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WHAT THE SEEKER NEEDS

Muhi-e-Din Ibn Arabi

In the name of Allah, The Benificent, Most Merciful

Note:

What the seeker needs is also known as *Kitab Kunh ma la budda minhu lil- murid*. This short work was written in Mosul in 1204 in answer to the question of what the seeker "should believe in and what he should do in the beginning, before anything else."

Translations of this work have been printed on several occasions: in Turkish (by Mahmud Mukhtar Bey, 1898); Spanish (excerpts by M. Asin Palacios, 1931); and in English (by A. Jeffrey, 1962).

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WHAT THE SEEKER NEEDS

All praise and thanks are due to Allah Most High, and may His benedictions and salutations be upon His messenger, and the progeny and companions of His messenger.

This short guide is a response to one who wishes to take the path of faith, hope, and love so that he might become complete and perfect as he was created. It was written to answer his questions about what he should believe in and what he should do in the beginning, before anything else.

O you who yearn for eternal beauty, traveler on the path of the true wish, may Allah make you successful in knowing the true way, finding it, and being upon it. May He use you and us in actions that please Him and are done for His sake. For the beginning and the end and what is in between, and success in them all, belong only to Him.

The way and means to eternal salvation and bliss is in coming close to the Truth. Allah Himself teaches us the meaning of His closeness to us. He teaches us by sending us His prophets. We say, "we believe." It is the truth. We accept and confirm it. The only thing then left for us to do is to follow the teachings and the example of His prophet.

First, you must believe in the oneness and uniqueness of the One who is before the before and after the after, who created us and everything else, and you must not associate with Him anything unbefitting the purity of His Essence. He Himself says in His divine book:

If there were in them gods besides Allah, (the heavens and the earth) would both have been in disorder (mixing and clashing and being destroyed). (Anbiya', 22)

The wills of many creators would clash and cancel each other, not permitting anything to be or to happen. Therefore, if we and all existence exist, He -- the One and Unique Creator - exists, and He has no associates.

O you with beautiful nature and pure heart, do not debate, discuss, even talk with people who attribute partners to Allah. There is no use in trying to convince them. Even the deniers will finally concede:

And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth they will say, Allah. (Luqman, 25)

They as well will finally admit an unknown force as the initial Creator of the creation - but they will add to Him further creators. The difference between them and the believers is that they suppose that others, among the created, are also able to create. You do not have to prove to them the existence of Allah. Let them prove, if they can, the existence of His associates.

This is sufficient advice for you on the subject of professing the oneness of Allah. Time is valuable: you cannot be careless with it. If the mind has reached a state in which it is free from

doubt and the heart is safe and secure, it makes no sense to disturb this peace with superfluous proofs.

The second matter of importance for one who wishes to learn is the belief that Allah Most High is free from all resemblance to anything visible or invisible in the creation. He is free from all defect.

There are some who, wanting to see the image of their Creator, err, and liken Him to a human being. Let His own words be your guide in this. He says:

Nothing is like Him.... (Shura, 11)

Any thought, any word, any quality or attribute not corresponding to this principle is a falsehood, unworthy of the Divine. Therefore seek no further than the fact that none resemble or are like Him. That is His reality. This is also confirmed by the declaration of His messenger, who said, "At the beginning was Allah, and none with Him." The ones who followed him added to this statement, "It is now as it was." As it was before the creation, it is after the creation. From the time when matter was hidden under the veil of nonexistence and there was no form, nothing has been added or subtracted. Though He has created the creation, still there are none like Him. Nothing is like Him. Nothing is Him, but everything is from Him. The divine word that He is without likeness cancels all other thoughts, claims, and interpretations.

You must also accept, and believe, even if you do not understand, the allegorical verses of the Holy Qur'an and the ambiguous statement of the Messenger of Allah concerning the unity and the ultimate cause, as well as all the declarations of the prophets which have come to us unaltered. You must consider that the significance of these words is a part of divine knowledge and that as such, you accept them. The monumental meanings of these holy expressions are for the understanding of people who are close enough to Allah to be able to see His beautiful attributes.

