibrations.[13]

Optimism in Islam is bound to looking towards the good that is possible, expecting relief, and calling blessings to mind — without a person denying his pain or ignoring his reality. It is a good opinion that moves the will, not a feeling that lulls it; fuel for intention, not a substitute for striving. A believer approaches life with an open spirit, because he knows the matter is in God's hand and that what befalls him does not fall outside God's knowledge and wisdom; but he does not make his

13 The first part is agreed upon: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7405, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2675; the addition 'so let him think of me as he wishes' appears in Aḥmad's *Musnad*, no. 16016, from Wāthila ibn al-Asqaʿ. The substance of thinking well of God is widely attested in the reports of the Prophet's household (peace be upon them).

psychological dignity hostage to the fulfilment of everything he hopes for.

Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) said: 'Accustom yourself to good intention and fine purpose, and you will attain success in what you seek.' Success here is understood in the context of good purpose and striving, not as a promise that every worldly aim will be realised. And God's words 'So their Lord answered them: I do not let the work of any worker among you go to waste' (Q 3:195) establish that work is preserved with God, not that its outward form is guaranteed.

Optimism differs according to its source and its content. One person may draw it from his experience, from the support of others, or from realistic probabilities, while a believer draws his highest hope from trust in God. It does not follow that every non-religious optimism must collapse, just as it does not follow that a believer must always remain calm; what faith adds is a point of reference that does not rest upon a guarantee that one's desires will be fulfilled, but upon God's wisdom and mercy and upon truthfulness of striving.

In this way the perspective of faith rebuilds the concepts: intention within servanthood; optimism within hope; work within trust; contentment within the receiving of one's outcome; and submission within yielding to truth and entrusting what lies beyond one's practical scope. These are not synonymous terms but distinct functions cooperating within the law.

A methodological comparison

Having presented the two models, it is well to place them in direct comparison — not to compare two means that share the same end, but to see that the difference is deeper than that. The divergence here touches a person's picture of himself, his place in the universe, the source of his strength, and the one to whom he entrusts outcomes.

Point of comparison	The Law of Attraction	The Law of Striving and Trust in God
Intellectual starting point	Cosmic energy, and the power of thought to shape reality	Divine oneness: God is the One who governs all affairs, and the human being is a servant commanded to strive
Intention	Central, and may be treated as sufficient if it is strong and clear	Important, but no substitute for work, and weighed by the truthfulness of one's turning to God
Mental visualisation	A pivotal instrument; a person is asked to experience the feeling of a fulfilled goal	Drawn upon in directing the self, but joined to supplication, work, and submission
Work	Not always at the centre of the conception, and may recede before the power of the idea	May become an embodiment of servanthood and worship in the broad sense when intention, purpose, and means are sound and rights are preserved
Positive feelings	A means of attraction, to be maintained lest the outcome be obstructed	An inner factor that supports striving — neither a criterion of truth nor an instrument for controlling reality
The human being	The axis of the experience, drawing what he wants by the power of his thought and feeling	A servant who strives and relies upon his Lord, and does not attach his heart to outcomes
The universe	Responds, in this conception, to the vibrations of thought and desire	An arena of trial and striving; a creation made subject by God's command

Point of comparison	The Law of Attraction	The Law of Striving and Trust in God
Outcomes	Tied to the degree of intention, visualisation, and feeling	Sought through means and referred back to God; responsibility is then reviewed, what lay beyond capacity is accepted with contentment, and striving is renewed
Psychological state	Liable to disturbance, because attachment to the outcome breeds tension and fear of failure	The heart may be steadied by contentment and submission, without any guarantee that anxiety or illness will be absent
Final purpose	The fulfilment of one's own desire	God's pleasure, the tazkiya of the self, and the soundness of striving

It becomes clear from this comparison that the law of attraction exalts the authority of thought and makes a person responsible for shaping his reality to a degree that may exceed his ability. The Law of Striving and Trust in God, by contrast, returns a person to his proper place: he thinks, plans, dreams, and works, but he does not make his desire a higher point of reference, and he does not judge himself by outcomes alone. He surrenders his heart to God and makes his very striving one of the gateways of servanthood.

Conclusion: the balance between heaven and earth

The law of attraction attempted to restore the value of intention and to remind a person that his thoughts and feelings affect his behaviour and his outlook on life. In this understanding there is a measure of truth that should not be denied. But in its

absolute form it burdened a person with what he cannot bear, when it severed intention from God's established patterns, visualisation from work, and self-confidence from trust in God, and made a person's tranquillity contingent upon his ability to regulate what he does not own.

The Law of Striving and Trust in God neither opposes optimism nor extinguishes ambition; it returns them to the balance of tazkiya. A person exerts himself to the full extent of his practical scope through lawful causes, relies upon God in his heart, then reviews what lay within his responsibility, accepts with contentment what lay beyond his capacity, and renews his striving.

The difference between the two frameworks begins at the root. In the Law of Attraction the human being appears as the axis and the universe as a party that responds to his desire. In striving and trust in God, the human being is a servant acting within God's established patterns: he works and plans, grants no independence to the cause, and does not own the outcome.

The cycle is thus complete: a truthful intention; a lawful end and lawful means; taking up causes within practical scope; trust in God and supplication; then review, contentment, and renewal. It is a formative cycle, not a mechanical recipe that guarantees the outcome.

A person's dignity lies not in attracting what he wants, but in his servanthood, his truthfulness, and his trustworthiness. Contentment is an important perfection of the heart, but it is not ranked above 'many outcomes' in any arithmetical ordering, and it is not used to judge people. What it does is prevent the outcome from becoming the sole measure of worth.

When this meaning settles in the heart, the meaning of ambition changes: it no longer remains a race against outcomes but becomes a conscious striving within the trust. A believer works at what he is able to do and relies upon God in what he does not fully control, and may thereby join the building up of the earth with the settling of his point of reference in God.

Some contemporary models explain the aspect of performance or of optimism without joining these two dimensions in a single purpose.

A believer does not attract the future; he walks towards it by taking up means and relying upon God. The aim is not to guarantee what you want, but to be truthful in what is required of you, to review your plan, and to entrust to God what lies beyond your practical scope.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Law of Purpose-Led Presence

A Reading beyond The Power of Now

Entry: why discuss the power of now?

In an age whose rhythms accelerate and whose pressures accumulate, many people find themselves far from their present moment: either pulled towards a past that does not return, or anxious about a future that has not yet come. Between regret for what has passed and fear of what may come, the need arises for a measure of calm and for a presence that restores to the self something of its balance. Out of this need there has spread, in recent decades, the idea of returning to the 'now' and living in the present moment as a way of lightening the weight of the past and the anxiety of the future, and as a means of attaining some inner peace.

The best-known formulation of this idea is Eckhart Tolle's in his book The Power of Now.[1] He holds that the human mind is often the source of a person's misery, because it replays the past as regret and sorrow and anticipates the future as anxiety and expectation, thereby depriving a person of the only moment he actually lives. He therefore calls for liberation from 'psychological time', and for the recognition that the past has gone, that the future has not yet arrived, and that what a person truly lives takes place in this moment.

So widespread has this idea become that many now look at themselves and at their time through it without realising it: they see remembering as a burden and planning as a source of anxiety, and suppose that stillness is attained if a person closes the door on yesterday and tomorrow and confines himself to the present alone. And because an idea with such a presence should be neither accepted with fascination nor rejected in haste, we shall try to read it fairly: presenting it as its proponents present it, considering what experience supports, and then pausing at its limits and at the criticism directed at it from within psychology itself.

Our aim is not to deny the evident benefit in this idea. A person does indeed need to quieten the noise of his mind, to be present in his moment, and not to let his past and his future steal his present from him. But the question that concerns us is deeper: is the moment alone enough to carry a person's meaning? A person grows weary not only because he remembers his past or prepares for his future, but because he may lose the purpose that orders his relation to the whole of his time. And when the 'now' is offered to him as a final remedy, some anxiety may subside, but the larger question remains: where is this

1 E. Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999); first published by Namaste Publishing in Vancouver in 1997.

present heading? And what is the meaning that gives it its weight?

The critique of the power of now is therefore not a demolition of the good within it, but an attempt to place that good where it belongs. Presence in the moment is required, but it is not complete if it becomes a severance from past and future, nor if it turns into an inner withdrawal from purpose. The deeper question, then, is not: do we live the moment? But: what is time in a person's life? Is it a burden we flee from into the present, or a trust extending from a past we learn from, to a present in which we work, to a future for which we shall be answerable?

From the answer to this question every subsequent difference branches out. We shall therefore present the idea and its critique in brief, and then move to what this chapter intends: the Law of Purpose-Led Presence — a vision that does not abolish the moment but does not make it an isolated island either, joining it rather to what comes before and after, in an extended awareness of God, of purpose, and of one's final end.

Tolle's philosophy of the moment

The conception behind the power of now rests upon the view that a person's problem lies not in outward time alone but in his inner relation to time. The mind, left unexamined, keeps moving between a past it recalls as regret or sorrow and a future it anticipates as anxiety or expectation. Through this repeated preoccupation a person is absent from the moment he is actually living. Tolle therefore calls for liberation from this 'psychological time', so that a person may not remain captive to his old stories or his expectations of what is to come, but return to the present as the field in which he can meet himself and find some measure of inner stillness.

For Tolle this is not merely a relaxation technique but a wider vision of time, selfhood, and suffering. Suffering, in his conception, does not arise from reality alone but from the mind's continuing attachment to what has passed or what has not yet come. The beginning of the road to peace is therefore that a person should attend to his moment and lessen his absorption in the continuous stream of thinking. He accordingly proposes simple practical tools that require no complex theoretical structure: noticing the breath, observing thoughts without passing judgement, daily meditation, and conscious engagement in small tasks.

Noticing the breath may help a person to attend to his body in the present instead of being carried along by his recurring thoughts. Observing thoughts may help him to realise that what passes through his mind is not necessarily a truth about reality or about himself, and that he can notice a thought without dissolving into it or resisting it violently. The daily meditative practice, in this context, aims at training attention and at some measure of stillness, not at forcibly halting thought or weakening the intellect. Added to this is the practice of carrying out daily tasks with greater attention: walking, eating, tidying, and working while present in what he does, rather than absent in a spiral of thinking. These tools may be useful in some circumstances, but they do not remove the need for reflection, for truth, for specialist expertise, or for treatment when it is needed.

Fairness is due here. These tools have a considerable psychological effect, and studies in mindfulness have shown that training in the observation of breath and thoughts may help to lower anxiety and improve attention;[2] that engaging with thoughts

2 F. Zeidan, S. K. Johnson, B. J. Diamond, Z. David, and P. Goolkasian, "Mindfulness Meditation Improves Cognition: Evidence of Brief Mental Training," *Consciousness and Cognition* 19, no. 2 (2010): 597–605.

from the position of an observer rather than of one carried along may be associated with a higher degree of awareness and emotional stability;[3] and that persistence in certain forms of meditation may reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression to varying degrees.[4] The problem, therefore, is not in denying these benefits, but in asking after their limits: are they useful instruments for ordering the mind and calming the self, or do they serve as a complete vision of the human being, of time, and of meaning? Here the question begins.

Where does the power of now stop?

We must here distinguish two things: the psychological benefit this practice may achieve, and the existential vision upon which it rests. It is one thing to tell a person to attend to his moment so that his anxiety may lessen; it is quite another for the moment alone to become the reality around which a person's life ought to revolve. The first is practical advice that may be useful in its place; the second is a complete conception of the human being and of time — and here the question begins.

If a useful means turns into a comprehensive vision, it becomes legitimate to ask: is this vision sufficient to explain the human being? A person does not live in a moment severed from what precedes and follows it; he carries his past in his memory and turns towards his future with his hope, his plans, and his responsibility. If the present is severed from these two

3 K. W. Brown and R. M. Ryan, "The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 822–848.

4 S. G. Hofmann, A. T. Sawyer, A. A. Witt, and D. Oh, "The Effect of Mindfulness-Based Therapy on Anxiety and Depression: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 78, no. 2 (2010): 169–183; compare the broader review by M. Goyal et al., "Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174, no. 3 (2014): 357–368.

dimensions, it loses something of its meaning and its direction. The past is not merely a burden; it is the site of experience and learning. The future is not merely a source of anxiety; it is also the site of hope and of purpose. From here come the most important observations made by researchers in psychology about this conception, which may be gathered under four heads.

Consider a single image that makes this meaning clear: the moment is like water you hold between your palms; if you cut it off from the river it came from and the sea it runs towards, nothing remains in your hands but a drop that soon evaporates. So too the present, if it is severed from its past and its future, loses much of its meaning. The past supplies it with experience and identity; the future gives it orientation and purpose; and the present is the place where the two meet.

First: memory is not a burden but part of the building of the human being. Through his past a person learns, comes to understand himself anew, and avoids repeating his mistakes; and he finds in it much of the meaning of gratitude, of fidelity, and of longing. The future, likewise, is not confined to anxiety; it carries hope, motivation, and readiness. Reducing awareness to the present alone therefore deprives a person of an important part of his psychological constitution, because the self does not live by the moment alone but by what binds it to what has passed and what awaits it.

Second: the future is part of the motive to act. A person often bears the hardship of today for the sake of a distant end. A student endures years in the pursuit of knowledge; a mother bears her burdens in hope for her children's future; a reformer works for what he may not see the fruits of himself. Studies in motivational psychology have indicated that distant goals, when joined to planning and work, are among the most important sources of persistence and achievement, and that contenting

oneself with momentary satisfaction may weaken this motive rather than strengthen it.[5]

Third: complete presence cannot be a permanent state. A person by nature moves between remembering and planning, between attention and distraction, according to what his life and his responsibilities require. Demanding of the self a continuous mental presence may therefore turn, for some people, into a new burden, especially in times of pressure and trial. Daniel Kahneman has pointed out that thinking about the future is not in itself a defect but a basic instrument of decision-making and good management.[6]

Fourth: soothing pain is not always the same as treating it. Observing one's feelings may help to reduce their intensity in some situations, but it is not by itself enough to address loss, or trauma, or the deep questions bound up with the meaning of life. Moreover, a person's preoccupation with his inner world alone may weaken his presence in his relationships with others, whereas much recovery arises from sharing, from consolation, and from the building of a shared meaning.

These observations do not mean that presence in the moment is without value; they mean that it is part of a wider picture. A person does not live in a moment severed from the rest of his life; he lives within a single span of time in which memory, present, and hope are integrated. If any one of these is severed from the others, the experience loses something of its

5 On distant goals joined to planning, see E. A. Locke and G. P. Latham, "Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goal Setting and Task Motivation: A 35-Year Odyssey," *American Psychologist* 57, no. 9 (2002): 705–717; on the effect of relying on positive imagining alone, see G. Oettingen, *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation* (New York: Current/Penguin, 2014), and H. B. Kappes and G. Oettingen, "Positive Fantasies about Idealized Futures Sap Energy," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47, no. 4 (2011): 719–729.

6 D. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

balance, even if it grants the person a measure of temporary calm.

What is missing from this conception?

When we gather these observations, it appears that the issue is not the value of presence in the moment — which, in itself, is something a person needs. The question is rather: is the moment alone enough to explain a person's relation to time? Here it becomes clear that the difficulty concerns not so much the tools this conception proposes as the foundation on which it rests. It calls a person to find his stillness in the present alone, while his relation to past and future remains limited or deferred — although a person does not live in the present severed from what comes before and after it.

The question that arises is therefore not: how do we live the moment? But: what is time in a person's life, and what is his place within it? Is he merely a present seeking to lighten its psychological burdens, or a journey extending from a past he learns from, to a present in which he works, to a future towards which he moves and for which he prepares?

Here the two starting points diverge. If a person regards time as a psychological burden, his concern will be to lessen its effect as far as he can. But if he sees it as a trust and as a purposeful course, his concern becomes to travel it well. The present then ceases to be severed from past and future and takes its meaning from them: it learns from the one, moves towards the other, and lives them both in the light of the purpose towards which it is moving.

What the power of now lacks, therefore, is not merely another means to be added to it, but a wider vision that makes the present part of the whole course of a person's life rather than a world standing by itself. This is the point from which the

Islamic conception begins, and upon which the Law of Purpose-Led Presence rests.

Part Two: The Law of Purpose-Led Presence — an Integrated Islamic Vision of Time

Having presented the philosophy of the power of now and its limits, we turn to a reading of time from within the Islamic texts and the purpose this book adopts. The difference here begins not from the means but from the question upon which the whole vision rests. The issue is not: ought a person to be present in his moment? That importance is not disputed. The issue is: what is time in a person's life, and what is his place within it?

If time is regarded as a psychological burden, the present becomes the refuge into which a person flees from past and future. But if it is regarded as a purposeful journey, the present is not severed from what precedes and follows it; it becomes the site of the work that joins them. From here the difference between the two conceptions begins.

Islam therefore does not abolish the value of presence in the moment; it restores it to its proper place. The present is not an isolated time but the place where what a person has learned from his past, what he hopes for and prepares for in his future, and the work he undertakes in his day all meet. From this meaning we set out towards what we call 'purpose-led presence'.

The Law of Purpose-Led Presence is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that the present is the setting in which a person lives and actually responds. The person brings awareness, heart, will, and body together around what is due in the hour and what befits it — worship, work, care, learning, rest and treatment, communication, lawful recreation, or lawful enjoyment — according to priority and practical scope, within the purpose of servanthood and trust, while drawing upon the past and preparing for the future.

Purpose-led presence is therefore not a passing emotional state but a way of reading time and life. It works together with inner truthfulness: the mutual accord of the aspects of the self under truth finds its practical embodiment in what is due in the hour and what befits it, not merely in a feeling of harmony.

The past is a place of learning, self-accounting, repentance, and reform; the future is a place of intention, planning, and considering consequences; and the present is the setting in which a person lives and actually responds to what is due in the hour — worship, work, care, learning, rest and treatment, or communication and lawful recreation, according to priority and practical scope.

The first pillar — temporal integration

In this sense neither past nor future is abolished. We take from the past what calls for learning, repentance, or reform, prepare for the future through intention, planning, and consideration of consequences, and then bring the self's awareness,

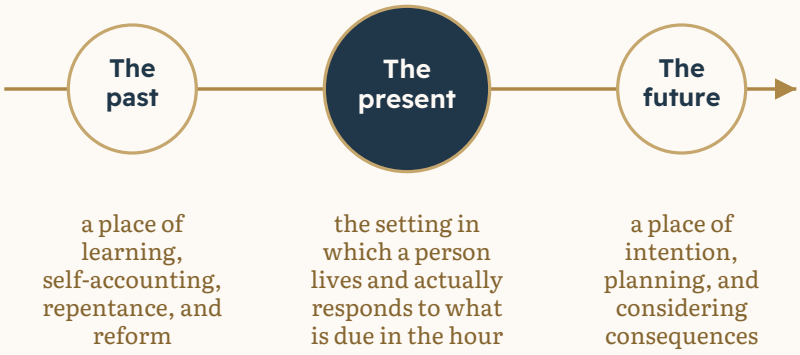
heart, will, and body together around what befits the present hour.

Remembering therefore is not a return to what does not come back, nor is thinking about the future a preoccupation with what has not yet happened; each becomes a help towards living well in the present. The Qur'an directs a person to the past so that he may take heed of God's blessings and his signs: 'And remember when you were few and oppressed in the land… that you may be thankful' (Q 8:26); and it binds him to the future so as to give him hope and constancy: 'Theirs is the good news in the life of this world and in the hereafter' (Q 10:64). Thus the three phases of time come together in a person's life: he learns from his past, prepares for his future, and fulfils what is required of him in his present.

Here the difference between this conception and the power of now appears. Purpose-led presence does not make the present a time severed from what precedes and follows it; it sees it as the meeting place of experience and purpose. When a person turns to his work, he benefits from experience he has gained, moves towards an aim he hopes for, and discharges what is before him with awareness and sincerity. The past does not pull him backward, the future does not consume him with anxiety, and the present does not lose its meaning, because each of these phases finds its natural place in his life. The present thus becomes a bridge rather than an island, joining what a person has learned from his past to what he hopes to attain in his future.

Presence extends to a person's purpose and his social effect, but it does not burden an individual with all the world's causes, and it does not turn general promises into a guaranteed worldly victory for every person or project. Bearing witness is a responsibility discharged with justice and mercy, within

practical scope; victory and empowerment are in God's hand and have their own patterns and forms.



Time as a purposeful journey: the present is not severed from what precedes and follows it

In this way a person's presence does not remain confined to his private affairs but becomes part of a wider purpose. He lives his present and discharges his responsibility, aware that he is travelling a road that began before him and will continue after him, and that every moment of his life takes its meaning from the purpose for which God created him.

The second pillar — truthfulness and reliance: a presence that holds firm amid change

Not every moment a person lives is a calm one; it may be a moment of fear, of trial, or of bewilderment. And here the meaning of real presence appears. Purpose-led presence is not confined to times of stillness; it remains present in times of hardship too. And this presence rests upon two complementary foundations: truthfulness and reliance.

Inner truthfulness is the mutual accord of the aspects of the self under truth and fitra. In purpose-led presence, this accord

is embodied in the work of the hour matching what the intellect has understood, what the heart has accepted, and the end towards which the spirit has turned — not merely in a feeling of harmony or the attainment of emotional calm.[7]

Reliance in the present is the heart's dependence upon God together with taking the means; it is not a detachment from the outcome in the sense of indifference, nor a guarantee of the self's stillness. It frees a person from independent reliance and leaves him responsible for planning and review.

Here an important aspect of the difference between this conception and the power of now appears. Observing one's feelings may help a person to calm his distress, but it is not by itself enough to give pain its meaning. In the Islamic vision, sorrow is not denied, and a person is not asked to disregard it; it is directed towards God, as Jacob (peace be upon him) said: 'I complain of my anguish and my sorrow only to God' (Q 12:86). The difference is not in the presence of sorrow but in the road a person travels while living it: does the pain remain an experience that leaves him closed in upon himself, or does it become part of his journey to God?

The tazkiya of sorrow does not mean abolishing it or forcibly converting it into a positive meaning; it means that it should not take command of one's orientation, and that a person should find a safe road for expressing it, complaining to God, seeking help, and then fulfilling what is due as far as he can.