There is no better proof of the perfection of the Divine, who is self-existent and whose existence is a necessity for the existence of all else, than the holy verse:

Nothing is like Him....

Allah declares with this verse His being, His essence, His divine nature, His limitless greatness, His glory. So write in your heart and mind this principle, this foundation of faith, and believe in Allah's prophet and the message that he brought from the Divine Truth, and in Allah's orders and justice. Furthermore, have faith in the true declarations of all the prophets known and unknown. Love their companions; accept the truth of their mission. Do not speak against them. Do not value one over another. Think of them with terms of praise, as they are described in the Holy Qur'an and in the words of other prophets, which can only be the truth. Show respect, as did the prophets, for the character that distinguishes the perfect man, and for holy places. Accept and believe in the deeds and the words of the saints, even though you may not understand their state and the miracles attributed to them.

Look upon the whole creation, and above all, mankind, with good will - accepting, approving, forgiving, serving, loving. Make that your nature in your dealings with the world. Listen to your conscience. Cleanse your heart. In that clean heart, keep up prayer for your faithful brothers. Help and serve, as much as you can, the people who hide their misery, who are content with their poverty, the travelers on the path to truth. Do not attribute to yourself virtue, goodness, and graciousness because of your service to the creation. Consider that you owe other people thanks for having humbly accepted your help. It is incumbent upon you to lighten the load of those who are burdened. If people whose pain you have helped to alleviate cause you pain in return - if their responses, their ways, their habits are dark and cast shadows upon you - show patience and forbearance. Do not forget that Allah says:

...surely Allah is with the patient. (Baqara, 153)

Do not spend your life in empty endeavors and your time in idle talk. Instead, reflect and remember Allah, read the Qur'an, guide the misguided to the enlightened path. Help others leave evil and turn to doing good. Mend broken friendships. Help others to help others.

Find the right friend, who will be a support for you, a good travelling companion on the path of truth. Faith is a seed. It grows into a tree with the beneficent watering and sunshine of faithful friends. Beware of being close to those who do not discriminate between the faithful and the unfaithful - not knowing either faith or the faithful, they do not care about them. They are either strangers to or enemies of the truth in which you believe.

Look for a perfect teacher who will lead you on the straight path. In your search for a guide, be sincere, because sincerity distinguishes the true seeker. It is certain that if you cling to sincerity and truthfulness, the Lord will manifest His attribute of the Ultimate Guide upon you and will guide you to a perfect teacher. Sincerity in the seeker is such a blessing that when it is present, Allah will even turn the accursed devil himself and the seeker's personal devil, his ego, into angels of inspiration serving him. Sincerity is such a catalyst that it turns lead into gold and purifies everything it touches.

A matter of the greatest importance, one of your greatest needs, is to be sure that the morsel of bread you put in your mouth is lawful. Lawful sustenance, the lawfulness of all you enjoy in this world, is the foundation of your faith. It is upon this foundation that your religion can be built.

To advance in this path, in the footsteps of the prophets (peace and blessings be upon them), you have to be light - light in worldly goods, light in your concerns about this world. An unmistakable sign of the heaviness that will prevent you from advancing is to be a burden on people. Neither be a freeloader nor let others carry your load. Particularly, don't accept goods and favors, either for yourself or for others, from people whose hearts are dead, submerged in the sleep of heedlessness.

In what Allah permits you to gain as your sustenance - in all your actions, behavior and words - fear Allah. Do not seek comfort and luxury, especially when you have not worked hard for it. Lawful sustenance is obtained by working harder than is demanded of you. A clear sign of the lawfulness of one's gain is that it will not permit you to be either stingy or a spendthrift.

Take care, since if the love of this world takes root firmly in your heart, it constricts your heart, and it becomes exceedingly hard to pull it out and throw it away. This world is a trial ground; don't seek comfort and riches in it. Eat less. That will leave more space in your heart and will increase your desire to pray and be obedient. It will make you more active and less lazy.

Cleanse and beautify your days and nights with worship. The generous Lord asks you to His presence five times a day. Do your prayers at the times He calls you, five times daily, and at each prayer make an accounting of your actions since the last prayer. It is to be hoped that only good deeds and actions befitting a Muslim are done between the times of prayer.

Most people complain that this world, their work to secure their sustenance, and their work as householders for their families, take time away from their worship. Know that work done heedfully, with consideration for others, in accordance with proper behavior, for the pleasure of Allah, is also worship.

Allah has blessed you with intellect, knowledge, profession, strength, and health. All grace and power are due to Him. Use these to gather as much of your sustenance as possible in the minimum of time. If possible, secure in one day your week's sustenance. Take the example of Ahmad al-Sabti, a prince, the son of the 'Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid. He used the maximum of his talents and strength and effort and worked exceedingly hard as a manual laborer on Saturday. With what he earned in one day he was able to live a whole week. He dedicated the remaining six days of the week to working for Allah and worshipping Him.

After you perform your morning prayer, stay with your Lord until sunrise, and after your afternoon prayer stay in His presence until sunset. These are two periods of time when spiritual powers and enlightenment flow in abundance. Keep your heart tied to Allah in humility and in peace.

There is great virtue and merit in performing extra worship of twenty cycles of prayer between the afternoon and evening prayers, and between the evening and night prayers. Perform extra prayers of four cycles just before the noon prayer, after and just before the afternoon prayer, and after the evening prayer. Perform another ten cycles of prayers in sets of two after the obligatory night prayer, and the three cycles of closing prayer, with, as the last worship of the day.

Do not sleep until you are unable to stay awake. Do not eat until you are hungry. Dress only to cover your body and to protect it from cold and from heat. Make it a habit to read from the Holy Qur'an every day. When you read, hold the holy book with respect. Keep it in your left hand at the level of your chest, and move your right hand along the words you read. Read aloud, but just loud enough that you can hear your own voice.

Read without haste, slowly thinking of the meaning of each word. Wish for divine mercy and beneficence when you come to the verses that inspire His mercy. Take warning from the verses of admonition, and when reading them, promise your Lord your determination to act upon His command, repenting, taking refuge in His mercy, seeking salvation. When you read verses describing the praiseworthy qualities of the truly faithful, think of your own qualities. Be thankful and praise Him for your good qualities, and feel shame for the qualities missing in you,

so that you may hope to find the character of the faithful in yourself. And when you read about the faults of the nonbelievers and of the hypocrites who hide and distort the truth, think about whether you are also afflicted with such faults. If you are, try to stop them, to chase them away, to eliminate them. If you do not have them, take refuge in Him, be thankful and praise Him.

What is essential for you is to be heedful at all times, to be attentive to what comes into your mind and your heart. Think about and analyze these thoughts and feelings. Try to control them. Beware of the wishes of your ego, settle your accounts with it.

Have conscience, shame, in front of Allah. That will be a motivation to make you heedful. You will then care about what you are doing or saying or thinking, and the thoughts and feelings that are ugly in the eyes of Allah will be unable to settle in your heart. Your heart will then be safe from wishing acts not in accordance with Allah's pleasure.^[1]

Give value to your time, live in the present moment. Do not live in imagination and throw your time away. Allah has prescribed a duty, an act, a worship for your every moment. Know what it is and hasten to do it. First perform the actions He has given to you as obligations. Then do what He has given to you to do through the example of His Prophet. Then take on what He has left you as voluntary, acceptable good deeds. Work to serve the ones who are in need.

Do everything you do in order to come close to your Lord in your worship and prayers. Think that each deed may be your last act, each prayer your last prostration, that you may not have another chance. If you do this, it will be another motivation for becoming heedful and also for becoming sincere and truthful. Allah does not accept good deeds done unconsciously and insincerely as readily as deeds done in consciousness and sincerity.