Someone who has lost a loved one is not required to move beyond his grief quickly or to prove his faith by denying the pain. He may weep, remember, and need people and treatment,

7 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Tamīmī al-Āmidī (d. 550 AH); see also *Sharḥ Ghurar al-Ḥikam*, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Khwānsārī, vol. 4, p. 330.

while his heart remains hopeful in God and his work continues within his practical scope.

Tranquillity in purpose-led presence is therefore not measured by the absence of pain or by outward composure alone. Pain and anxiety may remain, and a person may still need help, while his point of reference remains in God and he holds firm to truth within his practical scope. God Almighty says: 'The patient will be given their reward without measure' (Q 39:10).

The third pillar — the purpose of the hereafter: living the moment in the light of the next life

Purpose-led presence is complete only when it is joined to the purpose for which a person was created. The present, in the Islamic vision, is not understood in isolation from one's final end; it takes its meaning from the road along which a person travels to his Lord. Here what was developed in the first two pillars finds its completion: temporal integration is sound only when the orientation of the journey is clear, and truthfulness and reliance hold firm only when a person's balance reaches beyond the limits of this world.

Islam therefore does not separate the work a person does today from what he hopes for with God tomorrow. Intention, work, and striving all begin in this life, but their effects go beyond its limits. God Almighty says: 'Whoever desires the fleeting life, we hasten for him therein what we will... and whoever desires the hereafter and strives for it with the striving due to it, being a believer — those are the ones whose striving is appreciated' (Q 17:18–19). Striving takes place in the present, but it is directed towards a purpose that goes beyond the present itself.

Not every daily detail becomes a purpose or an automatic nearness. An act enters into purpose-led presence only when

what is due in the hour and what befits it are identified in the light of the revealed law, rights, priority, reality, competence, and practical scope, and then performed truthfully.

Preparing for the future does not contradict presence, just as natural anxiety does not invalidate it. A person plans, hopes, and takes precautions, and then returns to the action possible now, without rumination and without claiming control.

Nor does the effect of this presence stop with the person himself; it extends to his relations with people. A believer does not seek tranquillity for himself alone; he lives his presence in serving others, in doing good to them, and in making peace among them. God Almighty says: 'The believers are but brothers' (Q 49:10), and: 'They prefer others above themselves, even though poverty be their own lot' (Q 59:9). Preferring others, counsel, consolation, and reconciliation are all forms in which a believer lives his presence with people rather than apart from them.

Purpose-led presence therefore does not turn into a preoccupation with oneself alone; it joins a person's soundness in himself to his soundness in his relations with others. Hence making peace among people is among the effects of God-consciousness, as God Almighty says: 'So be conscious of God, and set right what is between you' (Q 8:1). The more the present is joined to purpose, the wider its effect grows: it no longer stops at an individual's tranquillity but extends to the good and the reform he offers to people.

The instruments of presence: appointed times that renew the bond

One instrument of presence is to notice one's breath and body, and to attend to thoughts when they become scattered — but this is a means of attention, not a spiritual measure. Nor should observation turn into obsessive scrutiny: if it increases

anxiety or disrupts life, it needs to be reduced or guided by a specialist.

The three pillars discussed above do not remain theoretical meanings; Islam establishes them through acts that recur in a person's life, so that presence becomes part of his daily journey. Among these is the balance between what is due to this world and what is due to the next, as God Almighty says: 'And seek, in what God has given you, the abode of the hereafter; and do not forget your share of this world' (Q 28:77). Among them is prayer, which recurs at appointed times, so that a believer returns through it to his Lord whenever he has gone forward in his work, as God Almighty says: 'Prayer is prescribed for the believers at fixed times' (Q 4:103), and: 'The human being was created anxious... except those who pray' (Q 70:19–22); and as the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) said: 'Give us rest through it, Bilal.'[8] Then he turns afterwards to his work, in compliance with God's words: 'And when the prayer is concluded, disperse in the land and seek of God's bounty' (Q 62:10). So too remembrance, by which the heart finds tranquillity, and reflection upon God's signs, which binds a person to his Creator, as God Almighty says: 'Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth' (Q 3:191).

It is not the aim of this chapter to set out these means in detail; each has its own discussion, and that will come in the next chapter in the treatment of conscious reflection. What is intended here is to point out that presence, in the Islamic vision, does not rest upon trying to maintain a single mental state at all times, but upon repeatedly returning to God

8 *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book of Manners, no. 4985, with the wording: 'O Bilal, establish the prayer; give us rest through it'; and *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 23088, with the wording: 'Rise, Bilal, and give us rest through the prayer'. Its substance — that prayer is the rest of the heart and the comfort of the eye — is widely attested in the reports of both traditions.

whenever a person becomes heedless or his resolve flags. The journey to God rests upon continual repentance and the renewal of intention more than upon the continuity of a feeling.

Purpose-led presence: a foundation, not a patch

It may appear that what has preceded is no more than an attempt to adjust certain aspects of the power of now, but the matter is deeper than that. The issue is not the addition of new elements to an existing conception, but a difference in the starting point itself. Instead of the question beginning from how to be rid of the pressure of time, it begins from the reality of the human being, the purpose of his existence, and his relation to his Lord. From this root his relation to the present, the past, and the future is subsequently determined.

Purpose-led presence is neither a productivity technique nor an independent mental exercise. It is a way of ordering time and what is due in the hour under God's authority, renewed through remembrance, prayer, self-accounting, planning, action, and lawful rest.

A methodological comparison

Having presented the two models, we may place them in direct comparison, whereupon it becomes clear that the difference between them is not confined to the means but extends to each model's conception of the human being, of time, and of the purpose of life.

Point of comparison	The Power of Now (Eckhart Tolle)	The Law of Purpose-Led Presence
Starting point	Concentration on the present and detachment from past and future	Placing past, present, and future in the service of purpose, and returning every hour to what is due to it
Meaning of time	The present is the fundamental reality	Time is a single course taking its meaning from purpose
Presence	Observing the moment and freeing the mind from thinking	Responding to what is due in the hour and what befits it under the authority of God and truth
Motive	Lessening anxiety and living in the present	Worship, work, care, learning, rest, treatment, communication, and lawful recreation according to priority and practical scope
Dealing with pain	Observing feelings and calming them	Patience, supplication, reliance, and seeking treatment — without claiming a particular meaning for every pain
Relation to others	Predominantly individual in dimension	Extends to reform, doing good, and bearing witness over people
Durability	Requires maintaining a continuous mental state	Renewed through acts of worship and self-review
Purpose	Inner stillness	Journeying to God and discharging what is due in the hour and what befits it within servanthood and trust

It becomes clear from this comparison that the difference between the two conceptions goes back not to some practical means but to the vision upon which each rests. Purpose-led presence does not abolish the value of the moment, but it makes it part of the whole of a person's life: he remembers, works, and hopes, and places all of this in the light of the purpose for which God created him.

Conclusion: from the moment to the road

The power of now has offered many people useful means that help to calm the mind and recover a measure of presence, and this is an aspect that should not be denied. But these means, however great their benefit, do not by themselves answer the question that precedes them: what is the meaning of a person's life? And what is the purpose towards which he is moving?

Purpose-led presence, by contrast, begins from this question. It does not ask a person to forget his past, nor to occupy himself with his future in a way that cuts him off from his present; it calls him to put each of them in its place: to learn from his past, prepare for his future, and fulfil what is required of him in his present, while turning towards his Lord.

Purpose-led presence is neither a productivity technique nor an independent mental exercise. It is an ordering of time under the authority of God, returning every hour to what is due to it and what befits it, while preserving learning from the past and preparation for the future.

There remains a question that leads us to the next chapter: if purpose-led presence returns each hour to what is due to it, how does attention become understanding and insight? Reflection prepares for this transformation, and may serve tranquillity when ordered within faith and remembrance, but it does not guarantee it on its own.

A present that is lived for God does not lose its trace with him, even when its time has passed and its outward form has gone. But it does not become a guarantee of a worldly outcome or of a permanent feeling; it remains an act and an orientation within the course of becoming.



CHAPTER TWELVE

The Law of Conscious Reflection

A Reading beyond Meditation and Mindfulness

Part One: Meditation and Mindfulness — between a Psychological Promise and a Scientific Critique

Entry: a question that leads the chapter

On a day crowded with messages, noise, and demands following one upon another, a person may feel as though he were living outside himself. And when he opens a meditation app, he hears a calm invitation to close his eyes, observe his breath, and let his thoughts pass without judging them. He may grow a little calmer. But the question that remains afterwards is deeper than the moment of calm itself: is it enough for the mind to grow quiet for the self to be at peace? Or is what a person lacks

too deep to be restored by a breathing technique or an exercise in presence?

On the journey of tazkiya it is not enough to know the nature of the self; we must also read the practices that have come to shape people's awareness in their search for stillness. Among the most widespread of these today are meditation and mindfulness, which promise the modern person that they will return him to his present moment and lighten his tension and distraction amid an accelerating rhythm of life. They have become a large industry: applications on phones, programmes in companies and schools, and practices that enter certain clinics as auxiliary tools. None of this should be made light of, just as it should not be dismissed merely because it came from another culture. But fairness itself requires that we not receive it without scrutiny, and that we not concede that everything which calms the self thereby sets it right.

The chapter therefore does not stop at the question of meditation's usefulness; it asks after the source of stillness, the orientation of attention, and what a person does with what he observes in himself. We shall present meditation and mindfulness within their own field, do justice to what they may offer by way of ordering attention and emotion, and then pause at their limits before moving on to the Law of Conscious Reflection as this book formulates it.



The Law of Conscious Reflection is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that deliberate consideration of revelation, the cosmos, and the self, with consequence held in view, prepares attention to become understanding and insight that guide action, whenever

the conclusions reached are weighed against truth and grounded in knowledge and truthfulness. Reflection is therefore neither a stream of mental association nor rumination, and not every passing thought or mental conclusion is an insight.

Meditation and mindfulness: what are they?

Meditation is a directed technique in which a person focuses his attention upon something specific — the breath, a mental image, a particular phrase — in order to slow the flow of his thoughts and reach a measure of inner clarity. It usually requires a set time and a quiet environment. Mindfulness is wider than a particular session or posture: in it a person trains himself to notice the thoughts, feelings, and sensations occurring within him and around him during his daily activity — eating, walking, listening — without judging them or becoming absorbed in interpreting them.

The difference between them is one of form and practice more than of substance. Meditation teaches the mind to settle in a particular moment; mindfulness teaches it to remain present in the details of the day. But they share a single root: strengthening mental presence and lessening the tension produced by preoccupation with the past or anxiety about the future, by returning attention to the present moment and accepting what occurs without direct resistance. This shared root is at once the site of their strength and of their limitation: presence may calm, but it is not by itself enough to build; and observation may bring relief, but it does not purify unless it becomes insight, self-accounting, and orientation. Here the real question begins: is presence an end in itself, or a means to what lies beyond it?

The psychological promise and its limits

Over recent decades meditation and mindfulness have entered programmes of psychotherapy, mental training, and stress management. Their spread did not rest upon publicity alone; it was accompanied by Western studies indicating possible benefits in more than one field. On tension, some research has indicated that an intensive eight-week meditation programme may be accompanied by structural changes in regions of the brain associated with the regulation of emotion and attention.[1] On anxiety and depression, systematic reviews have found a moderate improvement in symptoms among some practitioners.[2] On attention, research in cognitive neuroscience has linked regular meditation with improved capacity to concentrate.[3] On sleep, a clinical study of older adults found that certain meditation practices improved sleep quality and reduced insomnia.[4] And on psychological resilience, other studies have indicated that meditation programmes may help in coping with pain, chronic illness, and psychological pressure.[5]

1 B. K. Hölzel et al., "Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density," *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 191, no. 1 (2011): 36–43. This was a small longitudinal study of participants in an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programme; it establishes an association between participation and measured changes, not a general causal effect or a guaranteed outcome.

2 M. Goyal et al., "Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174, no. 3 (2014): 357–368.

3 F. Zeidan et al., "Mindfulness Meditation Improves Cognition: Evidence of Brief Mental Training," *Consciousness and Cognition* 19, no. 2 (2010): 597–605.

4 D. S. Black et al., "Mindfulness Meditation and Improvement in Sleep Quality and Daytime Impairment among Older Adults with Sleep Disturbances: A Randomized Clinical Trial," *JAMA Internal Medicine* 175, no. 4 (2015): 494–501.

5 J. D. Creswell, "Mindfulness Interventions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 68 (2017): 491–516.

These are findings that deserve to be acknowledged, and we are not among those who deny them or make light of them. But fairness itself requires that they be placed in their true proportion, and read alongside what science has disclosed of the limits of these practices. The issue is not to establish or deny a benefit absolutely, but to know its place, its extent, what it is able to offer, and what it cannot answer. From here the critique begins — a critique that came, in substantial part, from within psychology itself rather than from outside it.

Five objections from within the science

First: the inflation of the effect. Broad critical reviews have drawn attention to the fact that many studies of meditation and mindfulness are marked by methodological weakness, or by bias in publishing positive findings, or by the absence of effective control groups — which makes the psychological effect less general and less assured than some popular accounts suggest.[6] Even reviews that established a benefit did not make it a comprehensive solution; they generally spoke of a moderate effect in reducing tension and certain symptoms. And this opens a question deeper than the figures themselves: is the value of a practice bearing upon human awareness to be measured merely by its capacity to reduce tension, or by what it contributes to understanding the self, its orientation, and its work?

Second: the appearance of unwanted effects in some practitioners. A systematic review estimated the pooled prevalence of adverse events at around 8.3 per cent, with wide variation according to study design and the way an adverse event was defined and measured. Anxiety symptoms were among the

6 N. T. Van Dam et al., "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13, no. 1 (2018): 36–61.

most frequently reported.[7] Qualitative studies have also documented experiences such as the recall of painful memories or a sense of detachment.[8] This does not mean that meditation is inherently harmful, but it shows that its suitability varies and that some practices require professional guidance and consideration of psychological history, especially where there has been prior suffering.

Third: the difficulty of sustainability. Complete mindfulness at all times is more an ideal demand than a practical reality. Reviews in neuroscience show that findings vary with the intensity, duration, and design of training, and do not justify a promise of permanent presence or a constant effect. Daily pressures and interruptions may return a person to automatic patterns of thinking; the model of continuous attention should therefore not become a burden that makes him feel he has failed whenever his mind wanders. Mind-wandering is a familiar human phenomenon, not an incidental exception.[9]

Fourth: the possibility of using meditation as avoidance. Some researchers have warned that the practice of calming emotion may sometimes be used to postpone confronting a problem or decision, or seeking treatment. This is a functional possibility, not a judgement on meditation itself; the difference

7 M. Farias, E. Maraldi, K. C. Wallenkampf, and G. Lucchetti, "Adverse Events in Meditation Practices and Meditation-Based Therapies: A Systematic Review," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 142, no. 5 (2020): 374–393. The review found wide variation according to study type and the definition of an adverse event; a single percentage should therefore not be turned into a fixed estimate for all practitioners.

8 J. R. Lindahl et al., "The Varieties of Contemplative Experience: A Mixed-Methods Study of Meditation-Related Challenges in Western Buddhists," *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 5 (2017): e0176239.

9 Y.-Y. Tang, B. K. Hölzel, and M. I. Posner, "The Neuroscience of Mindfulness Meditation," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 16, no. 4 (2015): 213–225.

lies in the context, the purpose, and what the person does after noticing.[10]

Fifth: methodological cautions and limits to generalisation. The findings of this field are not always easy to interpret: definitions of meditation and mindfulness differ, the amount of practice, samples, and measures vary, and the effects of expectation, the instructor, and the setting are difficult to isolate. Neither personal experience nor a single study is therefore enough to establish a general judgement; nor should the practice become a comprehensive explanation of the self or a substitute for treatment, relationships, and responsibilities.[11]

The conclusion of this critique is that meditation and mindfulness may be useful in some cases, particularly as auxiliary means for reducing tension, ordering attention, or handling certain mild symptoms. But they are not always safe, not always effective, and it is not right to treat them as a comprehensive solution to the crisis of the modern person. The deeper observation is that the flaw lies not in the technique alone but in its sometimes being presented severed from the larger human question: who is he? Why does he seek stillness? And where does he go with what he sees within himself?

Some meditative practices may help in managing anxiety or directing observation, but they do not in themselves give a criterion for what ought to be done with what is observed. What conscious reflection adds is not merely a technical 'alternative', but truth and purpose as points of reference: it binds attention to revelation, to the intellect, to reality, and to rights, and turns a possible observation into a question about meaning, consequence, and action.

10 W. B. Britton, "Can Mindfulness Be Too Much of a Good Thing? The Value of a Middle Way," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 28 (2019): 159–165.

11 R. J. Davidson and A. W. Kaszniak, "Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," *American Psychologist* 70, no. 7 (2015): 581–592.

Part Two: Conscious Reflection — an Integrated Islamic Vision

From presence in the moment to presence with God

When a person searches for calm he may resort to silence or to slow breathing, and these tools may help him in ordering his attention. But tranquillity in the Islamic vision is the self's settling at its true point of reference and its stillness in God; it may grow with remembrance, faith, and action, without being equivalent to the calm of the nervous system or the absence of thoughts.

The Law of Conscious Reflection is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that deliberate consideration of revelation, the cosmos, and the self, with consequence held in view, prepares attention to become understanding and insight that guide action, whenever the conclusions reached are weighed against truth and grounded in knowledge and truthfulness. Reflection is therefore neither a stream of mental association nor rumination, and not every passing thought or mental conclusion is an insight.

In the previous chapter we arrived at the Law of Purpose-Led Presence as an independent Islamic conception that makes the present the site of response to what is required, using the past for self-accounting and the future for intention and planning. Here we build upon it: how does attention become reflection that seeks meaning and consequence, and weighs what it sees against truth, instead of contenting itself with observation or with becoming calm?

Reflection is worship, not a technique

Before we set out the fields of conscious reflection, its root must be established. It is an act of worship of intellect and heart when a person seeks truth and guidance through it; but it does not grant every mental conclusion authority, and it does not disclose the particular wisdom of every occurrence.

> ‘In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are signs for those of understanding: those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth’
>
> (Q 3:190–191)

Consider how the Qur’an joined remembrance to reflection, and made reflection a mark of those of understanding. It does not stop at the beauty of creation but passes from it to what it indicates: to wisdom, to purpose, and to the Lord of creation. Hence Islamic reflection goes beyond the mere calming of the mind to become a means of tazkiya, renewing faith, steadying the compass, and taking decisions in the light of God’s guidance rather than in the light of passing feelings or temporary pressures.

Here the difference appears between reflection and some common forms of meditation. Some practices seek to quieten preoccupations or notice experience without judgement, whereas reflection considers revelation, the cosmos, and the self with consequence held in view. It prepares attention for understanding and insight, but does not guarantee them: every conclusion must be weighed against truth, knowledge, and truthfulness.

The three fields of conscious reflection — and consequence as their horizon

Reflection has three interwoven fields: revelation, the cosmos, and the self. Consequence is not a fourth field alongside them, but a horizon and measure present in the reading of all three; we ask where knowledge, intention, and action lead in this world and the hereafter. Conclusions remain weighed against revelation, the intellect, reality, and specialised expertise.

The first field is reflection upon the self — from observation to self-accounting. A person asks about his knowledge, loves, intentions, habits, and shakila, and about truth and practical scope in his situation, considering the consequence of what he adopts and does. He does not stop at feelings or make them authoritative, but moves towards understanding, repentance, and reform when needed.

God Almighty says: 'Rather, the human being is a witness against himself, even though he offers his excuses' (Q 75:14–15). This insight calls a person to face his self-justification, but it does not make his interpretation of everything he feels infallible. The presence of pain or an inclination may be immediate, but its cause and its significance require evidence, intellect, and experience — and perhaps a specialist.[12]

The second field is reflection upon revelation — from reading to guidance. Contemplation considers the meanings of the discourse and where response to it leads; it does not load the text with passing thoughts or derive rulings from personal impressions. One turns to language, exegesis, and people of knowledge, and then the effect of guidance and the consequence of response are considered in heart and action.

12 *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Tamīmī al-Āmidī; it is among the widely attested sayings from the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him).

The Qur'an is guidance, not neutral information; but moving from a verse to a decision requires a sound understanding of context, of ruling, and of rights. A believer asks: what does the text make clear? And what does it require of me according to my knowledge and practical scope? Not: which meaning occurs to me first?

The third field is reflection upon the cosmos — from the scene to its signification. The cosmos is a set of signs, and examining it reveals order, beauty, and dependence, with consideration of the responsibility and consequence this entails. But it does not establish for us the particular purposes behind every phenomenon or remove the need for specialised sciences.

The Qur'an joined remembrance to reflection upon the creation of the heavens and the earth. A believer refers perfection back to God and grows in gratitude and responsibility, without treating every sense of ease in nature as the tranquillity of faith, or every personal inference as wisdom.

Reflection upon the universe is therefore a gateway to divine oneness and to taking heed when it rests upon evidence — not merely a means of relaxation, and not a book from which the details of the unseen may be read without a text.

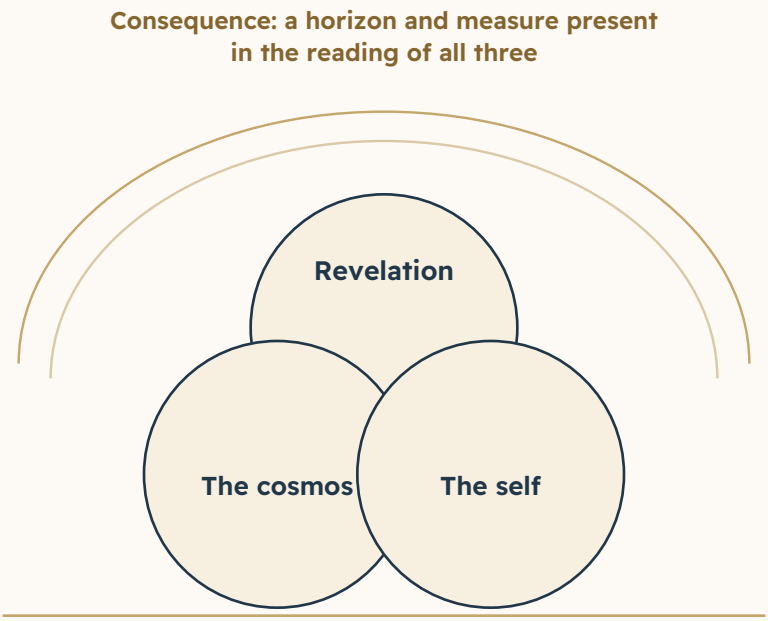
Fourth: reflection upon consequence — from immediate meaning to the final end. A person asks about the effect of his decision upon himself, upon rights, upon his future, and upon his hereafter, and connects means to ends without claiming knowledge of the particular final end God has concealed.