Cleanliness is an order of Allah. Keep your body and your inner self clean at all times. Whenever you make an ablution make two cycles of prayer following it, except when you have to make an ablution at times when praying is not permitted: at sunrise, at high noon, and at sunset. Friday is an exception to that rule; it is permissible then to pray at high noon.

Above all, what you need is high morals, good character, proper behavior; you must identify your bad features and rid yourself of them. Your relationship to whomever you come into contact with must be based on the best of conduct - but what this means may vary with conditions and circumstances.

Whoever neglects a single item of good behavior is considered to have bad character. Men are created different from each other. Their levels are different. Good behavior and character are also in different levels. Behavior is not a form. It is not to act in the same way on every occasion towards everyone. You have to consider each case, each person, in accordance with the circumstance and the need of the person. A good rule to remember is that if a thing is done to bring salvation, truth, comfort, and peace to others, to oneself, and to as many people as possible, protecting them, eliminating pain and hardship, it is good behavior - on condition that it is not done for personal benefit, but for Allah's sake. Is not man the servant of Allah? Are not his life and his deeds dependent on divine predestination? He is in a frame whose limits he, cannot

leave. His will, his freedom of choice, his destiny written on his forehead, are in the hand of the All-Powerful upon whom all acts, all moves depend.

Proper behavior is the means by which an intention becomes a good deed. Therefore it is the greatest capital in the hand of the seeker. The proof is the word of the one who was brought with the most beautiful character, the last prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), who said, "I have been sent to perfect good behavior."

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

And the recompense of evil is punishment like it, but whoever forgives and amends, his reward is with Allah.... (Shura, 40)

The religious law says that you may choose to demand your right or you may choose to leave it. Choose to leave that which is due to you and forgive, instead of punishing, so that you will be counted among the compassionate, the peaceful, the righteous, whose rewards are promised by Allah.

It is also within good behavior to be angry and to seek to punish when this is justified by the religious code. Anger and its manifestation are one of the great sins if aroused by wrongs done to you personally. But it is permissible and right and a part of correct behavior and good character to become " "Use of something done against Allah and His divine precepts, to manifest it, and to fight for Allah's sake. It is best to separate yourself from people who do not believe in what you believe, who do not do what you do, and who are against your faith. Yet at the same time you should not think badly of them or condemn them for what they are. Your intention in ignoring them should be that you prefer the company of believers. Spend your time in remembering, glorifying, and worshipping Allah instead of being with them. Treat well those who are dependent upon you: the people who work for you, your children, your wives and husbands, your mothers, sisters, and friends, the animals in your care, the plants in your garden. Allah has given them into your hands to test you. You are in His care. Treat the ones in your care as you want the One in whose care you are to treat you. The Messenger of Allah says, "All of creation are Allah's dependents." He has left a few of His dependents, such as your family, in your hands. That is why His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) says that the one who is best loved by Him is the one who is best towards his dependents. Show love, compassion, delicacy, generosity, and protection towards those who depend on you - and in fact, to everyone. If you wish His compassion and protection, remember that you yourself depend on the One, the lord and owner of all and everything.

Teach Allah's words in His divine book and the good behavior of Islam to your children. Secure for them conditions in which they can exercise what you have taught them. Do this without expecting any return from them. From the very beginning, teach them to bear difficulty, to have patience, to think. Do not place in their hearts the love of the world. Teach them to dislike the things of this world that will render them proud - luxuries, beautiful clothes, delicacies, excess of ambition - because all these, if obtained, will be subtracted from the good due them in the hereafter. Let them not get accustomed to good things; break their habits. Beware that this, which

may seem austere, should not bring forth in you the ugly character of miserliness towards your children. Do it in respect and attachment to your religion.