And God's words 'Our Lord, you did not create this in vain…' (Q 3:191) make clear that reflection awakens one to the denial of purposelessness and to responsibility; they do not offer a detailed explanation of every event.

And when the purpose of servanthood settles in the heart it becomes a standard for decision-making: is the act lawful? Does

it render what is due? Does it cultivate a perfection or entrench heedlessness? Asking about nearness does not mean judging that every experience of ease is nearness or that every cost is tazkiya.

Some meditative or breathing practices may help some people towards bodily calm and the ordering of attention, but they do not by themselves answer the question of meaning, and they are not a sufficient treatment for every anxiety or trauma. Reflection adds the question of truth and consequence, while the need for medicine and treatment remains where they are required.



Reflection has three interwoven fields; consequence is not a fourth field alongside them

The fields overlap in practice: a person reads himself in the light of revelation, looks into the universe, and reflects upon consequence. But this overlapping does not turn them into automatic roads to the knowledge of God or a guarantee of

tranquillity; they are materials for reflection, insight, and action.

The circles of conscious reflection in life

After this account it may appear that conscious reflection is an elevated concept that finds no place in an ordinary day. But the truth is that it does not remain an abstract idea; it lives in the very circles of life: in worship, in daily conduct, and in thought and enquiry. It helps a person to be more truthfully present in his worship, more alert in his stances, and deeper in his view of what surrounds him. From here we understand the principle the Qur'an lays down in God's words: 'Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches God, but what reaches him is your God-consciousness' (Q 22:37). What is intended is not the outward form of the act alone, but what the heart carries of God-consciousness, presence, and truthfulness.

The first place of reflection is embodied worship: the self believes and intends, the body performs the lawful form, the intellect contemplates, and the heart assents and turns. Remembrance is the presence of God as the point of reference in heart and life, not mere repetition — while the validity of worship and its limits remain matters for jurisprudence.

It is related from the Messenger of God (may God bless him and his family): 'An hour's reflection is better than a year's worship.'[13] What is meant is not that reflection is set against worship, but that worship does not reach its full meaning if it lacks the heart that is aware and the intention that refers the act back to God: a single truthful moment in which a person reflects

13 Related with variant wordings: 'An hour's reflection is better than a year's worship', 'sixty years', and 'seventy years'. See *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 68, the chapter on reflection. The chains of some of its transmissions have been debated, while its meaning is borne out by the verses urging reflection.

upon his Lord and his final end may open for him what many acts performed without presence do not open.

Reflection lives likewise in the ordinary day. God Almighty says: 'O you who believe, be conscious of God, and let every self look to what it has sent forward for tomorrow' (Q 59:18). Reflection is not a seasonal practice but a way of reviewing conduct, reading situations, and referring intentions back to God's balance. In every situation there is room for this reflection: in a person's anger and his contentment, in his speech and his silence, in his small decisions before his large ones. Not so that he may live in the anxiety of perpetual reckoning, but so that he may remain alert to what moves within him, asking after his purpose, remedying the effect of his error, and returning what he can to its proper orientation. It is related from Imam al-Kazim (peace be upon him): 'He is not of us who does not hold himself to account each day: if he has done well, he asks God for more; and if he has done ill, he seeks God's forgiveness for it and turns to him in repentance.'[14] Self-accounting here is not harshness towards oneself but mercy towards oneself, because it awakens intention and lights the way.

Reflection lives also in thought and creativity. It is a road to a deeper examination of the self and the horizons — not by the mere accumulation of information, but by looking carefully and linking what a person sees to what it indicates. Reflection thus takes a person out of the captivity of habit, so that he sees the meaning behind the familiar and the wisdom behind the surface. The Qur'an directed the gaze to a scene close to people's lives when it said: 'Do they not look at the camels, how they were created?' (Q 88:17). What is intended is not that a person should stop at the outward description of the camel, but that he should pass from the scene to its signification, from the

14 *al-Kāfī*, al-Shaykh al-Kulaynī, vol. 2, p. 453, the chapter on holding one's deeds to account, from Imam al-Kazim (peace be upon him).

creation to the Creator, and from the orderliness of the form to the wisdom behind it.

In this way reflection makes worship more truthfully present, daily life richer in self-accounting, and thought better able to read meaning. Conscious reflection is therefore not a moment isolated from life, but a way in which a person lives his whole life in the light of God.

How does conscious reflection answer the objections to meditation?

We did not review the criticism of meditation in order to overturn everything in it, nor to belittle whatever benefit it may offer, but to show that the difficulty generally lies not in the root of attention but in attention when it is severed from purpose, from meaning, and from the sense of God's presence. Many of the objections to meditation are not objections to presence of heart or stillness of self, but to the presentation of this presence as a self-sufficient technique. Conscious reflection therefore does not abolish the value of attention; it reconnects it to its roots and places it within a wider vision of the human being, his Lord, and his purpose.

Reflection does not measure its value by the degree of reduced tension alone, but by the meaning, self-accounting, and action it opens up. And the tranquillity in God's words 'those who believe, and whose hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of God' (Q 13:28) is not a guaranteed technical effect but a settling bound to faith, remembrance, and orientation. A person may begin in 'the tranquillity of the road' while anxiety remains or the shakila changes slowly.

As for the unwanted effects among some practitioners, they remind us that reviewing one's inner life may open wounds and memories beyond one's capacity. A person is therefore not asked to dive alone, and remembrance is not made a substitute

for treatment; he is gentle with himself, seeks help from God and from people of trust and competence, and stops whatever increases the harm.[15]

Nor does Islam drive a person to exhaust himself in the name of reflection. Gentleness and practical scope are taken into account, and some practices require specialist guidance. The tradition says: 'Do not be like one who drives his mount to exhaustion, who neither preserves a back to ride nor covers the ground.' Excess may spoil the aim rather than achieve it.[16]

Islam does not demand an unbroken and complete presence, but a renewed return after heedlessness. Prayer, remembrance, and recollection restore the point of reference; and work, rest, and dispersing through the earth are part of life itself. Inability to maintain continuous attention is not a deficiency of faith or a moral failure.[17]

As for using meditation as an escape, what stands against it is reflection that moves from observation to the question of truth and of action. But it does not interpret every experience of anger or grief in moral terms, and it does not turn self-accounting into obsessive intrusion. Bodily, psychological, and rights-related causes are examined, a specialist is consulted when

15 From the supplication of Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, related from Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him) for the pre-dawn hours of Ramaḍān; Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, p. 582; and *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*, Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs.

16 Reported by al-Bazzār in his *Musnad* and by al-Bayhaqī in *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* (vol. 3, p. 18) from Jābir, within the report: 'This religion is firm, so enter into it gently…' Hadith scholars have questioned its chain of transmission, while its meaning is sound and borne out by the sound reports urging ease. al-Kulaynī reported in *al-Kāfī* (vol. 2, p. 86) from Imam al-Bāqir (peace be upon him): 'This religion is firm, so enter into it gently, and do not make the worship of God hateful to God's servants'.

17 *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2499, which he described as 'singular'; and *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 4251, from Anas ibn Mālik, which a number of hadith scholars graded good on account of its corroborating reports.

needed, and then what falls within one's practical scope is put right.[18]

Nor does conscious reflection entail social withdrawal: when it is joined to truth and to rights it may return a person to people with a truer intention and a better way of giving — though it does not guarantee this automatically. God Almighty says: 'The believers are but brothers, so set things right between your two brothers' (Q 49:10); and in Sura al-ʿAsr he joined salvation to faith, to right action, and to mutual counsel in truth and patience.

This was manifest in the life of the Prophet (may God bless him and his family): he was the deepest of people in remembrance and reflection, and was at the same time in the heart of life, hearing people's pains and making peace among them: 'There has come to you a messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering; deeply concerned for you; to the believers kind and merciful' (Q 9:128). And Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him) gave his ring in charity while bowing in prayer, joining in a single moment the presence of worship and the need of the one who asked, and the verse was revealed concerning him (Q 5:55). Worship accompanied by reflection does not close a person in upon himself; it overflows in mercy and in reform.

It thus becomes clear that conscious reflection does not come to repeat meditation under another name, nor to quarrel with everything it offers, but to put presence in its proper place. If meditation trains a person in attention, reflection teaches this attention where to turn. If meditation lightens some of the inner noise, reflection asks after the source of that noise and after the road that returns the self to its Lord. Here a person

18 *Nahj al-Balāgha*, from a sermon of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), Sermon 176; it is also related as a saying of the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) in the sources of both traditions.

moves from observing his inner life to purifying it, and from a temporary stillness to a tranquillity that has meaning and orientation.

Application: returning to the first moment

Let us return to the scene with which we began. You are at the end of a crowded day, and you open an application that asks you to observe yourself and to let your thoughts pass without judging them. You may do so, and your tension may subside for a few minutes. This is a benefit we do not deny. But conscious reflection invites you, after this moment, to a deeper question: why was my self disturbed in the first place? And what has this anxiety disclosed within me?

Reflection may disclose a fear of falling short, or an excessive attachment, or a right that has been neglected; and it may also disclose that the anxiety is bound up with an illness, a trauma, or a circumstance requiring treatment and support. We therefore do not treat anxiety as a 'message' with a single meaning; we examine its causes and its evidence, and then act according to what truth, competence, and practical scope require.

This is the possible passage from observation to reflection: some meditative tools may offer a space of silence and attention, and reflection adds the question of meaning, consequence, and truth. Neither of them guarantees the full disclosure of the cause or the disappearance of anxiety; the need for evidence, experience, and treatment therefore remains in its place.

How does a person practise conscious reflection?

So that reflection may not remain a general idea, we can set out its course in simple steps — not intended as a rigid recipe, but as entry points that help you to live this meaning in your day.

Begin with intention before technique. The first question is not: how do I breathe? But: why am I reflecting? And where do I want this presence to lead me? If you begin from seeking God's face, silence is no longer an emptiness but a door to returning to him.

Read yourself truthfully. Do not be content to observe your feeling from a distance; ask it: where did it come from? Where is it pushing me? Does it disclose in me a fear, a desire, or a shortcoming? Here the effect of the Law of Inner Truthfulness appears in practice: you are seeking not superficial ease, but to know yourself as you are and then return to your fitra.

Link what you see to a verse or an established meaning from revelation, and reflect upon the self, the universe, or consequence; then ask: what general lesson do the text and reality indicate? And what action falls within my practical scope? Do not claim that God sent you a particular event to convey a particular message to you for which there is no evidence.

Move from understanding to reform. Not every truthful reflection ends in a pleasant feeling, but it should bear fruit in a practical step: seeking forgiveness, apologising, restoring a right, or making a clearer decision. In this way self-accounting is not harshness towards the self but mercy towards it.

Make reflection a merciful habit rather than a heavy burden. Do not demand of yourself complete presence at all times, and do not suppose that heedlessness is the end of the road. It is enough that you bring your intention to mind before an act, review your heart after it, and know how to return if you have strayed. Returning — not the impossibility of heedlessness — is the essence of the presence of faith.

In this way the practical difference between meditation and reflection becomes clear. Meditation may resemble someone who silences a disturbing alarm in order to rest; reflection asks: why did the alarm sound? And what ought I to put right

so that it does not recur? Feelings are neither silenced nor left to lead; they are understood, refined, and returned to God's balance. Reflection thus is not a passing moment at the end of a crowded day, but a way of reading the self and returning to God.

A methodological comparison

After this account, the difference between meditation and mindfulness on the one hand, and conscious reflection on the other, is no longer a difference between two techniques alone, but between two visions of the human being, two conceptions of stillness, and two paths for building the self. The first generally begins from calming the mind and ordering attention; conscious reflection begins from a person's bond with his Lord, and then rereads the self, the moment, and conduct in the light of purpose.

Point of comparison	Meditation and mindfulness	Conscious Reflection
Aim	Calming the mind, reducing tension, and ordering attention	Understanding and insight that guide action through reflection on revelation, the cosmos, and the self with consequence held in view
Reference	Modern meditative practices with spiritual and philosophical roots, and contemporary psychological applications	Revelation, remembrance, contemplation of the text, and the project of tazkiya
Practice	Observing the self, thoughts, or feelings without judging them directly	Reflection on revelation, the cosmos, and the self, with consequence as a horizon and measure present in reading them

Point of comparison	Meditation and mindfulness	Conscious Reflection
Dealing with feelings	Noticing them and accepting their presence without being carried along	Understanding the motives, rights, and causes involved, and weighing them against truth rather than suppressing them
Effect upon behaviour	May reduce tension, but does not always give a clear moral direction	Builds moral insight and impels a person towards truer action and purer conduct
Relation to reality	Its effect may remain within individual experience if severed from responsibility	Returns a person to reality with a sounder intention and a clearer sense of responsibility
View of time	Generally focuses on the present as the setting for becoming calm	Learns from the past, attends to the present, and considers the consequence of action in this world and the next
Road to stillness	Mental quiet and inner ordering	Remembrance, reflection, and tazkiya may cultivate tranquillity, with due regard to treatment and practical scope

In meditation a person may train himself to notice what occurs within him, and this is useful in its place. In reflection the observation is weighed against truth so that it may become — if it is sound — self-accounting, insight, or reform. Tranquillity may grow through remembrance, faith, and action; but it is not guaranteed by a session and is not measured by the duration of a calm feeling.

The aim is not to reject everything in meditation: some of its tools may help in ordering attention or emotion. They are used

as auxiliary means if their benefit is established and they are stripped of claims contrary to divine oneness — without our renaming them remembrance or reflection, or supposing that they turn of themselves into a deeper tazkiya.

Conclusion: from calming to tazkiya

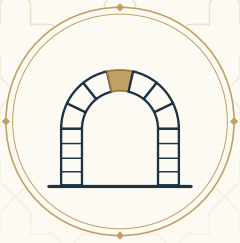
The matter, then, does not lie in the nature of the technique alone, but in the vision from which it proceeds, the purpose towards which it moves, and the context in which it is practised. Meditation, for all the useful tools it may offer in calming the nerves and ordering the mind, remains — if severed from meaning and from a moral compass — close to a mental or neural exercise that lightens some of the noise and then leaves a person facing his original question once again.

Conscious reflection in the Islamic vision is an act of reading and tazkiya: it considers revelation, the cosmos, and the self with consequence held in view; seeks meaning, relationship, and the final end; and weighs what it draws out against truth, knowledge, and truthfulness. It does not 'produce tranquillity' automatically, but may serve a settled orientation and a journey to God with insight.

So when feelings crowd upon a person and his motives become confused, it is not enough for him to observe what is occurring within him; he needs to recollect so that he may see, to see so that he may return, and to return so that he may be purified. God Almighty says: 'So flee to God' (Q 51:50). This is the end of conscious reflection: not a withdrawal inward, but a fleeing to God — from bewilderment to guidance, from heedlessness to light, and from a temporary calming that makes a person forget his great question to a wakefulness that returns him to it in the light of revelation and purpose.

Meditation may quieten attention in its place, and reflection seeks a meaning that guides action; stillness is not the absence of thinking but the settling of the self in God and in truth.

And if conscious reflection binds attention to truth, to intention, and to insight, what are we to make of a modern theory that has offered tools for adjusting language, images, and responses? To this question we turn with neuro-linguistic programming — without assuming that change is produced by external factors alone or by internal ones alone.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Law of Faith-Building

A Reading beyond Neuro-Linguistic Programming

The question is not: how do you reprogramme your mind? But: who is the human being we wish to build, and towards what purpose does he move?

The world of self-development promises tools that change the way we think and behave, and among the most prominent of these is neuro-linguistic programming. It spread because it offers a swift promise and easily circulated tools, and at the same time it has stirred scientific and ethical debate about its effectiveness and its limits. We shall present it as far as is needed, and then move to the Law of Faith-Building as this book formulates it in the light of revelation, of fitra, and of the experience of tazkiya.

Let us be precise: faith-building is not an improved religious version of neuro-linguistic programming, and it does not treat a person as a machine to be updated. It addresses the single self through the aspects of its knowledge, its heart, its intellect, its body, and its spirit, and refers change back to faith, remembrance, action, environment, and servanthood. The difference here lies in the definition of the human being and of purpose, not in the instrument's outward presentation.

Promises of swift change, of just a few sessions and guaranteed results, are widespread in the culture of self-development. But the durability of change is not determined by whether the influence is inward or outward alone; it is determined by the interaction of knowledge, heart, will, action, habits, body, environment, and support. A trainer or a session may help, and a transformation may begin from an inward decision, yet neither guarantees permanence without a gradual process of becoming.

Part One: Neuro-Linguistic Programming in Brief

What is neuro-linguistic programming?

Neuro-linguistic programming, or NLP, is a methodology of self-development resting upon the improvement of thinking and the modification of behaviour through an understanding of the relation between mind, language, and response. It arose in the 1970s through the work of Richard Bandler and John Grinder, out of a study of patterns of language and behaviour in people regarded as successful. Its general idea is that thinking is capable of being reshaped: if you change your inner language and your conceptions, your responses change, and perhaps

with them aspects of your lived reality. Hence it became famous for a phrase close to people's hearts: change the way you think and your reality will change. It spread through training courses and books on success because of its simplicity and its promise of a swift effect — which makes scrutinising it a necessity rather than a luxury.

Its four instruments

Some of the techniques of neuro-linguistic programming centre on reframing, anchoring, sensory representation, and modelling. They generally work upon language, image, feeling, and behaviour, and may help in reinterpreting a situation or ordering a response; but the extent of their effect and its durability require evidence in each use.

A student anxious before an examination may be asked to rename his fear or to link calm to a sensory trigger. He may find a momentary benefit, or he may not. Nor is it right to say that the instrument 'treats the surface and leaves the depths' in every case; the question remains: have the interpretation, the habit, and the shakila changed — and did the anxiety require treatment or support beyond the technique?

What does it promise, and where is it useful?

These instruments are marketed for overcoming fears, strengthening confidence, improving communication, and regulating emotions. We do not deny that some of them may be of immediate use in limited contexts: adjusting the angle from which one views a problem may genuinely lighten its weight; linking calm to some trigger may help in a moment of tension; and considering one's manner of address may improve communication between people. Its claims are concentrated in three domains: improving communication, setting goals through modelling,

and increasing psychological resilience under pressure. These are real areas in which people seek help. But the question is not: is it useful for a moment? It is: does it endure, and where does it lead? And here the difficulty begins.

What does the scientific evidence show?

Neuro-linguistic programming arose outside a rigorous academic context and relied upon assumptions that were not empirically established; in its popular form it possesses neither a mature explanatory structure nor a coherent empirical basis. A serious scientific critique has therefore accumulated around it — not by way of rejecting it from the outset, but by testing its major claims and comparing them with what is established by evidence.

Perhaps the most serious collapse concerns its founding assumption: that every person has a dominant sensory representational system that can be read from his eye movements or his language and then addressed accordingly. This claim has been tested repeatedly, and no reliable relation has appeared between eye movements and the alleged mental processes. This assumption is not a marginal detail but one of the foundations upon which many of its applications were built; and when the foundation falls, the whole structure is shaken.

In this context Witkowski examined sixty-three peer-reviewed studies in a broad review, and found that studies that did not support the claims of neuro-linguistic programming predominated and were methodologically stronger, concluding that it lacks a scientific basis establishing its effectiveness.[1] Sharpley showed that much of what is attributed to it by way of

1 Tomasz Witkowski, "Thirty-Five Years of Research on Neuro-Linguistic Programming: NLP Research Data Base—State of the Art or Pseudoscientific Decoration?" *Polish Psychological Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (2010): 58–66, https://doi.org/10.2478/v10059-010-0008-0.

effects is either unsupported by sufficient data or built upon assumptions difficult to test or refute — and this is among the deepest problems of any theory that wishes to be treated as a science.[2] And in a systematic review of its effect upon health outcomes, Sturt and colleagues found only limited evidence of benefit, together with a general weakness in the quality of the available studies.[3]

A number of researchers have therefore warned against presenting it as a comprehensive solution to fears and psychological problems without sufficient evidence: it does not match evidence-based treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy, and it should not be offered as a substitute for them. If some of its instruments are used in limited contexts, it should be with caution and without inflating their results.[4]

The upshot of the scientific position is that neuro-linguistic programming is a popular framework whose evidential strength varies with the claim and the technique, and not a firmly established theory explaining the whole human being. Some skills of communication or reframing may be useful within their limits, but they do not by themselves provide the criterion of truth or the purpose of becoming.

The effect of any training may weaken if it does not enter into habits, environment, and practice, whether it began with an outward trigger or an inward intention. Faith-building, by

2 C. F. Sharpley, "Research Findings on Neuro-Linguistic Programming: Nonsupportive Data or an Untestable Theory?" *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 34, no. 1 (1987): 103–107.

3 J. Sturt, S. Ali, W. Robertson, D. Metcalfe, A. Grove, C. Bourne, and C. Bridle, "Neurolinguistic Programming: A Systematic Review of the Effects on Health Outcomes," *British Journal of General Practice* 62, no. 604 (2012): e757–e764.

4 S. O. Lilienfeld, S. J. Lynn, and J. M. Lohr, eds., *Science and Pseudoscience in Clinical Psychology* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003); G. J. Devilly, "Power Therapies and Possible Threats to the Science of Psychology and Psychiatry," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 39, no. 6 (2005): 437–445.

contrast, takes revelation as its point of reference, and takes root through faith, remembrance, action, repetition, companionship, and a supportive environment — without our dispensing with a useful instrument or with specialist treatment merely because it is 'external'.

Part Two: From Programming to Tazkiya — Faith-Building

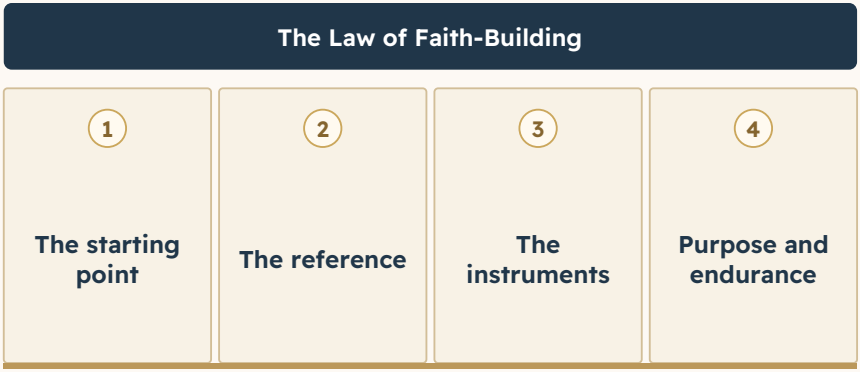
We presented the model fairly in order to determine its field and its limits, not in order to judge every technique within it invalid. We now turn to the Law of Faith-Building as an independent conception: it does not 'return a person to his heart' in isolation from his intellect, his body, and his environment; it builds the self's assent to truth and embodies this in remembrance, action, repetition, and a supportive environment.

The Law of Faith-Building is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that what a person knows of truth does not become realised faith merely by being known or repeated, but when the heart binds itself to it, submits to it, and takes it as a reference; it is then embodied in intention and right action and maintained through reflection, remembrance, repetition, and a supportive environment, by God's guidance and aid, so that its effect returns to the self.

Consider the terms of the definition: knowledge opens the door to truth; the heart's submission actualises the root of faith; action embodies it; remembrance, repetition, and a supportive

environment make it firm; and God's guidance and aid encompass the course. Neither the inward alone nor the outward alone is enough, and the human being is not reducible to the heart or to language.

Faith-building addresses the single self through the aspects of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit. Worship is embodied: the self knows, believes, and intends; the body embodies compliance; and the act returns as an effect upon the heart and the shakila — without any guaranteed mechanism.



Four integrated pillars: no one of them stands alone; each rests upon the others

So that this building may have clear features rather than remain an appealing but abstract idea, it rests upon four integrated pillars: a starting point, a reference, instruments, and a purpose. No one of them stands alone; each rests upon the others. Here is its structure, pillar by pillar.

The first pillar: the starting point — from knowledge to assent and action

A human being is not an operating system, nor an entity composed of independent centres, but a single embodied self. The

intellect receives meaning and discerns it; the heart binds itself to it or rejects it; intention and action appear in the body; and the shakila is formed through repetition and environment.

The heart is the self considered from the standpoint of its assent, its love, its faith, its intention, and its orientation — not a geometric 'centre' for the remaining dimensions and not a substitute for the intellect. Building therefore begins with knowledge and clarity, then assent, intention, and action, in a reciprocal network rather than a single line.

Faith-building begins with the question of intention: why am I doing this, and for whom? But it does not replace the question of ability, of means, and of truth. The saying 'there is no power and no strength except by God' affirms for a person a created ability subsisting by God — not an incapacity to act, and not an independent reliance upon the self. If the intention is sound, and the end, the means, and rights are sound, striving enters into servanthood; but intention alone does not make an act right and does not guarantee the durability of change.

It is not enough for an idea to be known or repeated: a person may know the truth while his heart does not submit to it, and he may begin to act before submission is complete and then cultivate it. Faith-building is a gradual passage from knowledge to the heart's commitment, submission, remembrance, action, and shakila, by God's guidance and aid.

The second pillar: the reference — revelation, fitra, and God's established patterns

Neuro-linguistic programming is generally presented as a set of utilitarian instruments in communication and change, and it therefore needs a moral and epistemic standard to govern its use, since it may be employed in helping or in manipulation. Faith-building, by contrast, has its reference in revelation, in

fitra as a general orientation, and in intellect, reality, and rights. Every psychological or technical claim remains in need of its own evidence and relevant specialist expertise.

From this reference the direction of change is determined. Lawful work may enter into servanthood if the intention turns towards God and the means and rights are preserved: 'Say: My prayer, my rites, my living, and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds' (Q 6:162). Intention gives striving its orientation, but it does not turn what is forbidden into tazkiya and does not exempt one from knowledge of reality.

It is likewise a moral safeguard. Where the word is treated in models of influence as a skill for reaching an outcome, in faith-building it becomes a trust for which a person is answerable: 'And speak to people with goodness' (Q 2:83), and 'He utters no word but there is with him a watcher ready' (Q 50:18). Skill in delivery is not enough if it is not built upon a sound intention, nor is effective influence if it is severed from truthfulness.

This reference reminds us that fitra is a root in the human constitution and a general preparedness for truth, perfection, and servanthood — not a detailed balance independent of revelation and intellect. The measure is not that you follow everything you find within yourself, but that you weigh what comes to be within you against what fitra and truth require.

The verse sets out a person's responsibility for changing what falls within his practical scope: 'God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves' (Q 13:11). It does not mean that circumstances, language, and behaviour have no effect; change arises from the interaction of shakila, body, environment, and action. Words may affect interpretation and response, but they do not create reality and do not remove the need for means or regard for rights.

The danger of the instrument's 'neutrality' therefore calls for a pause. A technique that knows how to influence people, if it is

not bound by truthfulness and sound intention, can be directed towards benefit as readily as towards deception; there is nothing in its structure that prevents misuse. But when the instrument is framed by revelation as its point of reference, it is returned to a clear aim: to benefit rather than deceive, to set right rather than exploit. What matters is not possessing the instrument but the balance that governs it. And this is a fundamental difference between an approach that gives you power without a compass, and an approach that gives you power and compass together.

The third pillar: the instruments — when worship enters the path of tazkiya

Faith-building does not reject useful psychological instruments, but it does not make worship an alternative technique. Worship is an act of the whole person, having a lawful form, an intention, a presence, and an action, and it may cultivate the shakila through repetition — without any promise of an automatic psychological effect or any removal of the need for treatment and expertise.

In reinterpreting pain we do not ask with certainty: 'what does God intend to cultivate in me through this?' but rather: what is the truth and the duty in this situation? And what can I learn or put right? We trust in God's wisdom without specifying his particular wisdom.

Remembrance restores the presence of God as the point of reference, and may help towards tranquillity; but it does not work as an automatic anchor, and the effect of fear does not vanish through the mere utterance of words. A person may need training, treatment, or a change of environment alongside remembrance.

Reflection reads revelation, the cosmos, and the self with consequence held in view, and weighs images and passing

thoughts against truth. It does not guarantee a heightening of perception by mere practice, and it does not make imagination a proof.

The example of the prophets, the righteous, and the Prophet's household joins aim and action; but emulation requires an understanding of context and practical scope, and does not turn into copying outward conduct or comparing oneself with the infallible.

Prayer, self-accounting, supplication, and striving all enter the path of tazkiya, but their effect is not automatic. Prayer is embodied worship; self-accounting is a merciful review rather than an obsession; supplication is dependence together with striving; and striving is constancy within one's practical scope. A supportive formative environment helps this building to take root.

This extends to communication as well. Where neuro-linguistic programming teaches you to speak in order to influence, to listen in order to read emotions, and to reframe in order to win acceptance, faith-building teaches you to speak with truthfulness and wisdom, to listen with mercy rather than to analyse, and to use the word for reform rather than for victory: 'Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fine exhortation' (Q 16:125), and 'those who listen to what is said and follow the best of it' (Q 39:18). Communication thus turns from a skill for reaching people into a trust that brings hearts nearer to truth.

Fasting may help in refining appetite, patience in establishing constancy, and remembrance in renewing one's point of reference, if these acts are performed with their meanings and their conditions. It does not follow that their effect is always slower or deeper than that of every psychological instrument: the effect is not automatic, and it interacts with faith, habit, body, environment, and support.

Faith-building rests upon self-accounting and repentance as two distinct operations: self-accounting discloses the self's position and its course; repentance restores its orientation after deviation; and reform embodies the return in its effects and in rights. External instruments and specialists may help along this path; correction is not confined to a single 'inward' resource.

The fourth pillar: purpose and endurance — nearness, not achievement

Purpose does not end at achievement; skill and outcome are ordered within success and servanthood. A stumble may become material for review, repentance, and learning if a person responds to it truthfully, but it is not automatically a gateway to nearness and not a good in itself.

The words of Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him), 'By the Lord of the Kaʿba, I have succeeded', disclose a balance that sees fidelity to God as success. This does not mean that a believer is freed from all fear of failure or guaranteed stillness; it means that his worth is not reducible to the outcome, and that he joins work, reliance, and submission.

Endurance does not come from the heart alone in isolation from body, habits, environment, and support. Faith is renewed through remembrance, action, and repetition; a person may weaken and need someone to help him. What is required is a continual return, not a claim to an effect that never fades.

We therefore do not set a 'fleeting Western motivation' against 'an inexhaustible source of faith' in a way that abolishes human nature. Every process of building needs upkeep, a supportive environment, relationships, and rest; faith itself increases and decreases — but its point of reference gives the course meaning and orientation.

The good life in God's words 'Whoever does right… while being a believer, we shall surely give him a good life' (Q 16:97) is not equivalent to permanent pleasure or the absence of illness; it is a life in which faith, action, and purpose are ordered, and it may coexist with pain and trial.

And God's words 'Their flesh… does not reach God, but what reaches him is your God-consciousness' (Q 22:37) set out the effect of God-consciousness and of intention, while the act and its lawful form remain. We do not weigh what is inward or guarantee the acceptance of a particular act; we do what lies within our practical scope and hope for God's favour.

Outward failure is read as an outcome requiring analysis: it may disclose an error in the plan, a constraint in the environment, or a place for learning and repentance — and it may be simply a painful loss. Not every failure constitutes nearness or an occasion for contentment, but every situation opens the question of a truthful response.

How do I begin?

You may ask: this is a coherent structure, but how do I apply it to myself? Let us follow a man — let us call him Khalid — whose tongue freezes with fear whenever he is asked to speak before his colleagues. In the Western model a swift solution was offered him: an anchoring session linking confidence to a press of his thumb, to be summoned in moments of tension. He tried it and it worked once or twice, and then the fear returned when the trigger was absent, because the instrument treated the symptom and did not touch the root. What, then, does faith-building offer him? Not a faster solution, but a deeper road: four graduated stages in which the four pillars appear as practice rather than as theory — the starting point in the first and second, the instruments in the third, and

purpose and endurance in the fourth. Here the theory takes shape in a lived experience.

The first stage: awareness and disclosure. Khalid asks about his fear of speaking: is it natural anxiety, a lack of skill, a harmful experience, or an excessive concern with his image? He does not assume that it has a single 'spiritual root'; he may need training or treatment. Self-accounting here is an attempt at truthful understanding, not a definitive self-diagnosis.

The second stage: correcting the intention. Khalid shifts his concern from his image to the trust of speech and its benefit, without blaming himself for his fear or necessarily regarding it as an exaltation of people. A sound intention lightens some of the burden, but it does not remove the need for professional preparation or the need for support.

The third stage: gathering the instruments. Khalid trains in speaking, prepares his material, gradually learns to face the situation, and seeks help through supplication, remembrance, and reliance. He says: I possess a measure of ability that I am developing, and God is my sufficiency and my helper — so he neither denies his competence nor relies upon it independently.

The fourth stage: repetition and gentleness. He repeats the training and the worship and renews his intention, assesses the effect of his efforts realistically, and may seek the help of a trusted therapist or trainer. The fear may lessen or some of it may remain, and this is not a failure of tazkiya. Change is the fruit of a network of knowledge, faith, action, body, and environment.

Faith-building thus offers a renewed course rather than a single session; but it does not promise change without limit in every ability. The horizon of tazkiya is open by God's favour, while the human being remains a creature limited in himself and people differ in their receptivities and practical scope. Nearness is renewed and does not turn into an infinite quantity belonging to the servant.

Between the two models: a comprehensive comparison

Now that we have seen the two structures, the following comparison shows that the disagreement is not over a technical detail, but over the definition of the human being, the source of his change, his purpose, and the measure of his success:

Point of comparison	NLP — Neuro-Linguistic Programming	Faith-Building
What is the human being?	Patterns of thinking and behaviour to be modified through language, visualisation, and modelling	A single embodied self whose becoming unfolds through knowledge, assent, action, and environment
Point of departure	Thought and language	Knowledge and clarification, then the heart's assent, intention, and action in a reciprocal network
Source of change	Techniques directed at patterns of thinking and behaviour	Knowledge made clear by revelation, the heart's assent, action, environment, and repetition, through God's guidance and aid
Reference	Utilitarian, not religious	Revelation, fitra, and God's established patterns
Instruments	Reframing, anchoring, sensory representation, and modelling	Prayer, remembrance, reflection, self-accounting, supplication, and striving
Source of tranquillity	Regulating emotion by a trigger that may vanish	Remembrance, faith, and reliance together with means and treatment; no guarantee of an emotional state

Point of comparison	NLP — Neuro-Linguistic Programming	Faith-Building
Criterion of success	Achieving goals and improving performance	Ultimate success: truthfulness of striving towards God and nearness to him
Place of the word	A neutral skill for influencing others	A trust for which the servant is answerable
Highest model	Those who succeed in performance	The prophets, the righteous, and the Prophet's household
Endurance	A temporary effect requiring a repeated trigger	An effect maintained through remembrance, action, repetition, a supportive environment, and God's guidance and aid; it may weaken and be renewed

Neuro-linguistic programming has mastered certain instruments of communication and visualisation whose evidence needs evaluation, whereas faith-building re-grounds purpose, intention, and servanthood. The comparison here is with this particular approach, not a comprehensive verdict upon 'the West' or upon all psychology.

The root of the whole comparison lies in its first line: the definition of the human being. If a person is regarded as a system to be recalibrated, then more technique and more control will be sought for him; and if he is regarded as a divine trust to be cultivated through tazkiya, then a road will be sought that returns him to his fitra and his Lord. This comparison is therefore not an inventory of scattered differences but a single tree: its root is the definition of the human being, and its branches are the starting point, the reference, the instruments, and the

purpose. If the root is sound the branches stand straight; if it is disordered they are disordered too.

Conclusion: from programming to insight

The deficiency of neuro-linguistic programming appears when technique is offered without a reference or sufficient evidence. Faith-building, by contrast, weighs skill against purpose and truth, and moves a person from information to faith and action. We do not set a 'surface' against a 'depth' in a way that abolishes the effect of skill, body, and environment; we integrate them into a wider course.

Faith-building does not promise control over outcomes; it calls a person to the tazkiya of the self, to truthfulness, to striving, and to repentance. Pain and stumbling may remain, but a person acquires a point of reference for review and action — not a promise of complete uprightness or permanent contentment.

This is not a call to abandon useful instruments, nor to disdain the practical good in self-development; it is a call to place every instrument where it belongs beneath the sky of the greater meaning. Take from the skills what benefits you, but do not make them an end, and do not sever them from intention, reference, and purpose. A skill is a good servant and a bad master: if it serves your tazkiya it brings blessing to it, and if it becomes the object itself it enslaves you. This is the final difference that sums up the whole chapter: that you should own the instrument and not be owned by it, because your heart belongs to God alone.

Faith-building: the thread that draws this section together

The laws in this section form an integrated network: truthfulness discloses and unifies; striving embodies; presence returns

each hour to what is due to it; reflection gives insight; faith-building consolidates; growth weighs; tranquillity steadies; ardent love moves; and wholehearted turning gathers the heart in devotion to God. These are interwoven functions, not a tree in which one law absorbs all the others.

What we have offered is not a set of parallel Islamic theories, but distinct laws united by the root of servanthood and becoming. Faith-building is one of these laws, not a name that absorbs them all; it sets out how truth passes from knowledge to assent, to action, and to shakila.

The agent in this building is the single self: it understands through the aspect of the intellect, assents and intends through the aspect of the heart, works through its body, and opens out through the aspect of its spirit towards God and towards purpose. Change is therefore reducible neither to 'reviving the heart' alone nor to reprogramming the mind.

And there remains the question of the next chapter: how do certain abilities grow, and how do we distinguish between instrumental expansion, actualised perfection, and response to truth? We turn to this in the Law of Growth through Tazkiya, through a reading of the 'growth mindset'.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Law of Growth through Tazkiya

A Reading beyond the Growth Mindset

Part One: Growth through Tazkiya — Its Reality and Its Anatomy

Entry: what is growth in reality?

Many schools of self-development promise growth, but they do not all intend the same meaning by it. The question that precedes any comparison is: what is it in you that grows, and towards what? Does what you are able to do increase, or do truer knowledge, character, and orientation take shape within you? From this distinction the roads become clear, without any sweeping verdict upon every school.

The Law of Growth through Tazkiya is a formative, normative, conditional principle which holds that commendable human growth is not achieved merely by the expansion of instruments

or the intensification of powers, but when the self's powers and perfections grow and turn, in positive interaction, towards truth and servanthood. An increase in knowledge, will, or power together with a corrupted response is an intensification of becoming, not growth through tazkiya. Every growth through tazkiya is a commendable intensification of becoming, but not every intensification of becoming is growth through tazkiya.

We shall build the Law of Growth through Tazkiya as an independent principle: defining it, explaining its motive, method, and purpose, and then seeing where the 'growth mindset' falls in relation to it. That mindset is an instrument that captured the effect of believing that certain abilities are receptive to growth within fields of learning; it does not by itself carry a teleological definition of growth or of the tazkiya of the self.

The Law of Growth through Tazkiya is an Islamic formulation developed within the project resting upon revelation, upon fitra, and upon the discussions of ethics and wisdom; it is not derived from the growth mindset. This does not mean that it 'precedes' it chronologically in the same formulation, but that its point of reference is independent — and the modern instrument is then compared with it within the limits of its own field.

The reality of growth through tazkiya

Some modern conceptions describe growth as increased performance or the acquisition of new instruments. This law distinguishes receptivity, resources, and circumstances that widen the field of action from what has become knowledge, understanding, will, skill, or actual power within the self. It then distinguishes the response that directs these powers towards truth or towards desire: a person's becoming may intensify without undergoing tazkiya.

This meaning may be illuminated by the doctrine of 'substantial motion' in Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, a doctrine of the Transcendent Philosophy holding that gradual change is possible in the very substance of a material existent. The theory draws upon it in explaining how change may reach the very quality of the embodied self; but it is not a synonym for becoming or for growth through tazkiya, and it is not empirical evidence for them.

A person is in continual becoming, but not every movement is growth and not every increase is nearness. A habit or a skill may take shape, and a desire or an injustice may equally take root. Hence the question is asked about the nature of what has been realised in the self, about the orientation of the striving and the lawfulness of the means — not about the quantity of movement alone.

Growth, then, is not merely the addition of skills, nor merely a 'return to a complete true self'; it is a becoming whose effects touch knowledge, love, intention, settled disposition, and orientation. When patience takes root the self becomes more patient; when purpose becomes sincere the manner of using ability changes — while a person remains in need of review.

The Law of Growth through Tazkiya is a formative, normative, conditional principle which holds that commendable human growth is not achieved merely by the expansion of instruments or the intensification of powers, but when the self's powers and perfections grow and turn, in positive interaction, towards truth and servanthood. An increase in knowledge, will, or power together with a corrupted response is an intensification of becoming, not growth through tazkiya.

This law rests upon distinctive principles that should be read together before we turn to the details:

- A human being is a project of tazkiya, not a machine of achievement.
- Growth through tazkiya joins the cultivation of perfections to the soundness of response, and is not reducible to skill.
- Failure may become material for learning and self-accounting, not a final verdict upon a person's worth.
- Striving is a continuous process of growth, not a battle settled once.
- The purpose is success in its fullest sense, not achievement alone.

Fitra comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood; but it does not compel a person, nor does it prevent its own effects from being veiled by desire and environment. Tazkiya discloses what it requires and cultivates the perfections that accord with it: 'Successful is the one who purifies himself' (Q 87:14).

To clarify the difference we may imagine two people learning the same skill: one may seek praise, and the other may seek to discharge a trust. This is an analytical example, not a judgement upon the inner life of two particular people; God alone knows intention and practical scope. What is meant is that similar behaviour may differ in its orientation and in its formative effect.

Knowledge within this law: transformation, not storage

Knowledge is one of the gateways of growth when it becomes living knowledge that guides judgement and action. Among the

comprehensive supplications is: 'And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge' (Q 20:114). But an abundance of information does not purify a person by itself, and knowledge is virtuous only to the extent warranted by its soundness, its orientation, and its effect.

Transformation does not occur merely by information entering the intellect. A person may know the truth and not assent to it, and he may begin the work before his understanding is complete and thereby cultivate the heart and disclose the meaning. Becoming is a non-linear network of interactions between knowledge, assent, intention, action, and repetition; we therefore do not assume a single fixed course running from understanding to character.

The project draws, as a declared philosophical premise rather than an empirical claim, on the principle of 'the union of the knower and the known' in the Transcendent Philosophy: knowledge, at the level of its realisation, becomes a present quality in the self, not a thing placed beside it. This does not mean that every piece of information is a virtue, or that knowing evil makes the knower evil; it shows rather that change can reach the quality of the self.

True knowledge may bear the fruit of awe when it discloses God's greatness and the heart assents to him: 'It is only those of his servants who have knowledge who stand in awe of God' (Q 35:28). An abundance of information, by contrast, is not equivalent to wisdom or to awe, and may remain without action: 'The likeness of those who were charged with the Torah and then did not carry it is the likeness of a donkey carrying books' (Q 62:5).

The seeking of knowledge is therefore an open course, but not every new understanding is a step towards nearness. Knowledge brings a person near when it is true, when the heart assents to it, and when it is translated into action, mercy, and

humility. Knowledge that increases the capacity for self-justification or for injustice stands in need of review.

Its motive: intention and striving against the self

Growth is motivated by a truthful intention and striving that confronts desire and habit. Striving in Islam is wider than the struggle against the self, but this chapter focuses upon this gateway: that a person should strive against his heedlessness and his inclinations contrary to truth within his practical scope, without contempt for the self or denial of his body and its need for rest.

Its truest form is what passes in silence between you and yourself when you stand before an unrestrained desire, a familiar habit, or an inclination that makes the easier road attractive — and you hold yourself to what you dislike for the sake of what God loves. God therefore swore by this self-reproaching self: 'And I swear by the self that reproaches' (Q 75:2) — the self that has not surrendered to heedlessness, in which a voice remains that reviews, holds to account, and returns it to the road — and he set out its fruit: 'But as for the one who feared standing before his Lord and restrained the self from desire, the Garden is the refuge' (Q 79:40–41).

Intention is a governing element in the direction of an act, but it is not the sole measure of growth and does not make an unsound means sound. Growth through tazkiya is read in the perfections realised in the self, and in the truthfulness of its response to truth and servanthood according to the clarity given and the practical scope available. A small act may be great through its sincerity, but we do not calculate ranks, nor infer from a report a numerical measure of nearness.