Do not seek to be close to the heedless, to the ones who are slaves to the desires of their flesh. They take hearts away from the light of truth and throw them into the dark hole of heedlessness, as they did with their own hearts. If you are placed with them in the same time and space, then face them and advise them. If they turn their backs on you, it is because they do not know their fronts from their backs. Do not stab them in the back. Be the same way to them whether they turn their faces to you or their backs. Then they may like and respect you and perchance they may be attached to you and follow you.

Do not be satisfied with your spiritual state; advance. Advance ceaselessly, without interruption. With firm intention pray to Allah, the Ultimate Truth, to bring you from the state in which you are to a state beyond it. In every state, in every move, while doing a thing or while being inactive, be sincere and truthful. Be with the Ultimate Truth. Do not ever forget Him. Feel His presence always.

Learn to give, whether you have plenty or little, whether you are happy or in pain. This is a proof of your faith in Allah. Try to satisfy the needs of the needy. This is an affirmation that Allah has assigned everyone's sustenance and nothing will change it. This is a proof of your trusting in Allah.

A miser is a coward. The accursed Devil whispers in his ear that there is no death, that he will live a long time; that the world is hostile; that if he gives he will be left destitute, dishonored, and alone; that he should not be fooled by the plenty that he now has, for no one knows what will happen tomorrow. Worse still, if the miser has little, the devil tells him that soon he will have even less. No one will help him; he will be a load on others and will be detested. He has to look after himself. If these evil imaginations capture the heart one may be led to the edge of hellfire. On the other hand, the ones who give their ears to Allah hear His blessed words. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

...and whoever is saved from the miserliness of his ego, these it is that find salvation. (Hashr, 9)

...whoever is miserly is miserly to himself. (Muhammad, 38)

The final warning is:

If you turn back (on the path) He will bring another people in your place. (Muhammad, 38)

That is to say, after having been taught and after having been brought to the path of faith, if you begin or continue to be a miser, you may lose your place, your level, and Allah's favor. Someone else, who is generous and believes in Allah's generosity, will be brought in your place.

The one who is niggardly has not realized the terrifying meaning of Allah's words:

Destroy their riches and harden their hearts. (Yunus, 88)

This is the curse of the prophet Moses (peace be upon him) upon the Pharaoh. When Allah willed the destruction of Pharaoh and his chief, the prophet Moses (peace be upon him) prayed to Allah, the Absolute Judge, for them to be cursed with miserliness. With the effect of this curse the Egyptians were afflicted with miserliness and envy. The poor and the weak died of hunger and Allah judged the Pharaoh and his followers and punished them because of their miserliness.

The ones who are cursed with stinginess do not listen to the words of Allah's messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), who says, "Allah has two angels next to Him who pray every morning, 'O Lord, increase Your bounties upon the ones who give, and take away what they have from the ones who keep it!'"

When Hadrat Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) wished to donate all that he possessed and brought it to the blessed presence of our master, the Prophet of Allah asked, "What have you put aside for the care of your family?" He responded, "I leave them in the care of Allah and His messenger." When Hadrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) brought half his fortune to donate and was asked the same question, he answered, "I have left half of my goods for the sustenance of my family." The prophet of Allah told them, "The difference between you two is in accordance with your response to my question "

The one who gives from his sustenance attracts; a more than he has given from the Ultimate Sustainer. The miser, in addition to his sin of miserliness, accuses Allah Most High of stinginess and prefers and trusts his miserable goods over the generosity of his Lord. This is the unforgivable sin of attributing partners to Allah and may cause one to be rejected from Allah's mercy and lose his faith, may Allah protect us.

Therefore, spend from what Allah has given you. Do not fear poverty. Allah will give you what He has promised, whether you or everyone asks for it or does not ask for it. No one who has been generous has ever perished in destitution.