This striving is a renewed course, but challenges are not automatic 'stations of ascent'. They may disclose what is in the self and open the possibility of learning, and they may wound

and require protection and treatment. Growth appears in the manner of one's response to truth, not in the mere occurrence of hardship.

When striving meets endeavour, lawful worldly motives — provision, learning, benefit, excellence — are ordered beneath the highest purpose rather than abolished. A person learns for God and for the service of people, works both for provision and to discharge the trust, and the road itself turns into a place of tazkiya if the intention, the means, and rights are sound.

Its method: failure, trial, and self-accounting

Errors, trials, and self-accounting enter the method of growth as possible materials for review, not as guaranteed gateways. Failure is an outcome requiring analysis; it may disclose a lack of skill, an external obstacle, or a moral error — and a person then chooses what falls within his practical scope by way of learning, repentance, or reform.

Repentance is a return to God after a deviation or a shortcoming that has become apparent, resting upon acknowledgement, remorse, desisting, resolve, and reform. It is not a 'daily ritual' without occasion, nor a mere resetting; a person renews his return whenever he finds what calls for it.

Self-accounting is a truthful examination of knowledge, intention, action, effect, and practical scope, and it may end in thanks, in correction, or in repentance. It may be organised at a suitable time, but a daily review is not to be imposed upon someone for whom it only increases obsessive scrutiny or exhaustion, and it must not turn into self-castigation.

Trial is a test that discloses and activates receptivities and opens the possibility of review, and it may arise through multiple causes. We do not assert that it is a 'means of cultivation' designed for each individual, or that every affliction was sent to

give him a particular lesson. We trust in God and search for the truth and for the action that is possible.

Maturity is not measured by the suppression of complaint or of grief. A person may feel pain, complain to God, and ask for the trial to be lifted, while remaining patient in holding to truth and without objection towards his Lord. The words 'We belong to God, and to him we return' (Q 2:156) restore the heart to dependence and to one's final end; they do not abolish the duty of treatment and reform.

The method thus becomes a renewed course rather than an inevitable chain: an error may disclose a need for self-accounting; self-accounting may open the door of repentance and reform; and the good then needs tending if it is to take root. Tazkiya does not mean infallibility or freedom from faults, but truthfulness of return and of work within one's practical scope whenever a place for correction is disclosed. Errors, then, are neither inevitable endings nor goods in themselves; but they may become materials for learning and repentance if a person responds to them truthfully.

Its purpose: from achievement to nearness

The purpose of growth is not merely that you should become more capable, but that the self's powers and perfections should grow and turn towards truth and servanthood. This is read in non-spatial nearness through what has actually been realised in the self and through the orientation of its response, in acceptance or refusal, according to clarification and practical scope; developing capacity alone may serve either nearness or distance. Vicegerency connects tazkiya with reform and action.

Tazkiya-oriented aspiration is a person's striving to develop his powers, competences, and achievements and to widen his impact within the purpose of servanthood and trust, so that

instrumental expansion serves growth through tazkiya rather than replacing it. There is no blame in seeking knowledge, provision, or excellence for a lawful purpose, so long as rights are preserved and the striving does not become independent of God.

Perfection is not a closed point but a graduated course within a creature's limits and dependence. The horizon of learning and of tazkiya is open by God's favour, but it does not make a person infinite in himself or capable of everything, and it does not demand of him a suffocating perfectionism.

Excellence is a truthful presence, sound execution, and servanthood — not perpetual superiority. If instrumental ability increases while justice, mercy, and truthfulness do not grow, the field of action has widened but growth is not complete. And if ability is ordered within truth, it becomes a trust serving realisation and response.

How growth through tazkiya appears in your day

The law becomes manifest in the details of the day when the purpose, the means, and rights are sound. Prayer may refine the self if it is established with its meaning; work may become an arena of excellence and service; remembrance renews the presence of God as the point of reference; relationships become a place for good character; and giving becomes a way of resisting avarice. But these effects are not automatic, and the outward form of an act is not enough to judge that they have been realised.

This does not mean neglecting the world. Initial resources and capacities — such as wealth, bodily potential, and opportunities — widen the field of action; knowledge, will, skill, or power that has become a settled, actual quality within the self enters into actualised perfection. All of this may be used in truth or in falsehood, and the orientation of response

determines its ethical and spiritual value. Neither a resource nor a settled disposition is therefore a station of nearness in itself.

Not every professional or health-related development, therefore, becomes tazkiya automatically. It enters into growth through tazkiya when its purpose, its means, and its regard for rights are sound, and when it cultivates a perfection or helps towards a truthful response. Some learning may be permissible and beneficial without being called a spiritual station.

How to build your growth through tazkiya

Let us bring this into practice. Imagine ‘Mazin’, a young man learning a difficult skill who stumbles repeatedly until he almost abandons it. If he remains captive to the logic of achievement alone, he will understand his stumbling as a failure that passes judgement upon him. Here are six steps that move him — and move you — towards growth through tazkiya:

First: correct your intention and your purpose. Ask why you are learning, and do not make every desire for recognition a form of ostentation or every worldly aim blameworthy; an intention may gather provision, benefit, and excellence under God’s pleasure as its point of reference.

Second: redefine success. Measure the plan by what you have learned, by the effort you made within your practical scope, and by the lawfulness of the road — not by the outcome alone. Stumbling is not called success, but it does not pass judgement upon a person’s worth, and it may disclose a step towards correction.

Third: hold yourself to account gently. Review your knowledge, your purpose, your work, its effect, and your practical scope at a time that suits you, and reinforce the good as you

remedy the shortcoming. Do not make self-accounting an obsessive examination or a total verdict upon yourself.

Fourth: learn from failure where there is something in it to be learned. Ask about the fault, the obstacle, the environment, and the ability available; you may need to change the goal or seek help rather than insist upon the same road.

Fifth: place learning within servanthood. Work may become worship through a lawful intention, sound execution, and regard for rights — but it does not literally turn into prayer, and intention does not make an unsound means sound.

Sixth: take account of the body, the environment, and opportunities. Growth is not made by decision alone; you may need sleep, treatment, training, support, or protection from a harmful environment. These preconditions are part of striving when they are known and available.

The six steps above correspond to the pillars of the law: correcting the intention, identifying the field of growth, building capacity, self-accounting, making use of stumbling, and bringing learning within servanthood. They are not a recipe guaranteeing deep transformation, but conditional guiding principles practised within one's practical scope and reviewed against reality.

Part Two: Where Does the 'Growth Mindset' Fall?

The growth mindset: an instrument identified in the West

The growth mindset draws attention to the fact that certain abilities can be developed through effort, strategies, and feedback — not that every ability can grow without limit. We

therefore distinguish receptivity, preparedness, actual capacity, and practical scope.

Receptivity is the field of possibility; preparedness is the degree of readiness; actual capacity is what a person can do or refrain from doing now; and practical scope is what responsibility rests upon in the person's real circumstances, whether by acting, refraining, or putting in place the available prerequisites. Upper limits are not inferred from a single performance, nor is a person blamed for what they lacked the conditions to attain.

Point of comparison	The Fixed Mindset	The Growth Mindset
Abilities	Fixed characteristics that do not change	Develop through effort and learning
Challenge	Avoided for fear of failure	Welcomed as an opportunity for growth
Failure	Evidence of a deficiency in competence	An experience disclosing where learning is needed
Effort	Given little value compared with the outcome	The basis of sustainable success

Effort is effective within a network that includes body, education, environment, time, and instruments. It is therefore not enough to tell someone deprived of the conditions that make effort effective to 'believe in growth'; a fair opportunity and appropriate support must be provided as far as possible.

A sound instrument, but a truncated one

The problem with the growth mindset is not what some studies indicate about the effect of beliefs upon learning, but its inflation when it is presented as a general key to growth.

Psychological research tests the instrument in specific fields; it neither establishes nor refutes the Law of Growth through Tazkiya. The law, in the project's formulation, adds the reference of intention, tazkiya, purpose, and practical scope, drawing upon its Islamic sources.

On one side, a national observational study of more than 160,000 students in Chile found an association between a growth mindset and achievement across social groups, with the association notable among lower-income students.[1] A smaller longitudinal study combined observation with an educational intervention and found improvements in motivation and some grade trajectories. These are encouraging findings, but they are not sufficient by themselves to establish a fixed general effect.[2]

On the other side, reviews show that the average effect on achievement is small and variable.[3] A recent systematic review concluded that the effect weakens considerably when attention is restricted to higher-quality studies and those showing clearer evidence of changing mindset itself, while scientific debate about variation and context continues.[4] Educational research

1 S. Claro, D. Paunesku, and C. S. Dweck, "Growth Mindset Tempers the Effects of Poverty on Academic Achievement," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 31 (2016): 8664–8668.

2 L. S. Blackwell, K. H. Trzesniewski, and C. S. Dweck, "Implicit Theories of Intelligence Predict Achievement across an Adolescent Transition: A Longitudinal Study and an Intervention," *Child Development* 78, no. 1 (2007): 246–263.

3 V. F. Sisk et al., "To What Extent and Under Which Circumstances Are Growth Mind-Sets Important to Academic Achievement? Two Meta-Analyses," *Psychological Science* 29, no. 4 (2018): 549–571. The analyses found a small effect that varied by context.

4 B. N. Macnamara and A. P. Burgoyne, "Do Growth Mindset Interventions Impact Students' Academic Achievement? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis with Recommendations for Best Practices," *Psychological Bulletin* 149, nos. 3–4 (2023): 133–173. The review concluded that the apparent effect is influenced by design quality and possible publication bias, while methodological debate about the variation continues.

has also shown that how the message is presented and how the teacher behaves may affect its outcome, and that some responses may discourage rather than motivate.[5]

The scientific critique of the growth mindset does not of itself testify in favour of growth through tazkiya; it determines the instrument's field and prevents its being generalised. Benefiting from it remains possible in some areas of learning, while the meaning of growth is referred back to tazkiya, to perfection, and to response to truth.

In evaluating growth we take into account the starting point, the body and the psychological state, upbringing and environment, and opportunities, clarity, and practical scope. We therefore do not compare two people superficially, and we do not say that a person can overcome every failure by will alone.

How growth through tazkiya embraces and completes it

The law reads growth in a positive interaction between the powers and perfections realised in the self and its response to truth and servanthood. An increase in knowledge, will, or power together with a corrupted orientation is an intensification of becoming, not growth through tazkiya; motive, method, and purpose are explanatory elements, not a substitute for this structure.

The law may have a deep practical effect, but it does not guarantee an outcome or its endurance. It requires knowledge, action, remembrance, environment, and treatment when

5 A. Rattan, C. Good, and C. S. Dweck, "'It's OK—Not Everyone Can Be Good at Math': Instructors with an Entity Theory Comfort (and Demotivate) Students," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 3 (2012): 731–737.

needed, and the support of God, who opens the road without abolishing his established patterns.

In the example we do not judge a particular student to have become more firmly rooted or nearer than another; we say rather that redefining ability, building a plan, reviewing one's intention, and seeking support may change his response and widen his capacity.

The following table clarifies the instrument's place within the structure:

Element	The 'Growth Mindset' (an instrument)	Its place within Growth through Tazkiya (a law)
Stance towards ability	Ability grows through effort	Some abilities grow according to receptivity, preparedness, environment, and effort; what becomes established becomes an actual quality within the self
Stance towards error	Error is an opportunity for learning	It may be a place for learning, repentance, or reform — not an automatic gateway to nearness
Motive	Personal drive for achievement	Intention and striving in truth, with due regard for the body, the environment, and practical scope
Method	—	Trial, self-accounting, and repentance each in its place, not an inevitable chain

Element	The 'Growth Mindset' (an instrument)	Its place within Growth through Tazkiya (a law)
Purpose	Achievement and competence	The growth of the self's powers and perfections in a positive response to truth and servanthood
Upshot	A useful but limited instrument	A framework distinguishing growth through tazkiya from the intensification of knowledge, will, or power with a corrupted orientation

The table shows that the growth mindset is an instrument concerning belief in the possibility of developing certain abilities, whereas the Law of Growth through Tazkiya is a teleological framework that distinguishes instrumental expansion from realised powers, then weighs the orientation of response. A person's knowledge, will, or power may increase while his orientation is corrupted; his becoming thus intensifies without growing through tazkiya.

Conclusion

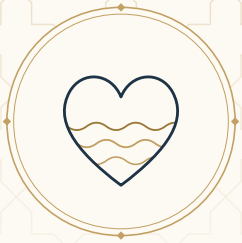
The Law of Growth through Tazkiya: commendable human growth is not achieved merely by the expansion of instruments or the intensification of powers, but when the self's powers and perfections grow and turn towards truth and servanthood. An increase in knowledge, will, or power together with a corrupted response is an intensification of becoming, not growth through tazkiya.

The growth mindset offers an important instrument in some fields of learning, but it does not by itself offer a teleological definition of growth. Nor do we generalise the verdict to every

form of Western self-development; we determine what the Islamic vision adds to this particular model.

Real growth is not that your instruments alone should widen, but that your perfections should grow, that your response should be truthful, and that your instruments should be directed towards truth and towards service.

When this is realised, your non-spatial nearness to God increases: as perfection within the self and as servanthood in response, while your dependence, limits, and need of his favour remain.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Law of Inner Tranquillity

A Reading beyond Positive Psychology

Part One: The Law of Inner Tranquillity — Its Reality and Its Pillars

Entry: where does the heart come to rest?

Never has a person possessed such means of comfort, nor such scope in shaping his life; and yet he does not appear to have grown more still. The question of happiness has become a daily question rather than a distant theoretical one: how does a person keep his calm? How does he remain whole under pressure? Yet there is a hidden flaw in this question when it makes happiness a feeling sought for its own sake, as though it were a state to be seized if one arranges one's day well, trains oneself in optimism, or watches one's feelings continually. The

more feeling becomes the end, the more the heart grows attached to what changes.

Many have noticed that whoever makes happiness a direct goal may find himself further from it — not because he does not want it, but because he has come to search for it at every moment, to measure himself by it, and to ask himself: am I happy enough? The pursuit of happiness thus turns into a new gateway of anxiety. Stillness does not settle when it is chased as a passing feeling; for if it is attached to circumstance it is shaken with it, and if it is attached to what a person owns it vanishes when that vanishes. This chapter therefore begins from a different starting point: perhaps the deeper question is not how I may produce a better feeling, but where the heart finds its place of rest.

The Law of Inner Tranquillity is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that the tranquillity of the self increases to the extent that its knowledge of God and remembrance of him become firmly established, its powers and orientation are ordered within servanthood, and the perfections realised within it interact positively with its response to truth. Its point of reference settles in God while sorrow, fear, and pain may remain. Tranquillity is an original fruit and a graduated manifestation of nearness, not emotional calm and not an outward measure for ranking people.

The reality of tranquillity

Tranquillity is the settledness of the self and heart in God along the path, and the rootedness of its point of reference in knowledge, resolve, and orientation, so that it does not make

events, means, and outcomes its final authority. It is a genuine spiritual station that may increase with nearness, even when the appearance of emotional calm is delayed by the body, pain, or illness.

Tranquillity is not attained by chasing a feeling; it is tended through faith, remembrance, action, reliance, and the ordering of powers and orientation. It is an original fruit and a graduated manifestation of nearness, not a guarantee of immediate ease or an outward measure for ranking people.

Happiness in this law is not merely an emotional effect but the soundness of the self and its realisation of the perfection befitting its fitra, and its ordering within truth and servanthood. The good life may coexist with pain, and it does not mean freedom from illness or grief.

Tranquillity, then, is not the opposite of pain, and it is not 'the opposite of being lost' in a way that judges one who suffers to be lost. It is the constancy of one's point of reference and orientation; the feeling of it may weaken because of the body or of trauma, while faith and the capacity to return remain.

Tranquillity is clear in the stance of Moses (peace be upon him) at the sea: the danger was present and the road was not visible, and he said: 'No indeed. My Lord is with me; he will guide me' (Q 26:62). This is a particular instance of divine accompaniment and guidance given to a prophet in his own situation, not a rule guaranteeing that the outcome a person wants will open for him whenever the means are closed. What we learn is the referring of the heart back to God together with the use of means — not a denial of danger or a claim to know the outcome.

Tranquillity appears likewise on the night when the idolaters surrounded the house of the Prophet (may God bless him and his family), intending to kill him, and ʿAli (peace be upon him) slept in his bed. This was not the sleep of one who does not know the danger, nor the stillness of one from whom the

reality of the moment was hidden; it was the tranquillity of one who knew to whom he was surrendering himself, and on which road he was setting out. Tranquillity here is not that danger should disappear from outside, but that the heart should settle from within upon a meaning greater than the danger. That stance thus became a witness to a self that does not measure its peace by what surrounds it but by what it rests in — a self that placed God's pleasure, the safeguarding of the message, and fidelity to the Prophet above calculations of individual survival.[1]

This tranquillity also appears among the companions of the Messenger of God (may God bless him and his family) at the expedition of Hamra al-Asad, after Uhud, when fear was meant to enter upon them through the gate of massed forces and threat, and it was said to them: 'The people have gathered against you, so fear them' (Q 3:173). They had gone out with the marks of their wounds upon them, and the outward situation invited withdrawal and retreat; but the news did not increase their disturbance — it increased their faith, and they said: 'God is sufficient for us, and an excellent guardian is he' (Q 3:173). Tranquillity, then, is not that a believer should hear nothing frightening or see nothing threatening, but that there should be in his heart what is firmer than the frightening news and the threatening circumstance.[2]

These examples show that tranquillity does not deny reality or danger; it makes the heart return to God while taking up the

1 The event of the night when ʿAli slept in the Prophet's bed is well known in the biographical and exegetical literature; see the *Sīra of Ibn Hishām*, the *Tafsīr of al-Qummī*, and *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl* of al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī, on the revelation of God's words 'And among people is one who sells himself seeking God's pleasure' (Q 2:207) concerning ʿAli (peace be upon him).

2 On the Muslims' going out to Ḥamrāʾ al-Asad on the morrow of Uḥud, God's words were revealed: 'Those who responded to God and the Messenger after injury had befallen them' and what follows (Q 3:172–174); see *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* of al-Ṭabrisī, and the *Sīra of Ibn Hishām*.

means. And we do not infer from a heroic stance that a believer does not fear or that danger does not affect him; we see rather the possibility of a steadfast orientation alongside fear.

Tranquillity grows through a network rather than an automatic ladder: faith and certainty, remembrance, reliance, fear and hope, patience, contentment, submission, doing good, and action. Some of these stations may precede others or overlap with them, and their completeness is not to be judged from outward appearance.

The first pillar: faith — the source of tranquillity

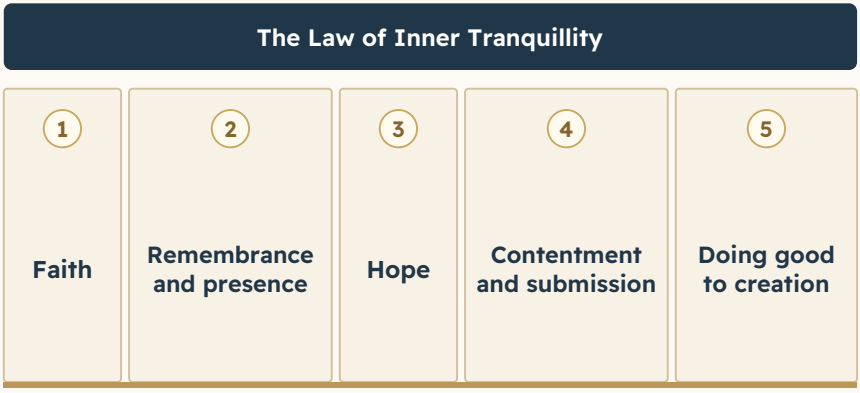
The root of tranquillity is that God should be the heart's point of reference, but disturbance is not reduced to a single cause: bodily, psychological, and social factors may all be at work. Faith is the heart's binding itself to truth, submitting to it, and taking it as a reference for life; its truthfulness and rootedness appear in intention, action, and following. Stillness remains a favour from God, not a substitute for diagnosis and treatment.

God's words 'It is he who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers…' (Q 48:4) refer stillness to God's favour. They do not mean that every anxiety is caused by weakness in one's bond with God, or that medicine and treatment contradict it. Tranquillity grows through divine aid and striving, and an illness requiring specialist care may remain alongside it.

The words of Imam ʿAli (peace be upon him), 'The root of the heart's strength is reliance upon God', set out the heart's point of reference; they do not promise that it will never be disturbed. Reliance is dependence upon God together with the taking up of means — and the means may include treatment, protection, or the seeking of help.[3]

3 From the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAli (peace be upon him); *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim* of al-Āmidī.

Faith returns a person to what fitra and truth require, and restores to the heart its highest point of reference. By contrast, life may grow narrow from within when attachment takes command of a person: he seeks wealth in order to feel safe, and then the fear of losing it is present in every decision; or he seeks people's acceptance, and is not content until he has guaranteed what he has no power to guarantee. The flaw lies neither in provision nor in relationships nor in natural need, but in a limited object of desire becoming a point of reference that governs the heart and competes with truth.



The five pillars of the Law of Inner Tranquillity

God Almighty says: 'And whoever turns away from my remembrance shall have a straitened life' (Q 20:124). In the worldly aspect we are explaining here, this straitness may coexist with an abundance of possessions, because the constriction lies in the manner of seeking and attachment, not in a lack of money alone. The turning away from guidance and remembrance intended here is not merely being occupied with lawful work or a passing distraction. This is one way of understanding the verse, not an exhaustive account of what has been said in its interpretation.

In the light of God's words, 'And we shall certainly make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater punishment, that they may return' (Q 32:21), the book proposes that some distress arising from turning away and the tyranny of attachment may fall among the forms of the nearer punishment that alert a person to return. This is a proposed interpretive synthesis identifying some possible instances, not an explicit text naming every anxiety or distress as the nearer punishment, nor a diagnosis of any particular person's condition.

Opening the door of return does not mean that a person will inevitably enter it. He may review what has enslaved him, or grow more entrenched in justification and attachment. Nor is torment through attachments synonymous with an alert: in some contexts it may be associated with the granting of respite and with being drawn on gradually towards ruin. Pain alone therefore does not disclose a particular message that we know, just as abundance and ease alone do not indicate God's pleasure.

Returning here is a return to what servanthood and the pledge require, not merely to a comfortable feeling. Prayer, remembrance, and right action reorient the self, while inner truthfulness explains how it accepts what has become clear to it and acts upon it. Remorse and hardship may accompany this, and a believer may be in pain or ill while remaining truthful in faith. The need for treatment, protection, and support therefore remains fully recognised, and not every experience of distress is attributed to weak faith.

The second pillar: remembrance and presence — from the self's attention to God as the point of reference

Remembrance is the presence of God, of his names, his signs, his command, his promise, and the purpose of servanthood

within the awareness and the heart of the self — a presence that shapes understanding, love, intention, and action. It is not an exit from 'the circle of the self' or an anxious monitoring of the heart, and it does not require explicit thought of God every second.

The Qur'an does not separate remembrance from the movement of life: a person disperses through the earth and seeks provision, while God remains the point of reference governing his intention and limits. He may become heedless and then recollect; and being occupied with lawful work does not mean he has lost his presence.

Reflection adds to attention the consideration of revelation, the cosmos, and the self with consequence held in view. It does not seek an emptying of the mind and does not guarantee tranquillity. Remembrance renews the heart's point of reference, while the body's right to rest and treatment remains.

The tradition on excellence cultivates an awareness of God in one's work, not a claim of 'witnessing' or of spatial companionship. This presence may help towards calm, but it does not make a person independent of himself or of the support of others.

The third pillar: hope — when thinking well of God becomes a stance

Hope is not an expectation that tomorrow will be as you wish, but the heart's looking towards God's mercy, his guidance, and his acceptance, together with striving. The future may be harder, and hope remains what prevents despair and impels a person towards action.

Thinking well of God does not mean thinking well of every outcome or denying the possibility of pain. It is trust in his justice, his mercy, and his wisdom, without any guarantee of a particular form of relief.

Fear born of faith awakens one to the consequence of falling short and is not equivalent to clinical anxiety. It is balanced with hope; and we do not judge the strength of a person's faith by the measure of his fear or of his calm.

The fourth pillar: contentment and submission — two distinct stations

God Almighty says: 'It may be that you dislike a thing and it is good for you...' (Q 2:216). The verse opens the possibility that our knowledge falls short and that outcomes may run contrary to our estimation; but it does not permit us to specify that any particular disliked thing is a manifest good, or that we know its particular wisdom.

The Supplication of Iftitah brings this meaning near to the heart of the one who prays when it says: 'I presume upon you in what I have sought from you; if it is delayed from me, I reproach you in my ignorance, though perhaps what has been delayed from me is better for me, because you know the outcome of all things.'[4] The one supplicating here does not deny that he asked, and does not pretend that the delay of what he sought causes him no pain; but he discovers that his reproach came from the narrowness of his knowledge, not from any deficiency in his Lord's mercy. What has been delayed from him may be the good he cannot see now — not because his desire was false, but because God's knowledge of outcomes is wider than his haste.

Contentment is the heart's stillness in God and the absence of resentment and objection towards him in what he has decreed and ordained, together with trust in his justice, his wisdom, and his mercy. It does not mean loving pain for its own

4 The Supplication of Iftitāḥ: among the supplications of the nights of Ramaḍān; related by Ibn Ṭāwūs in *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*, and given by al-Kafʿamī in *al-Miṣbāḥ* and *al-Balad al-Amīn*.

sake, or approving injustice, or abandoning whatever remains within one's practical scope by way of treatment and reform. Patience, meanwhile, is the self's constancy in holding to truth despite the cost; the two may come together without either being a definition of the other. The Prophet (may God bless him and his family) said: 'Wondrous is the affair of the believer: all of his affair is good for him, and this belongs to no one but the believer. If ease befalls him, he gives thanks and it is good for him; if hardship befalls him, he is patient and it is good for him.'

Contentment with what one has does not mean abandoning ambition or accepting injustice; it means that the self is not enslaved by what is in people's hands, while lawful striving to improve one's situation and to render what is due continues.

The secret of this contentment is that a person knows his life is not adrift, and that what occurs within it lies inside God's knowledge and not outside it: 'No misfortune strikes in the earth or in yourselves but it is in a record... so that you may not grieve over what has escaped you nor exult over what he has given you' (Q 57:22–23). Whoever believes this does not prevent grief from entering his heart, but prevents it from taking command of him; and he does not prevent joy from visiting him, but prevents it from throwing him off balance. This is the stillness of contentment: that a person should live between loss and gift, so that loss does not swallow him and gift does not make him overstep.

The fifth pillar: doing good to creation — a tranquillity that overflows to others

Mercy, doing good, and sound relationships may support psychological and spiritual stability, but they do not produce tranquillity automatically, and a person's standing is not measured by the extent of his social activity.

A person may be tranquil while his relationships are few, and may be disturbed amid people's love — because tranquillity is bound to the self's point of reference and its orientation, while being genuinely affected by body, environment, and support.

The counsel to give must therefore not burden one who is in pain with the responsibility of healing himself by serving others. He begins by safeguarding his body and his rights and by seeking treatment, and then gives to the extent of his practical scope.

Tranquillity grows through certainty, faith, remembrance, reliance, patience, contentment, submission, and truthful work. Fear and hope are two wings within it, not its opposites; and the tranquillity of the road may begin before the change of habits and emotions is complete.

From the law to life

Now that the pillars of the Law of Inner Tranquillity have become clear, the question remains: how does this meaning pass from conception into life? Tranquillity is not built by a passing decision or by a set of swift procedures; it is cultivated in the heart when its orientation changes, and this is then reflected in how a person views himself, his day, and whatever straitness and ease he meets.

Let us bring the meaning near through the figure of 'Hani', a man weighed down by pressures who came to seek calm wherever he could: he reads about relaxation, tries gratitude exercises, and attempts to think positively, growing calm for a while before the anxiety returns to him anew. The flaw is not in everything he tried; many of these means may help a person in their place. But something deeper remained without an answer: where does the heart come to rest when the means are not enough? And to whom does it return when the self grows weary of managing itself?

Correct your point of reference. Hani no longer asks only: when will my life grow calm? But: how do I make God my heart's point of reference within it? This is the beginning of the practical effect of faith — that a person should not seek his stillness from circumstance alone. Tranquillity is not waiting for a world without pressure, nor a permanent emotional connection, but the settling of one's orientation in God while work and treatment continue.

Be present with your heart. Give remembrance a living place in your day as a repeated return to your point of reference, not as a flight from life. In work, in provision, and in preoccupations the heart needs to bring to mind God's command and his promise; distraction may lessen and may remain — what is intended is that the point of reference should continue to shape understanding and choice.

Think well of God in straitness. The hardship he used to read as a closed ending he began to see as a passage whose end he cannot yet discern. This does not mean that he ceased to feel pain, or came to see everything as easy; but he became certain that what he sees is not the whole truth, and that God's mercy is wider than the narrowness of the moment. Here hope turns from a phrase with which he consoles himself into a stance of the heart by which he holds firm when available means grow scarce.

Review causes and orientation together. Neither Hani nor you are required to search for a sin behind every painful feeling. Ask first what you need by way of treatment, protection, rest, or support, and then what has actually become clear in your conduct: has a fear or an attachment come to govern your decision at the expense of a truth you know? The distress itself is not evidence of the answer. A violation may become clear from a word or an act, while the causes of the pain may remain unclear.

If an error becomes clear to you, move from knowing it to a response within your practical scope: repenting, restoring what is due, changing a habit, or seeking help. Then reinforce this response through remembrance, action, and review. A text, a word of counsel, or a blessing may awaken you to it; do not wait for pain before you begin, and do not make relief from the feeling the purpose of returning.

Distinguish, too, between distress that may be connected with turning away, hardship that may accompany facing an error and returning, and suffering whose cause you do not know. These considerations may overlap, and you cannot diagnose them from feeling alone. The persistence of pain does not condemn your repentance, and its disappearance does not by itself bear witness to the soundness of your orientation. What matters is what has become clear to you and how you respond to it.

Contentment is the heart's stillness in God without objection, while pain remains and striving in treatment and reform continues. Submission is yielding to truth and entrusting the matter and its outcome to God after doing what lies within one's practical scope. The two may come together, but neither is a definition of the other.

Move beyond preoccupation with your own concerns by giving within your practical scope. Doing good may help some people gain a wider view and withdraw less into themselves, but it does not treat every pain and should not become a flight from the need for treatment or rest. Within it the rights of the self, the body, the family, and the one being helped are all preserved.

After a time, what had changed in Hani was not that his pressures had all gone — some of them remained as they were — but that his relation to them had changed: he came to carry his concern with a heart that remains turned towards God, and to face what he faces without allowing it to define his whole life. This is

tranquillity: not that life should be free of pain, but that the heart should rest in God even when life is not.

Part Two: Where Does 'Positive Psychology' Fall?

Positive psychology: a useful human endeavour

Now that the Law of Inner Tranquillity has been built from within, we turn to the most prominent contribution of modern psychology in the field of happiness and human flourishing: what has become known as 'positive psychology'. This current emerged in the late 1990s with Martin Seligman, in an attempt to move psychology from an exclusive focus on treating illness and disorder to a wider question: what makes life more meaningful and more balanced? Psychological health thereby ceased to be understood as the absence of illness alone and came to be understood as the presence of meaning, of relationship, of gratitude, and of a capacity to live better.[5]

This shift of attention was useful at its root: it was important that a person should not be reduced to his illness, and that psychological enquiry should not remain occupied only with what breaks within the self. Hence Seligman formulated a model of flourishing resting upon dimensions known by the abbreviation PERMA: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment; and practices such as gratitude, the cultivation of strengths, the building of resilience, and the care of relationships entered this domain.[6] These are meanings

5 M. E. P. Seligman and M. Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 5–14.

6 M. E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York: Free Press, 2011).

Islam does not reject, and whose value it does not diminish when they are placed where they belong.

The deeper difference concerning the meaning of 'the good life' is not established by a mere similarity of phrase: the Islamic vision binds it to faith and right action and does not reduce it to a pleasant feeling. This framework places pain within trial and servanthood without claiming to know the particular wisdom of every pain or asking one who is hurt to deny it.

Useful instruments and their teleological limits

Positive psychology offers useful instruments in gratitude, strengths, meaning, and relationships, but it does not by itself determine the existential purpose or the meaning of servanthood. Our critique concerns the limits of the model; it neither denies all its findings nor judges its effect to be always superficial.

Reviews indicate that some positive-psychology interventions may improve aspects of wellbeing, while effect sizes vary, may be small, and are affected by the quality of the studies and samples. These are considerable goods within their own field, but we do not confuse them with the tranquillity of faith or with existential happiness, and we do not make them a substitute for treatment when someone is ill.[7]

7 R. A. Emmons and M. E. McCullough, "Counting Blessings versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 2 (2003): 377–389. B. L. Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions," *American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (2001): 218–226. M. E. P. Seligman, T. A. Steen, N. Park, and C. Peterson, "Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 5 (2005): 410–421. J. Holt-Lunstad, T. B. Smith, and J. B. Layton, "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review," *PLOS Medicine* 7, no. 7 (2010): e1000316.

The average effects of these interventions may also be limited and variable, and the findings are affected by method and context.[8] This calls for moderation — not for saying that every effect is brief or false.[9]

The difference between an instrument and a law lies in reference, purpose, and limits: an instrument may order a feeling or a behaviour, while the law places that within faith, remembrance, rights, and servanthood — without guaranteeing that the effect will endure.

Tranquillity is not independent of the body and of circumstances in the sense of being unaffected by them: a person may fall ill, or be exhausted, or need safety and treatment. But it is not reducible to these states, because the self's point of reference may remain in God even while it is disturbed.

How the Law of Inner Tranquillity embraces and completes it

Positive emotions are not reduced to a worthless 'shadow'; they are goods that may help towards work and relationships. But they are not the criterion of truth, nor the whole purpose of happiness.

Tranquillity is not 'seeing God in everything' in the sense of claiming mystical unveiling. It is the settled presence of God as the point of reference in the heart, the intellect, and action,

8 C. A. White, B. Uttl, and M. D. Holder, "Meta-Analyses of Positive Psychology Interventions: The Effects Are Much Smaller Than Previously Reported," PLOS ONE 14, no. 5 (2019): e0216588. After adjustment for small-sample bias, effects on wellbeing were small, while results for depression were more variable and more sensitive to outliers.

9 P. T. P. Wong, "Positive Psychology 2.0: Towards a Balanced Interactive Model of the Good Life," *Canadian Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2011): 69–81; see also B. S. Held, "The Negative Side of Positive Psychology," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 44, no. 1 (2004): 9–46.

and trust in God without claiming to read the particular unseen.

Remembrance restores presence and strengthens the road, but it does not prevent flagging and does not guarantee that the self will not weaken. A person therefore needs renewal, a supportive environment, and treatment when necessary.

The following table clarifies the instrument's place within the structure:

Axis	Positive Psychology (an instrument)	The Law of Inner Tranquillity (an integrated structure)
Source of happiness	Feelings, relationships, meaning, and achievement, to be cultivated	Happiness is the more encompassing soundness of the self; tranquillity is the settling of its point of reference in God
Meaning of success	Self-realisation and personal flourishing	Non-spatial nearness and the discharge of the trust, without numerical measurement or judgement upon persons
Meaning of hope	Optimism and a mental expectation about the future	Hope and thinking well of God
Meaning of pain	A burden to be managed, lightened, and reinterpreted	May accompany trial or returning; this reading proposes that some distress of turning away may alert a person to return, without generalisation or individual diagnosis.

Axis	Positive Psychology (an instrument)	The Law of Inner Tranquillity (an integrated structure)
Meaning of contentment	A psychological acceptance of reality and an improved view of it	Contentment is the heart's stillness in God; submission is entrusting the outcome to him after striving
Meaning of relationships	Psychological support and belonging	Kinship, character, doing good, and tazkiya
Where the course leads	Wellbeing and quality of life, affected by circumstance	Tranquillity is an original fruit and a graduated manifestation of nearness; happiness in its wider sense is the soundness of the self in truth and servanthood

Tranquillity is sought as a perfection and a proximate purpose, and it is also a favour and a fruit. We therefore neither make it 'a gift only' in a way that cancels striving, nor a technical project that a person carries out on his own.

Conclusion

Happiness is not that life should be free of pain, nor that the self should be compelled to see the world as beautiful in every state. True happiness is the perfection of the self and its ordering within truth and servanthood, and it may coexist with grief and with illness.[10]

And when pain occurs we do not claim that it has a particular meaning that we know. We ask what truth requires and what lies within our practical scope; we trust in God and seek

10 From her words (peace be upon her) in the assembly of Ibn Ziyād in Kūfa; see *al-Luhūf ʿalā Qatlā al-Ṭufūf* of Ibn Ṭāwūs, and *Muthīr al-Aḥzān* of Ibn Namā al-Ḥillī.

treatment and help; and we may gain experience or find mercy through it without making that an explanation of the decree.

Tranquillity is not that you should always see life as beautiful, but that the self should settle in God and in truth, and remain able to return and to work even when its feelings are disturbed.

This is the compass that reorders the inner life in a world oscillating between anxiety and breathless pursuit: 'Those who believe, and whose hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of God — truly, in the remembrance of God hearts find tranquillity' (Q 13:28).

Nor is this stillness an isolated concept; it is one face of the self's movement towards God. And if this law has set out the point of reference for tranquillity, another question awaits us: what moves the self to act and continue its journey? From here we enter, in the next chapter, the field of motivation and self-determination theory.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Law of Ardent Love of God

A Reading beyond Self-Determination Theory

Part One: The Law of Ardent Love of God — Its Reality and Its Pillars

Entry: what really moves you?

In the previous chapter you learned that tranquillity is the self's settling in God and in truth, that it grows through remembrance, faith, and action, and that it is not reducible to calm circumstances. The tranquil self does not sit back from striving; it knows its point of reference and then works. From here we ask: what is the impulse that raises a person up, preserves his orientation when enthusiasm weakens, and helps him perform work well even when no one sees it?

The familiar answer is close at hand: you move because you desire, or because you await a reward, or because you have a

psychological need seeking satisfaction. All of this is true in its place, but it does not reach the root of the matter. Desire is extinguished, reward disappears, and a need may be satisfied and grow quiet — and yet there remains in a person something deeper than all of that: an impulse that satisfaction alone does not explain and achievement alone does not preserve. What is this impulse?

Take a compass whose needle inclines in one direction: it is an approximate image, not a mechanical description of fitra. Within the human being is a fitra that prepares him to seek perfection and servanthood, but it may be veiled or its objects misidentified. We name the intensity of divine love, governed by servanthood, God's transcendence, and the revealed law, 'ardent love of God' in this law — not an unrestrained emotion or union.[1]

Let us hold to a single example that will accompany us through this chapter: an employee in a strict institution, performing precise work, unable to change his method, and receiving neither praise nor promotion for his excellence. What keeps him doing well when the supervisor is absent and the reward is absent? We shall return to him at each pillar, because his example reveals the law in the reality of work rather than as an abstract idea.

The definition of the law

The Law of Ardent Love of God is a formative, motivational, conditional principle which holds that established knowledge of God, his perfection, and his

1 *al-Kāfī*, Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on worship; and from it: al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, vol. 1 (Islamiyya edition), p. 61.

beneficence, together with a person's awareness of dependence upon him, prepares love for God to intensify and become the highest motive, reordering loves, needs, and capacities around the purpose of servanthood. Its truthfulness appears in preferring God's will when there is a conflict, while rights and lawful loves are preserved.

The more general term in the definitions is 'divine love'; 'ardent love' is the name of the law and denotes the intensity of a love governed by these conditions. Love is not measured by the heat of rapture, but by following, by the ordering of what one loves, and by rights.

First: fitra is a general presential root and an original orientation, not a compelling drive

Fitra is a distinctive mode of human creation. It comprises a general, non-conceptual presential awareness of truth, an original love of absolute perfection, and an orientation towards servanthood. It is neither detailed conceptual knowledge nor completed religious awareness; its manifestation and the identification of its object therefore require revelation, intellect, and tazkiya. A person does not therefore return to God automatically, nor is his love complete merely by virtue of the root of fitra; it grows through revelation, the intellect, remembrance, and action.

Ontological dependence is a universal reality in every creature, not an acquired station or evidence of love. Love, by contrast, increases through knowledge, remembrance, and action, without making the creature infinite or independent of God.

But the presence of this inclination in a person's root does not mean that its orientation is always pure. Love may turn towards

what does not deserve it, and the heart may be divided among many rivals: an image, status, recognition, achievement, or power. The Qur'an therefore distinguishes between a love scattered among things other than God and a love united in devotion to God: 'Among people are those who take others besides God as rivals, loving them as they should love God; but those who believe are stronger in love for God' (Q 2:165). The issue is not merely that the heart should move, but that the heart should know who deserves its love. It is therefore not enough for a motive to be internal, for the inner life itself may require tazkiya, lest its movement turn into a new attachment to what is other than God.

Second: love and longing — the ordering of fear and hope

The motive of worship may at its beginning be mixed with fear and hope, and it is not required that it be 'purified' of them; they are two lawful stations that awaken the heart, and love refines and orders them rather than abolishing them. People differ in their motives, and we do not rank their inner states.[2]

This love does not remain an inner claim without witness, nor does it turn into a rapture severed from the road; it is tested by following. The Qur'anic balance is therefore decisive: 'Say: If you love God, then follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is forgiving, merciful' (Q 3:31). Love in the Islamic vision is not severed from obedience and does not exempt the one who has it from what is commanded and forbidden; it may make obedience more beloved to the self and more

2 From the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAli (peace be upon him): 'Some people worshipped God out of desire, and that is the worship of merchants; some people worshipped God out of fear, and that is the worship of slaves; and some people worshipped God out of thankfulness, and that is the worship of the free'. *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Saying 237.

constant in orientation, without abolishing the cost or the flagging of resolve. Ardent love of God is therefore not an unanchored emotional state but a love that guides the will, impels a person towards action, and returns a person whenever his heart has been divided.

Among the finest formulations governing this meaning is what appears in the Supplication of Those Who Love, of Imam al-Sajjad (peace be upon him), where love is mentioned not as a feeling severed from the road but as a leader towards God's good pleasure and a guard against disobedience: 'Make my love for you a guide to your good pleasure, and my longing for you a guard against disobeying you.'[3] Love here does not abolish action; it directs it. It does not weaken what is required; it makes it issue from a heart that has come to know its orientation.

One moved by love does not lose his identity, nor does his will become independent of the revealed law. The perfection of wholehearted turning means that the heart is undivided in its devotion to God and freed from competing, independent attachment, while work, relationships, rights, fear, and hope remain in their proper places. Ardent love is a motive that orders; wholehearted turning is a state that gathers the heart during action.[4]

And when God's pleasure is the governing reference, life is ordered into a single orientation: 'Say: My prayer, my rites, my living, and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds' (Q 6:162). Work, provision, relationship, and striving may enter into servanthood if the intention is sound, the means lawful, and rights preserved; a bare 'sincerity' is not enough to make every act right.

3 From the Fifteen Intimate Supplications related from Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (peace be upon him); see *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 91.

4 From the Shaʿbāniyya Supplication related from the Commander of the Faithful and the Imams among his descendants (peace be upon them): 'My God, grant me the perfection of wholehearted turning to you'; related by Ibn Ṭāwūs in *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*.

Third: resolve — the gathering of agency when orientation becomes one

Resolve is the gathering of the self's agency around a purpose; it is neither an independent energy nor permanent enthusiasm. It may strengthen and weaken, and it needs rest, environment, and companionship; its loftiness is praised for the soundness of its purpose rather than by its mere intensity.

Loftiness of resolve here is not intensity of enthusiasm but clarity and constancy of orientation. Two men may do the same work: one begins strongly because he is drawn by an immediate desire, and then weakens when the desire changes; the other proceeds calmly because he is carried by a single unbroken impulse. The second is closer to constancy, because his movement does not depend upon a passing surge. The Qur'an therefore made striving for God a road to guidance: 'And those who strive for us — we shall surely guide them to our ways' (Q 29:69). Guidance is opened to the one who strives upon the road, not to the one who waits for enthusiasm to blaze up and then die down.

How do we read autonomy, competence, and relatedness?

In comparison with self-determination theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are read as interpretive bridges that help explain some forms of motivation, not as pillars of the Law of Ardent Love. The law rests upon the principle that established knowledge of God and his beneficence, together with awareness of dependence, prepares love to intensify; it does not produce it automatically.