If you wish to find the truth and have Allah's pleasure and support in it, then avoid being negative and control your temper and anger. If you cannot stop anger, at least do not show it. When you do this, you will please Allah and disappoint the devil. You will begin to educate your ego and straighten and shorten your path. Anger is a result and a sign of the ego not being under control, like a mean wild animal untied and uncaged. As you hold your temper, it is as if you put a bridle on its head and barriers around it. You begin then to tame it, teach it how to behave, to obey, so that it cannot hurt others or itself (because it is a part of you).

When this discipline reflects from you, revealing someone who can control his temper and hold his anger, your adversary will be calmed. You will not be reacting to his provocations. You will not be punishing him or responding to his negativity, but ignoring it. This is more effective than punishing him. He may be led to see the reality of his acts, to realize what is fair, and to confess his faults.

Give heed to this advice and make it a habit. If you do, you certainly will see the positive result and the rewards here and in the hereafter. You will be the winner on the day when your deeds will be weighed. That is the greatest reward and the greatest grace that you will receive. For if

you hold your temper, the All Just will also hold back His punishment for your sins, which are punishable by His divine wrath. Your forgiving will be rewarded by His forgiving you. What better benefit may one expect for effort in bearing hardship caused by your brothers and sisters in faith?

Allah will treat you the way He has ordered you to treat others. So try to assume the good qualities of being just, peaceful, helpful, gentle, and loving. Persist in these qualities; act with them. You will see that this character will spread from you to others around you, creating harmony, mutual love, and respect. The Beloved of Allah, our master the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), orders us to love each other, to be in a continuous loving state. He repeats this in so many ways, in so many statements. To leave anger, to replace it with bearing hardship, with forgiving, with caring for the one who causes the hardship, is one of the cornerstones of the foundation of love.

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Open your heart in order to receive divine benevolence. A benevolent heart becomes the mirror in which Allah's favors are manifest. When the divine favors manifest and come through you, when you feel His presence, you will feel shame at your improper actions. This will cause both you and others to have conscience. Thus your benevolence will protect you and others from sin.

When the archangel Gabriel asked our master the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), "What is divine benevolence?" The Last of the Prophets answered, "To pray and glorify Allah as if you are in His presence, as if you see Him." Reverence reflects in the heart of a believer who has reached the level of praying as if he sees Allah.

Then our master the Prophet continued, "For if you are unable to see Him, He certainly sees you." The one who has reached that level of realization of divine benevolence will have conscience. He will feel that gaze of Allah upon him and will be ashamed to sin. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Conscience is total good." If a believer has conscience, he is aware of what he is doing and he cannot do wrong; Men a heart is filled with conscience, the possessor of that heart encounters no harm either in this world or in the Hereafter. The sign of a man with conscience is his lack of arrogance and self-importance. He never oppresses or tries to dominate others. May you also reach the level of benevolence and have conscience, and may you have the strength and foresight to try to attain it.

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Wake before sunrise, remember Allah, and repent. When repentance follows sin, it erases it The sin disappears as if it never happened. When repentance follows a benevolent action or prayer, it is like light upon light, grace upon grace. To remember Allah and to praise Him unifies the heart when it is scattered all around - like a mirror broken into a thousand pieces - and mends it, makes it into one, and turns it towards the One. Then all trouble leaves the heart, and it is filled with the joy of the One whom it remembers.

When your heart is filled to the brim with remembrance, then read the Holy Qur'an. When you read, reflect upon the meaning of what you have read. When verses remind you of His oneness and of His being without likeness and free from all defect, praise Him. When you read verses describing His blessings, bounties, generosity, and love or His wrath and punishment, take refuge from Him in Him and beg for His mercy. When you hear the parables about past prophets and their people, take heed and draw lessons from what happened to them. There are infinite meanings within the verses of the Holy Qur'an, within every word - changing with your states and levels, knowledge and understanding. Therefore you cannot possibly be tired, weary, or bored in reading them.