Psychological autonomy is the right and need for an act to issue from the person; outward freedom is a real right that may be taken away and must be protected. Moral freedom, meanwhile, is realised gradually through the self's liberation

from the tyranny of desire under servanthood; it does not mean independence from God, nor that outward coercion has no effect.[5]

A person may work in a constrained environment and retain a measure of moral freedom so long as he possesses knowledge, purpose, and choice at some point; but coercion, rights, and the realistic alternatives available all affect his ability and his practical scope. The employee may control neither the instructions nor the praise, and may yet possess the intention of doing well and of refusing injustice within his limits. 'Inner freedom' is not to be used to deny oppression or to justify the stripping of rights.

Competence is an ability to act and to do well; it is a trust, not the measure of a person's worth or of his nearness. It differs according to body, environment, and learning, and a person may need support for it to appear.

Every talent is a trust, but a person is not required to use every ability at all times or to exceed his practical scope at the expense of rest. Doing well is a due in its place, and it remains lawful for him to learn, to advance gradually, and to excuse himself from what he cannot do.[6]

Relatedness is a natural need for relationships, family, and society, and it is not abolished by the higher belonging of servanthood. The bonds are rather ordered under truth, so that the group does not turn into a reference rivalling God or strip the individual of his rights.

Belonging to the community is an extension of one's purpose and place in history, but it does not diminish the nearer circles and does not always promise the individual a feeling of

5 'Tie it and rely upon God': reported by al-Tirmidhī; its meaning — that reliance does not conflict with taking up the means — is established in the Imami sources, among them *al-Kāfī*, the chapter on reliance.

6 'God loves that when one of you undertakes a task, he should do it well': it comes in the context of urging excellence in work; reported by Abū Yaʿlā and by al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿab al-Īmān*.

acceptance. The individual may need a safe community and genuine support.

Summary of Part One

Love thus moves as a longing for more of the knowledge of God and of his pleasure, and resolve unifies the self around its purpose. This movement does not abolish fatigue or flagging, and it is not measured by emotion; it appears in returning, in following, and in giving within one's practical scope.

Part Two: Self-Determination Theory — a Psychological Framework Effective within Its Field

Entry: an influential theory in explaining motivation

Psychology has not been heedless of the question of motivation: Edward Deci and Richard Ryan presented self-determination theory (SDT).[7] The theory distinguishes between forms of internal and external motivation and examines how motives are internalised and regulated — rather than adopting a simplified dichotomy that makes every internal motive deeper or better than every external one.

The theory identifies three basic psychological needs bound up with motivation, wellbeing, and performance: autonomy, that is, the experience of an act as issuing from one's own acceptance rather than mere coercion; competence, that is, the sense of efficacy and ability; and relatedness, that is, the

7 E. L. Deci and R. M. Ryan, "The 'What' and 'Why' of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior," *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (2000): 227–268.

experience of connection with others. These needs have been studied in various work environments, and their support has been associated in some research with performance and well-being.[8] The theory has also examined the appearance of the effects of autonomy in collectivist cultures, while the interpretation of the findings remains within the limits of the studies and their contexts.[9]

All of this is a useful diagnosis deserving appreciation. The theory identified an important insight: that it is not enough for a person to be pushed from outside, and that reward and punishment do not by themselves explain the depth of human movement. It also brought into view three areas whose connection with what has preceded will become clear: choice, ability, and relationship. Yet it remains an instrument of diagnosis, not a framework answering the final question of purpose.

Where does the instrument stop?

This instrument, for all its usefulness, stops at a limit in its very nature: it describes psychological needs and their proximate movement, but it does not by itself answer the question of source and orientation. It asks: when does a person feel that he is choosing? When does he feel competent? When does he feel that he belongs? These are important questions, but they do not reach the deeper one: what deserves to be the aim towards which these needs are directed? And towards whom

8 P. P. Baard, E. L. Deci, and R. M. Ryan, "Intrinsic Need Satisfaction: A Motivational Basis of Performance and Well-Being in Two Work Settings," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 34, no. 10 (2004): 2045–2068.

9 V. Chirkov, R. M. Ryan, Y. Kim, and U. Kaplan, "Differentiating Autonomy from Individualism and Independence: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Internalization of Cultural Orientations and Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 1 (2003): 97–110.

does a person's will finally turn? From this limit the difference between framework and instrument appears in two areas.

Environment genuinely affects autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and may widen ability, narrow it, or remove choice in a given case. Faith does not abolish this reality; it makes it obligatory to build more just environments, and it preserves the heart's point of reference while rights and help are sought.[10]

Autonomy is not independence from God; competence is not a person's worth; and relatedness is not reducible to the religious community. The three needs are ordered under servanthood while their psychological and rights-related meanings are preserved.

Motivation may be strengthened by love and remembrance, but it may weaken with illness, exhaustion, and environment. It therefore needs renewal, gentleness, and support, and no one is to be blamed for needing a lawful external incentive.

Endurance in this law is not the continuance of feeling but the persistence of orientation and the return after flagging, together with the building of habits, ability, and a supportive environment.

The place of self-determination theory in relation to the law

The difference between the two frameworks lies in position and purpose. Self-determination theory is a psychological framework for reading motivation and needs within its field, whereas the Law of Ardent Love of God refers what one loves and what moves one to the purpose of servanthood. It does not claim that the psychological theory is searching for a 'religious root' it has

10 E. L. Deci, R. Koestner, and R. M. Ryan, "A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 125, no. 6 (1999): 627–668.

lost. The difference becomes clear when we place each meaning where it belongs:

Point of view	Self-Determination Theory — an instrument of diagnosis	The Law of Ardent Love of God — the encompassing framework
Deepest impulse	Psychological needs seeking satisfaction	Established knowledge of God and his beneficence, together with awareness of dependence, prepares love of him to intensify, without inevitability
Autonomy	The sense that an act issues from oneself	Moral freedom within servanthood, with outward freedom and its rights preserved
Competence	The sense of being able to act and to do well	An ability and a trust, not a measure of a person's worth
Relatedness	The sense of connection and relationship with others	Natural and purpose-bearing bonds ordered under servanthood and truth
Endurance	Affected by environment and by controlling incentives	Love is maintained through knowledge, remembrance, action, and support; it may weaken and then be renewed, and it is not mechanically produced by knowledge
Criterion of success	Attaining the goal and being satisfied with performance	Discharging the trust and seeking the face of God
Purpose	Wellbeing and psychological growth within the horizon of the self	Journeying with the self towards God

The law thus adds to the diagnosis of motivation a teleological point of reference: the love of God orders what one loves, longing moves, and resolve gathers — while a person's needs, relationships, body, and practical scope are all preserved.

Conclusion

We do not say that a hidden love 'drew you before you searched' in some inevitable way; God created in you a fitra capable of knowing truth and seeking perfection, and love grows through knowledge, faith, remembrance, and action.

One who loves may need companionship, appreciation, safety, and support, and this does not contradict his sincerity or his reliance. Divine love governs these needs; it does not abolish them.

This impulse, considered alongside the other Laws of Islamic Origination, is one face of a single movement: a person's journey to God. And if this law has disclosed what moves a person to action, another question awaits us: what happens to the self when it becomes wholly absorbed in the work itself, so that its distraction disappears and it is present in its entirety in what it does? We explore this in the next chapter through the gateway of flow.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Law of Wholehearted Turning to God

A Reading beyond Flow Theory

Part One: The Law of Wholehearted Turning to God — Its Reality and Its Pillars

Entry: where does your heart go while you work?

In the previous chapter you learned that love of God can become the highest motive, reordering what one loves — not an 'innate ardent love' operating deterministically on its own. But motive is one thing, and the heart's point of reference while acting another: a person may begin with a sound intention and then become scattered. From here comes the question of wholehearted turning.

Every worker knows moments of deep absorption in an act, when his attention gathers around his task, his sense of

passing time lightens, and his hand and mind almost move along a single course. Some may suppose that this absorption is the highest state a person can attain in work. But the deeper question is not: did you become absent from yourself while working? It is: with whom was your heart while you were present in it? There is a difference between forgetting yourself in the task and having your heart with God while you perform it.

Wholehearted turning to God does not require withdrawal from the world; it requires discharging the trust within it with a heart that nothing enslaves. It does not annul the rights of family, of the body, or of society, and it does not make seclusion a measure of purity.

Wholehearted turning may occur in an office, a home, or a marketplace, so long as the work is lawful, rights are preserved, and the intention is truthful. And withdrawing from a harmful task or environment may itself be what is required, rather than continuing in it in the name of devotion.

This meaning may be brought near by the example of a player in a World Cup final. He runs, manoeuvres, passes, and tries to score, yet in all of this he is drawn towards a single purpose: winning the cup. His striving towards the cup is not something outside his play, nor is his concentration on play something separate from his dream; rather, his presence on the field intensifies because the purpose fills his heart and impels his movement. Were the purpose to cool within him, something of his resolve and performance would cool with it. In this way — as to form, not as to purpose — is a believer's movement in the world and his journey to God: not two adjacent movements, but a single movement when the orientation is sound. He works in the world, but his heart does not stop at the world.

From here we understand the meaning of the supplication of the Prophet (may God bless him and his family): 'O God, do

not make this world our greatest concern, nor the limit of our knowledge.'[1] The problem is not that a person should work in the world, nor that he should be present in his work, nor that he should exert himself within his practical scope to earn his provision and serve people; it is that the world should become the ceiling of his heart, the utmost of his seeking, and the furthest reach of his insight. If the world remains in a person's hand and does not become his final concern or the limit of his knowledge, he can work within it while directed towards what lies beyond it, and be present in its details while his heart is not cut off from God.

Let us hold to a single example that will accompany us through this chapter: a physician sitting before his patient. He may perform his work with competence while preoccupied with his fee, or with the praise of his colleagues, or with his standing among people. And he may perform the same work, with the same competence, while his heart is present with God, seeing in the patient a trust he has been charged with and in his knowledge a gateway to doing good rather than a means of magnifying himself. The form of the work is one, but the orientation of the heart changes its whole reality. From here the question of the law begins: what turns work from a job performed into an act of worship by which one draws near?

1 Reported by al-Tirmidhī among the comprehensive supplications (no. 3502); and it is stated in the Imami sources that the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) used to make this supplication constantly: *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 95, p. 361.

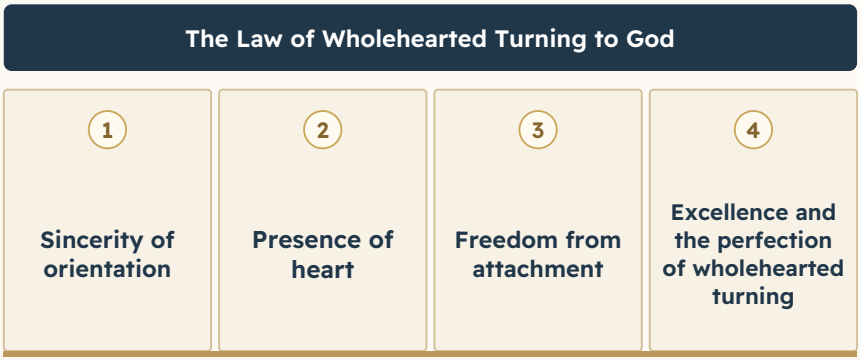
The definition of the law

The Law of Wholehearted Turning to God is a formative, guiding, conditional principle which holds that the heart becomes increasingly undivided in its devotion to God as it is freed from independent attachment to anything else. It sees people, blessings, and causes as subsisting through God rather than as sources independent of him; deals with them as means; and orders love, intention, and striving towards his pleasure. Wholehearted turning is not abandoning the world, but being present and acting within it without allowing the world to possess the heart: a heart undivided in its devotion to God, and responsible action in the world.

The name of the law comes from the supplication for the perfection of wholehearted turning in the Shaʿbaniyya Supplication. What is meant is the gathering of the heart in devotion to God and its freedom from independent attachment to anything other than him — not indwelling, union, the loss of the servant's identity, or absence from people and work.[2]

The prophets' work in trades shows that nearness does not require abandoning work. Work becomes worship when its intention, its means, and its regard for rights are sound — not merely because it is work or because it issues from a believer.

2 From the Shaʿbāniyya Supplication related from the Commander of the Faithful and the Imams among his descendants (peace be upon them); related by Ibn Ṭāwūs in *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl* (vol. 3, p. 299); no earlier source for it is known.



The four pillars of the Law of Wholehearted Turning to God

The first pillar: sincerity of orientation

Before the heart can be present, the orientation must be sound. Sincerity in an act is that God's pleasure should be its highest point of reference — not that all its lawful subordinate purposes should vanish at once; seeking provision, benefit, and excellence may be gathered under servanthood. God Almighty says: 'They were commanded only to worship God, sincere to him in religion' (Q 98:5).

Intention gives an act its direction, but it does not turn an ordinary act into worship unless it is lawful in its end, in its means, and in its safeguarding of rights. The saying 'Deeds are only by intentions' establishes the centrality of purpose, not the abolition of the outward act. It is related from the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him): 'The gift is according to the measure of the intention.'[3] The physician brings his work into

3 'Deeds are only by intentions' is agreed upon, and is a foundation in the chapters on intention in both traditions (in *al-Kāfī*: Book of Faith and Unbelief, the chapter on intention). The saying of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), 'The gift is according to the measure of the intention', is in *Nahj al-Balāgha*, from his testament to his son al-Ḥasan (peace be upon him).

servanthood when he intends to do good seeking God's face and discharges what is due to the patient through his profession and his truthfulness — not by intention alone.

The second pillar: presence of heart

Presence of heart with God is an acquired state of servanthood; it is not God's sustaining relation to creation or his universal encompassment, which include all creatures. A person may become heedless while God still encompasses him, and then return through remembrance.

Universal accompaniment consists in God's knowledge, his sustaining relation to creation, and his encompassment; it does not in itself indicate a servant's merit. Special accompaniment is the care, guidance, strengthening, and succour that God bestows upon his servants along the path of response and servanthood, according to his wisdom and promise — without being a spatial nearness or a guarantee of a worldly outcome.

This meaning may be brought near by the example of a mother who does her housework with her hands occupied in what she is doing while her heart is present with her child asleep in another room. The work does not distract her from him, and her attachment to him does not prevent her from discharging what is before her. So too is presence of heart with God in work: occupation with means without heedlessness of the one who causes them, and movement in action without any break from one's orientation. Nothing establishes this presence like keeping in mind that God watches: 'God is ever watchful over you' (Q 4:1). This differs from what we discussed under purpose-led presence: that was presence in time and purpose; this is presence with God at the heart of the act.

Prayer is embodied worship: the self knows and intends, the body embodies compliance, and the heart turns. We therefore do not set 'limbs that work' against a heart severed from them;

we seek rather the ordering of the whole person within worship.

Among the clearest demonstrations that presence of heart with God does not mean absence from people is God's saying: 'Your guardian is only God, and his Messenger, and those who believe — those who establish prayer and give alms while bowing' (Q 5:55). In the Imami reading, and in a number of transmitted reports and commentaries, the verse was revealed concerning the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAli (peace be upon him), when he gave his ring to a poor man while bowing in prayer.[4] His reverence did not isolate him from the person in need, and his wholehearted turning did not prevent his hand from giving. Rather, his presence with God made his presence with the person in need truer and more merciful. Wholehearted turning to God is thus not absence from life but presence within it with a heart not possessed by it: the hand works, the heart is with God, and the work itself becomes servanthood.

The third pillar: freedom from attachment

Seeking reward from God is lawful and belongs to servanthood, and is not blameworthy in any absolute sense. What is blameworthy is that reward, outcome, or praise should turn into an independent centre rivalling the face of God, or that rights should be neglected for its sake.

This is precisely what the Qur'an described in those men: trade in the hand, and hearts that it does not distract from the remembrance of God. Freedom here is not the annihilation of the will nor the abolition of striving; it is that the will should be freed from enslavement to what is other than God. A person

4 On the revelation of the verse concerning the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), see *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* of al-Ṭabrisī on the verse; and *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl* of al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī.

continues to work carefully, to do well, and to take up the means — but he does not let people's approval own his heart, does not make the outcome alone the measure of his truthfulness, and does not make work a means of inflating his image of himself.

Nor do we set 'the professional' against 'the worshipper' as though excellence and outcome were of no concern to a believer. The trustworthy professional plans and measures effect; the worshipper adds intention, rights, and reference — and the two descriptions may apply to one person.

The fourth pillar: excellence and the perfection of wholehearted turning

Excellence joins the worship of God and awareness of him to the quality of the work according to its own domain. But it does not turn every instance of professional superiority into spiritual superiority, and it does not exempt one from learning the specialised standards or from assessing harm.[5]

A sound intention is not enough if the work is faulty or rights are lost, and outward excellence is not enough if the purpose is corrupt. Wholehearted turning unifies the point of reference, and excellence seeks truthfulness within and soundness without, together.

Application: how does this meaning accompany you at work?

Salary and the need for provision are lawful purposes and are not automatically a scattering of the heart. They are ordered

5 The report of Gabriel: 'that you worship God as though you see him, and if you do not see him, then he sees you', agreed upon; Imam al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) related its substance in *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharīʿa*, adding an account of the degrees of watchfulness.

under the trust, and wealth does not become a final point of reference or a justification for injustice.

The mark of this state: effect, not warmth of feeling

A person may review the marks of wholehearted turning in himself: does his character change when praise is absent? Does he safeguard rights under pressure? Does he return to God when the outcome comes? And he does not use these marks to rank people or to diagnose their inner states.

The self is one, and loves, intentions, and habits may contend within it. Harmony is not the gathering of 'separate dimensions' but the ordering of the functions of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit under a single orientation in truth.

Summary of Part One

The law does not require the effacement of every subordinate purpose, but the unity of the highest point of reference: God. Beneath it family, work, provision, rest, and achievement are all ordered, and whatever rivals it or violates a right is refused.

Part Two: Flow Theory — an Instrument That Observed Absorption without Addressing the Heart's Point of Reference

Entry: what did psychology see?

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi observed a state he called flow: a state in which a person becomes deeply absorbed in an activity he is performing, when he is able to concentrate, when the task has a clear goal and available feedback, and when

its challenge is well matched to his skill. In this state a person's self-awareness recedes, his sense of time changes, and he feels that the work is, to some extent, its own reward. This is an important observation deserving fair acknowledgement; the theory captured a real aspect of human experience when a person is present in his entirety in an act.[6]

Perhaps the most precise of its observations is that work is not always the enemy of presence, as many people imagine. Some of its studies have shown that a person may experience moments of flow at work more often than in leisure, even though he supposes that he desires leisure more.[7] This observation aligns, in a certain respect, with a principle we established in this chapter: work is not outside the road of presence, nor opposed to it, but may be its very field when the orientation is sound. Yet the theory stops at this limit: it describes how a person becomes absorbed in work, while the law asks towards whom his heart turns while he is absorbed in it.

Where does the instrument stop?

While we do justice to flow theory for what it observed, the theory remains an instrument for describing psychological experience, not a law governing the orientation of the heart. It is useful in telling us how attention gathers, and how clarity of goal, feedback, and a balance of skill and challenge help a person to be present in his act. But it does not by itself answer the deeper question: does this act deserve a person's wholehearted attention? Is the intention moving it sound? And does this presence

6 For descriptive purposes, not as evidence, see J. Nakamura and M. Csikszentmihalyi, "The Concept of Flow," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89–105.

7 M. Csikszentmihalyi and J. LeFevre, "Optimal Experience in Work and Leisure," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, no. 5 (1989): 815–822.

bring him nearer to God, or increase his attachment to himself, to his image, or to a purpose that does not please God?

The limit of this instrument becomes clear in three areas. The first is that flow, by definition, is an experience whose reward a person finds within the activity itself: the work becomes pleasurable in itself and motivates the person from within. This is a precise description of the experience, but it is not sufficient from the standpoint of servanthood; for the question in the Law of Wholehearted Turning is not only whether you found pleasure and presence in the work, but for whom this presence was, and towards what end the effort was directed. A person may be intensely present with the work while his heart remains absent from God. The theory describes absorption, but it possesses no compass to direct it.

Flow is usually bound to conditions such as clarity of goal, a balance of challenge and skill, and a suitable environment. Wholehearted turning, in its turn, does not occur in isolation from body, ability, and environment; the difference is that it governs the heart's point of reference and the value of the act, and does not promise a continuous state of concentration when the conditions are absent.[8]

The third area is that flow does not by itself determine the moral value of what a person is absorbed in. He may attain a deep presence in a beneficial act, and may attain something of this presence in an act that neither purifies his heart nor pleases his Lord.[9] Absorption therefore does not become a value merely through its intensity, and the fading of attention to the self does not become a sign of sincerity. A person may be absent from himself during a performance and then return afterwards

8 C. J. Fullagar and E. K. Kelloway, "Flow at Work: An Experience Sampling Approach," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 82, no. 3 (2009): 595–615.

9 M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

seeking people's praise and recognition; absorption may be a well-executed flight from the self, whereas wholehearted turning is a return to truth. From here the essential difference appears: flow describes the state of absorption, whereas wholehearted turning to God governs the orientation of that absorption, its intention, and its purpose.

We need neither reject flow nor raise it to a teleological law. What the theory observed of concentration, clarity of goal, and balance between skill and challenge may serve excellence when it enters into lawful work; but it is not a degree of wholehearted turning to God and not a sign of nearness. Flow may occur in truth or in falsehood; orientation, intention, and rights determine its moral value.

The place of flow in relation to the Law of Wholehearted Turning

The difference between the two frameworks is not in the degree of absorption alone, but in what the heart centres on and the purpose it seeks:

Point of view	Flow Theory (an instrument of observation)	The Law of Wholehearted Turning to God (the encompassing framework)
Centre of the experience	The work and the experience of awareness	A heart undivided in its devotion to God, and responsible action in the world
Impulse	Inner enjoyment and the attraction of the activity	Sincerity and servanthood
Presence	Presence with the task itself	Presence of the heart with God while discharging what is due to the task and to people

Point of view	Flow Theory (an instrument of observation)	The Law of Wholehearted Turning to God (the encompassing framework)
Criterion of the work	Quality of performance and depth of absorption	Truthfulness of intention, soundness of the work, rights, and excellence
Measure	The feeling during the experience and its indicators	An inward review of one's point of reference, intention, and rights — not a numerical measure or outward effect by which nearness is judged
Condition	Generated largely by a balance of skill and challenge and by clarity of goal	Maintained through intention, remembrance, and watchfulness, with due regard for the effects of body and environment
Value	Does not by itself determine moral orientation	Determined by orientation towards God
Place of the self	The fading of attention to the self during performance	The heart's liberation from enslavement to the self and to people's regard, with identity, rights, and action preserved

The table does not set flow theory against the Law of Wholehearted Turning as its rival; it shows how some of its observations enter the orbit of the law when they are placed where they belong. Absorption is not rejected, but it is not enough. Quality of performance is not abolished, but it is raised to the meaning of excellence. The fading of attention to the self does not become sincerity unless the heart is freed from seeking people's

approval. And clarity of goal is not complete until it passes beyond the accomplishing of the task to the seeking of God's face.

Conclusion

Flow describes a state of attention within an activity; wholehearted turning describes a heart undivided in its devotion to God while it works. The two may come together, and a heart may turn wholly to God in quiet work that does not meet the conditions of flow, or in work during which the person needs rest and treatment.

And when intention, means, and rights are sound, work may become worship and a road — not an automatic 'ascent'. Professional and spiritual success remain distinct concepts that may cooperate or diverge.

Inner truthfulness discloses and unifies; trust in God governs the self's relation to causes; purpose-led presence returns every hour to what is due to it; and wholehearted turning gathers the heart in devotion to God. These are not independent components, but integrated laws for the course of a single self.

Conclusion to Section Two

From the Self to God: When Insight Comes into Flower

A reflective preface: what does it really mean to develop yourself?

Amid the paths of self-development offered to us, the idea appears clear at first glance: that developing yourself means advancing, achieving, doing well, and increasing your capacity to manage your life. Yet a deeper question remains present within a person: towards what is he advancing? Why does he seek achievement? And by what standard should the self he seeks to develop be measured?

Is self-development merely the improvement of one's outward performance, or the rebuilding of oneself in the light of one's reality and purpose? Is it an accumulation of skills, or a journey of truthfulness towards the root of fitra? And is it enough for a person to become more able to act if he does not know the orientation his action ought to follow?

The modern person has long been led to imagine that the self is an entity to be trained, tamed, engineered, and managed, so that it may become more effective in the world. All of this may be useful in its place, but it is not enough to understand the human being. The self in the Islamic vision is not a project that magnifies itself, but a trust to be cultivated through tazkiya; not an energy to be managed apart from purpose, but a self created

to journey to God, to know him, to worship him, and to return to him.

In this section of the book we were not searching for a way to make a person more productive, more focused, or faster in achievement, nor for a recipe granting him a better feeling about himself. We were searching for a deeper meaning: how may a person be more truthful on his journey to God? Not merely how he may perform at a higher level, but how he may live with a truer meaning, a clearer orientation, and a heart nearer to his Lord.

In this sense the question of self-development is no longer a question of skill or technique alone; it has become a question of intention, of purpose, and of direction. It has become a question about the moment in which the self stands before its own reality and realises that it does not set itself right by itself, and does not become complete by revolving around itself, but needs to say truthfully: O God, take my hand to you, and make of me a self that knows you and strives towards you.

The road we travelled: from dismantling to building

Our aim in this section was not to put Western theories on trial one after another, nor to reject them merely because they came from a different context, but to rebuild the picture of the human being from its roots. Those theories were therefore not the axis of the journey but its stations, at each of which we paused to ask: what did it see in the human being? What escaped it? And where may it be placed within a vision wider than its own limits?

From here we followed one thread that led the human being from understanding needs, to understanding motives, to the meaning of presence in the moment, to reflection, growth, tranquillity, motive, and then the heart's wholehearted turning to God while acting in the world.

These laws rest upon a single self read through the aspects of the bodily dimension, the heart, the intellect, and the spirit — not upon adjacent parts. Each law illuminates one relation in its becoming, its orientation, and its work.

From the Law of Attraction, which makes desire central to the making of reality, we moved to the Law of Striving and Trust in God. Here a person does not stop at what he wants or imagine the universe revolving around his desires; he strives within God's established patterns, takes up the means, and then surrenders his heart to the One in whose hand all affairs lie.

The Law of Purpose-Led Presence returns every hour to what is due to it and what befits it — worship, work, care, learning, rest and treatment, communication and lawful recreation — while learning from the past and preparing for the future.

The Law of Conscious Reflection considers revelation, the cosmos, and the self with consequence held in view. It prepares attention to become understanding and insight that guide action, without making every passing thought an insight.

The Law of Faith-Building carries truth from knowledge to the heart's binding itself to it and submitting to it, then to remembrance, action, and shakila, through God's guidance and aid — not to an inner 'programming'.

The Law of Growth through Tazkiya distinguishes the expansion of instruments and the intensification of powers from commendable growth. Not every increase in knowledge, will, or power is tazkiya unless the response is ordered within truth and servanthood.

The Law of Inner Tranquillity establishes the self's point of reference in God as a graduated fruit of nearness. The Law of Ardent Love makes love of God the highest motive that reorders what one loves, and the Law of Wholehearted Turning gathers the heart in devotion to God together with responsible action in the world.

Thus each chapter became a bridge by which we crossed from a model that captures something of the human being to a law that returns the human being to his root. We did not abolish what was sound in those models, and we did not make them the standard by which all else is measured; we returned them to their place within a vision that sees the self as a trust to be cultivated through tazkiya, not merely an instrument to be managed.

The great messages this section has offered

What we take away from this section is neither a critique of models nor the replacement of one technique by another, but a method of looking: that we should understand theories fairly, then see their limits, and then place what they got right within a wider Islamic vision. The real danger is not that these theories exist, but that they should turn into a final point of reference for understanding the human being.

Nor does returning to revelation lead us to reject everything in these theories, or to borrow their picture of the human being. In the structure of this book we return what they got right to its place, set out what escaped them, and read the human being within a framework wider than performance, adaptation, and feeling. Here the Islamic vision is the ground of comparison in this project, not a partial dimension added to a Western model.

The titles and the paths have varied, but the great messages that took shape in this section go back to shared meanings, springing from fitra and directed towards tazkiya.

Initial capacities, resources, and circumstances remain trusts that widen the field of action. What has become knowledge, will, or a settled skill, however, is an actual quality within the self and enters into actualised perfection. None of these is a sign of nearness in itself: the orientation of response

determines its value, and all are developed and directed by truth and within practical scope.

Happiness is not a permanent feeling, but the soundness and flourishing of the self and its ordering within truth and servanthood. Tranquillity is the settling of its point of reference in God; it is an original fruit and a graduated manifestation of nearness, and it may coexist with anxiety, illness, and the need for treatment.

The moment is not a refuge into which we flee, but the setting in which we live and actually respond. The now is not everything and does not cut us off from our past or our final end; it is the site of what is due in the hour and what befits it. We learn from what has passed, plan for what is to come, and in the present perform worship, work, care, or rest according to priority and practical scope.

No developmental model is complete without the question of purpose: why? For whom? And towards what? But this does not abolish lawful worldly goals; it reorders them under servanthood and under rights.

The road to God is open to every person according to what has reached him and what lies within his practical scope. It begins with truthfulness and the seeking of truth, and it requires knowledge, striving, repentance, and support; a good beginning alone does not guarantee that it will continue.

Self-development, when ordered within truth and servanthood, pursued through lawful means, and governed by rights and practical scope, becomes a course of tazkiya. These laws are a practical gateway to the wider system set out in Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview.

Returning to Section One with a new eye

The book began from within: identity, purpose, fitra, the self, vicegerency, and truthfulness. A human being is a single

embodied self that opens out through the aspect of its spirit towards God, and is reducible neither to a body seeking control nor to a self magnifying its own image.

Then in Section Two we moved to a calm intellectual encounter with some of the concepts most prominent in the awareness of the modern person. We read them from within, and tried to understand what they give and what they take away, what they illuminate and what they leave in shadow. But we did not stop at them, and did not make them a foundation to return to; we came back from them to the Islamic vision to propose laws rooted in fitra and connected to God.

What was built in Section One from fitra, purpose, truthfulness, and harmony returned here as the measure of comparison. The harmony intended is the ordering of the self's functions under truth, not a merely psychological consistency that may revolve around falsehood.

Perhaps, if you return to Section One after this journey, you will read it with another eye. You will not return to it to repeat what you read, but to discover that much of what passed before you in this section was a repeated return to the first question: who am I? Why was I created? And what is the road I ought to travel? Yet this question has now grown deeper, because it has passed through critique, comparison, dismantling, and rebuilding.

This section, therefore, is not a closed ending but a measure that will accompany you afterwards. Whenever you meet a new theory, or a new discourse about self-development, you will not hasten to accept or reject it, but will ask calmly: what did this discourse see in the human being? What was absent from it? And where is its idea to be placed within a wider vision that begins from God and returns to God?

When the heart returns to God

The problem is not the multiplicity of theories, but that a partial instrument should turn into a point of reference for explaining the whole human being. If a reader returns to revelation, to fitra, to the intellect, and to truth, he can place every theory within its own field: taking what is established, keeping what is limited within its limits, and rejecting what contradicts divine oneness or rights. This does not guarantee that the whole road will be straight, but it opens a course of continual review.

The nine laws illuminated one map: truthfulness discloses and unifies; striving embodies; presence returns every hour to what is due to it; reflection gives insight; faith-building consolidates; growth weighs; tranquillity steadies; ardent love moves; and wholehearted turning gathers the heart in devotion to God. All of them return the human being to God without abolishing the self, the body, or the world.

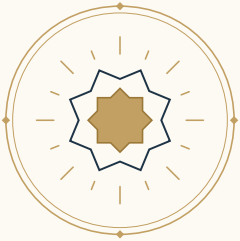
Return to God: with your self, not outside it; by your striving, not by your wishing; by your truthfulness, not by your claim; and by your daily work, not by waiting for an ideal moment.

The road begins where you are: when the intention is sound, when what fitra requires is read in the light of revelation and the intellect, and when the self moves in a Godward orientation through knowledge and action within its practical scope.

And when insight comes into flower, a person no longer sees himself as he used to. He does not see himself as a project closed upon itself, nor as material for continual development, nor as an image to be beautified before people, but as a trust in God's

hands. The most important question then becomes not: what do I add to myself? But: where do I direct myself? And not: how do I appear more successful? But: how am I more truthful in my journey to God?

Here the beginning of the road meets its end: from the question of self-development to the question of servanthood. What is required is not a heart that is 'nearer' by distance, but a self that is truer and more complete in its response to truth, in non-spatial nearness to God.



Conclusion of the Book

From Knowledge to Accompaniment

When the noise of concepts subsides, the question remains: who am I? And why am I here? The answer is not a new name for success, but the knowledge of the self as a reality created for a purpose, bearing a trust, whose becoming unfolds through what befalls it and what it knows and chooses.

The return inward did not mean closing in upon the self or making it the centre of existence, but a reading of its fitra, its shakila, its orientation, its weakness, and its ability. And the example of Zaynab (peace be upon her) teaches that constancy comes out of faith, truthfulness, and dependence — while human pain remains.

The book travelled along two roads: establishing the reality of the human being, his purpose, and his becoming; and then reading contemporary concepts of self-development in the light of that foundation. It took from them what is useful within their field, and set out what they cannot by themselves determine about purpose, revelation, and the return to God.

It became clear in this reading that the Islamic vision does not content itself with adding scattered instruments; it reconsiders the meaning of the self, success, and striving. Lawful work is ordered within servanthood and may become worship in the broad sense when intention, purpose, and means are sound and rights are preserved — without every moment or every act automatically becoming nearness.

Islam calls neither to abandoning the world nor to dissolving into it. It acknowledges the body and its needs, and provision, work, and relationships, and makes them trusts and means beneath one's purpose — with their right to preservation, to treatment, and to rest.

The Islamic vision begins from the purpose of servanthood, then reads non-spatial nearness through the knowledge, understanding, will, powers, and perfections actually realised in the self, and through its response to truth in acceptance or refusal, in light of the clarification available to the person and within their practical scope. The human being is therefore not reduced to production, and neither God's universal sustaining relation to creation nor ontological dependence is made an acquired rank.

The agent in tazkiya is the single self, not the heart alone. The intellect understands, the heart assents and intends, the body embodies the act, and the self opens out through the aspect of its spirit towards God. Acts of worship help this building without an automatic effect and without removing the need for treatment and expertise.

Inner truthfulness is not following what is within, but the mutual accord of the aspects of the self under truth and fitra, followed by work to repair whatever gaps appear within practical scope. Knowledge, loves, intention, speech, action, and shakila are fields that disclose the degree of this accord, not a rival list defining it.

The revealed laws and the acts of worship are a system of guidance and embodied cultivation, not external burdens or psychological techniques. They are performed in their lawful form and with their intention, and they contribute, together with remembrance, self-accounting, action, and environment, to the becoming of the self.

This self is a servant of God and a vicegerent upon the earth, responsible for what reform it is able to accomplish. Its tazkiya is not completed by closing in upon itself, but by safeguarding rights, justice, mercy, and trustworthiness in relationships and in work.

Character consists of existential perfections within the self, not an ornament added after achievement. Instrumental capacities widen what a person can do; mercy, justice, truthfulness, and wisdom, by contrast, make the self itself more complete, while the degree attributable to the person's striving varies.

After all this, the conclusion of the book does not return to summarising what has passed, but to referring it back to its first root. We began from a person's question about himself: who is he? Why is he here? And what makes his life wider than his immediate needs, his immediate achievements, and the image he makes of himself? The promise from the beginning was that this book should be neither a journey in the magnification of the self nor a call to flee from it, but an attempt to see it as it was created: a self bearing a trust, moving in the world, and understanding its reality only when it knows its Lord, its purpose, and its road to him.

Hence the presence of Zaynab (peace be upon her) at the beginning of the road was more than a scene recalled; it was a key to understanding the whole meaning. That stance showed that the strength this book intends is not bare psychological robustness, nor an ability to overcome pain by relying upon oneself alone, but constancy born of faith, clarity of orientation, and a heart that knows a person does not grow greater

when severed from God, but when truthful in returning to him. Perhaps everything that followed was a detailing of this meaning: how the self is understood, how it undergoes tazkiya, how it strives, how it finds balance, and how it reads the theories and instruments offered to it without losing its root.

The aim, therefore, was not to reject everything contemporary theories of self-development say, nor to take them as they are, but to return the human being to his proper place within the Islamic vision. These theories may capture something of the human being: a habit, a motive, a psychological effect, or a way of managing behaviour; but they do not by themselves possess the answer to the question of purpose. And if self-development is severed from purpose, it becomes a process of revolving around the self, even if outwardly it appears as movement and progress. But when it returns to tazkiya, it recovers its meaning: that a person should know himself in order to worship his Lord more truthfully, and should strengthen what is in him not in order to become self-sufficient, but in order to bear the trust well.

The Laws of Origination are governing principles that disclose conditional regularities in human becoming and direct understanding and action without determinism or any guarantee of a result. They form a system of interacting functions rather than successive stages: truthfulness discloses and unifies; striving embodies; presence returns every hour to what is due to it; reflection gives insight; faith-building consolidates; growth weighs; tranquillity steadies; ardent love moves; and wholehearted turning gathers the heart in devotion to God.

At this point the title No Limits returns to its properly bounded meaning. It does not mean that a person is absolute or unlimited in himself; he is a dependent creature with a body, abilities, practical scope, and real limits. But he is not reducible to his worldly horizon, because the self, through the aspect of its spirit, is open to God and to its purpose, and its horizon

widens by his favour through tazkiya and striving within his established patterns. This bond is one of dependence and servanthood — neither indwelling nor union.

Perhaps this journey returns the question to its proper place: towards whom do I turn with my strength and my weakness? And how do I bear myself as a trust before God? Universal accompaniment describes God's relation to all creation in terms of his knowledge, encompassment, and sustaining relation. It includes all creation, is not acquired, and does not mean spatial companionship.

Special accompaniment is the care, guidance, strengthening, and succour that God bestows upon his servants in the path of response and servanthood according to his wisdom and promise; it does not guarantee any particular worldly outcome. Nearness through servanthood describes the servant's turning towards God, whereas special accompaniment describes God's care for the servant along that path. Return, then, to God with your striving and truthfulness, and seek help in everything that lies within your practical scope.

I ask God to make this book a gateway to calmer insight, truer striving, and a heart that settles in God as its true point of reference; and to bring us back to him in a beautiful return, along a road whose horizons widen by his favour — while servanthood, dependence, and the limits he has made a trust and a mercy all remain.



Where Should You Continue Reading?

The project does not impose a single order of reading. If you began with a book from a practical or human-centred gateway, move on to The Islamic Intellectual Framework to understand the worldview foundation, and to Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview to return to the governing definitions, laws, and models. The Reader's Guide comes at the beginning of Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview, and its appended reference glossary will help you grasp the terms and find the passages in which they are explained. And if you began with the governing reference text, you will find in The Immortal Self a fuller account of the picture of the human being; in No Limits an application and a comparative critique; in Live Happily a contemplative and lived engagement; and in The Journey of a Toiler a narrative embodiment.

A QUICK MAP

1. **The Islamic Intellectual Framework** — the worldview foundation and home of the broader cosmic account.
2. **Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview** — the governing reference text, which includes the Reader's Guide and the reference glossary.
3. **The Immortal Self** — the book of the human being, his becoming, and his trajectory.
4. **No Limits** — the reader-facing gateway to the laws and comparative critique.
5. **Live Happily** — the gateway to contemplation and lived engagement.
6. **The Journey of a Toiler** — the gateway to narrative embodiment.

The Reader's Guide and the reference glossary are included within the book Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview, not in a separate volume.

A Message from the Author to the Reader

These books began from a question that kept me company: how does a person understand himself, move within his life, and journey to God without becoming severed from his reality, his work, and his responsibility? In each book I have tried to approach one aspect of this question — through grounding in one book, exposition in another, and application, contemplation, or narrative in others.

I do not offer these works as closed answers, but as a human endeavour within the Islamic vision: one that seeks clarity and accepts review. My hope is that the idea should be the protagonist, that the evidence should remain its servant, and that language should be the road by which it reaches the reader's intellect, heart, and action.

Open Access to Knowledge

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CORRECTIONS AND REVIEW

This book is part of an intellectual project open to review and development. Substantive corrections, and the details of the latest print or digital edition, are published in the official library at https://abbasalhumaid.com/library/. Documented observations may be sent through the contact form on the website, specifying the title of the book, the edition, the page, the passage, and the nature of the observation. Those who offer scholarly and editorial observations that contribute to greater accuracy and clarity are gratefully acknowledged.



About the Author

ABBAS AL HUMAID

Abbas Al Humaid is an Omani writer, researcher, and strategic consultant. From his earliest years, questions about the human being and purpose have accompanied him: how does human becoming unfold? How do knowledge, faith, and action turn into a conscious movement towards God? And how does a person bring together depth of meaning and precision of action? From these connected questions arose his path in reading, writing, and work.

In 2023 he was honoured with the trust of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik — may God preserve and protect him — when a royal decree was issued appointing him a member of the State Council of the Sultanate of Oman for the term 2023–2027. This high national appointment represents a significant milestone in his career, through which he takes part in the work of the Council, particularly through its Economic and Financial Committee, contributing to the study of public issues and policies and to the offering of strategic perspectives supporting national development and the strengthening of economic and institutional performance.

He studied the religious sciences and philosophy in their traditional circles, and then pursued a professional path extending over nearly three decades in accounting, auditing, consultancy, strategy, management, and institutional transformation. He spent more than two decades in partnership and leadership positions within international professional firms, and led projects in strategy,

transformation, restructuring, and governance in the Sultanate of Oman and beyond.

Alongside his national role, he leads the Merit Group and Merit Academy in the United Kingdom as professional and educational platforms through which he shares the distilled lessons of his experience with leaders, individuals, and institutions, and contributes to developing strategic, managerial, and professional capabilities. He holds a number of international professional accreditations in accounting, consultancy, and management, among them CPA, CFE, CMC, and CMgr.

This professional experience has not been separate from his intellectual preoccupation. He came to see that spirit and strategy, for all the distance that appears between them, meet in a single question: how does purpose become a path, vision become action, and a human being move from one state to another? Hence he has sought in his writing to join reflection to work, the idea to its effect, and vision to the movement of a person within life.

He founded the Islamic Theory of Origination Project as an interpretive intellectual project within the Islamic worldview, studying human becoming, existential movement, growth, conduct, and purpose-bearing responsibility, and joining intellectual grounding to human experience and practical application. His works range across the Islamic worldview, the human being and growth, Qur'anic contemplation, literary narrative, and management and strategy.

Abbas Al Humaid writes from the position of a researcher exercising his own judgement, distinguishing between the sacred text and human understanding, and between what is a religious foundation and what is an interpretive construction open to consideration and review. His writing rests upon clarity of idea, truthfulness in attribution, respect for the reader's intellect, and openness to criticism and correction.

He makes the digital books in his online library freely available, out of a desire that knowledge should reach people and that discussion around it should widen. What he hopes for from the reader is not swift agreement, but a truthful reading, a testing of the ideas, and the sending of corrections wherever the reader sees a need for them: for the idea is the protagonist, the evidence is its servant, and language is the road.

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Books in the Islamic Theory of Origination Project

THE SIX BOOKS

1. **The Islamic Intellectual Framework** — the worldview foundation and home of the broader cosmic account.
2. **Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview** — the governing reference text, which includes the Reader's Guide and the reference glossary.
3. **The Immortal Self** — the book of the human being, his becoming, and his trajectory.
4. **No Limits** — the reader-facing gateway to the laws and comparative critique.
5. **Live Happily** — the gateway to contemplation and lived engagement.
6. **The Journey of a Toiler** — the gateway to narrative embodiment.

THE READER'S GUIDE AND THE REFERENCE GLOSSARY

At its beginning, the book Human Becoming in the Islamic Worldview includes a concise guide to the project, its books, and its reading paths; at its end, it includes a simplified reference glossary of its terms. Both are parts of the governing reference text itself; neither is a separate volume nor a seventh book within the six-book project.

Online library: https://abbasalhumaid.com/library/

From the Islamic Theory of Origination Project

This book offers a practical reading of self-development in the light of the Islamic vision from which the project proceeds. It reorganises key concepts — patience, tazkiya, balance, responsibility — and translates them into practices that help you meet life's challenges and seek balanced success in this world and the next.

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