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Try to undo the knots of your persistence in sinning. Knot over knot ties you up. How are you going to save yourself? You will need the help of the one who tied those knots, your own self. Talk to it, reason with it. Tell it: "O temporal flesh, you resent listening to reason, but listen. Are you sure, as you inhale, that this is not your last breath? Allah knows best, but the next breath may be your last in this world to which you are so attached. Death will seize you by the throat; yet you persist in piling wrong upon wrong, sin upon sin. The Ultimate Judge warns the ones who persist in sinning with such punishment that mountains of rock cannot bear it. How then can you, flimsy as a straw, imagine that you could bear such horrible torments? Do not turn your back on me One who created you. Face Him and repent. Do it now, without delay, for you do not know when death will break you in two."

And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them he says, "Now I repent (Nisa', 17)

Say to the self: "Indeed, after the aura of death has rendered you prostrate and life is fading away, if you can remember at all and repent, that repentance will not be accepted by Allah. The Prophet whom He sent as a mercy upon the universe said that though Allah accepts your repentance until the time when your breath is being choked out of you, at the moment of your death throes it is too late. Death comes without: warning - to some while eating, to some while drinking, to others while sleeping with their wives, to others in deep sleep from which they do not awake. Whoever, before that, has not turned from falsehood to truth, has not repented but persists in sinning, will fall into the abyss of death."

Talk this way to your self. Try to discipline and educate the desires of your flesh. As. they are persistent in sinning, be persistent in convincing them to stop sinning. If you keep warning your lower self, with the help of Allah the knots binding your heart will be untied. That is the only way to be saved.

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Fear Allah both in your actions and deep in - your heart and thoughts. Fear of Allah is the fear of Allah's punishment. Whoever truly fears the warnings of torment of the Absolute Judge cannot but act in accordance with the pleasure of the Creator and seek the right over the wrong. The Owner of the Final Word Himself said:

...and Allah cautions you against His retribution.... (Al-Imran, 27)

... and know that Allah knows what is in your minds, so beware of Him.... (Baqarah, 235)

The fear of Allah is a protection, the thing that guards you from harm. Allah's protection is the strongest of all armor, of all fortifications; no harm can penetrate it. That is what divine fear secures for you. The Prophet of Allah, whom He sent as His mercy upon the universe, himself took refuge in his lord. Praying to Him, he said, "I take refuge in Your pleasure, in Your beauty, in Your gentleness, from Your wrath and Your strength. I take refuge in Your divine mercy and compassion, from your punishment. I take refuge in You from You."

Seek, learn about, and imitate K beneficent acts of your Creator that manifest all around you. Protect yourself against divine wrath with acts and deeds in accordance with Allah's pleasure. Whatever act, whatever thing, whatever path is under the shadow of doubt and fear, do not come close to it. Leave it. Know that knowing your Creator and obeying Him is the only path that will lead you to peace and felicity. Revolt and selfishness are a dead end. Only by gaining the divine consent can you save yourself from your Lord's wrath. Only by entering the straight path can you get out of the abyss of that dead end; only by actions proper to paradise can you keep away from the fire. Allah says:

Fear Allah... and fear the Fire. (Al 'Imran, 130-31)

With the fear of Allah, rise away from fire and towards felicity.

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While you persist in sinning and stubbornly refuse to see your errors, why are you so proud that Allah treats you with patience, kindness, and generosity in spite of your sins? Is it that you are fooled by what the devil whispers in your ear, saying, "If it weren't for your sins and your revolt, how would Allah manifest His infinite mercy, compassion, and generosity?" Don't you see how irrational that evil teaching is? Would it be less merciful and beneficent for the Owner of Infinite Wisdom to prevent His servant from opposing His will and pleasure?

Then the devil may whisper in your ear again: "You have no hope of attaining the level of benevolence of those who are born with good character and obedience. They have come to this world and shown their obedience to the will of Allah, gathered their Lord's mercy and beneficence in this world, and left it. The real mercy, generosity, and kindness of Allah will be manifest in the Hereafter on the Day of Judgment, Men He judges His disobedient servants who need of His mercy."

Only someone who has lost his senses could believe in and be deceived by such thoughts. Protect yourself against such temptations and tell your devil: "What you say about Allah's infinite patience and generosity towards His servants is true. Indeed, if there were no revolt, disobedience, and sin, we would not see the manifestation of His divine attributes. So many examples are related to us in the holy books and statements. But you, evil one, are using the truth

for your own purposes - so that Allah's mercy be manifest, you encourage me to sin! You are trying to make me revolt because Allah is patient and kind.

"You ask me to test Allah's mercy and beneficence. How do you know, O accursed one, that I am of those who will be forgiven? Indeed Allah forgives whom He wills and punishes injustice whom He wills. How do I know to which party I belong? All I know is that I am full of sin. And just as I was left in this world without the ability to repent and ask His forgiveness, He may well refuse me His mercy before I enter hell and punish me with the fire. Although one dies as one lives, and sin is the messenger of disbelief, if I am fortunate and give my last breath as a believer, then He will purify me in hellfire and take me out and give me peace in His mercy.

"If I knew for sure that there were no day of reckoning with my sins, that there were no punishment, and if I were certain that I would receive divine absolution, I might have considered your twisted reasoning. Even then, it would be no better than admitting foolishness, for it is certainly an unforgivable behavior for a servant to test the patience of his Lord.

"On the other hand, even if I were certain that I would receive divine punishment, the proper thing for me would be shame and thankfulness for His delaying His punishment and spending of all effort of which I am capable in trying to obey the commands of my Lord.

"I have not heard of any good word that all sins will be forgiven. On the contrary, one is left free to choose between the right and the wrong, and the Ultimate Judge is free to forgive or to punish. In your case, though, O evil-commanding ego, there is no choice. You are constant in your wish for the wrong and the forbidden!"

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Be chaste; chastity is to be cautious, to try to abstain from all that is unclean and sinful. It is protecting yourself from all that is doubtful and suspicious in and around you. When the Messenger of Allah said: "Leave that which is doubtful and reach for that which is sure," he was speaking of the necessity of abandoning things that render you doubtful and hesitant, that create uncertainty, suspense, and fear in your heart - and of turning towards things that render you secure and peaceful.

It falls upon you to examine each act, each word, each act of worship, each relation with others such as friendship or marriage. You must find whether each thing is good or bad, clean or unclean, right or wrong-in other words, lawful or unlawful. In some cases it is clear; then you must choose the right over the wrong. In some cases it is doubtful; then you must leave it as if it were wrong and seek that which is sure.

Follow the advice of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): Even if you feel in need of that which is doubtful, even if you are unable to get anything else, do not take it; leave it for the sake of Allah. This is chastity. Be sure that Allah will reward the chaste with abundant goods much better than the doubtful thing that was abandoned. But do not expect your reward immediately.

Chastity is the foundation of religion and the path to truth. If you are chaste, all your deeds will be pure and sincere; all you do will end well; you will be in harmony with the divine order. You will be the recipient of divine generosity; all will turn to you. You will be under divine protection. If you are chaste and pious, avoiding the wrong and the doubtful, there is no doubt that you will receive all these blessings. But if you turn your back to chastity and piety, the Absolute Judge will place you in a shameful state - helpless, terrified. He will leave you by yourself in the hands of your ego. Then you will be a toy for the devil, who will find no resistance, no opposition to his tempting you, to his taking you away from truth.

Spend all your effort to stay on the path of piety, and may Allah help you.

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This world is a place of preparation where one is given many lessons and poses many tests. Choose less over more in it. Be satisfied with what you have, even if it is less than what others have. In fact, prefer to have less.

This world is not bad - on the contrary, it is the field of the hereafter. What you plant here, you will reap there. This world is the way to eternal bliss and so is good - worthy to be cherished and to be praised.

What is bad is what you do with the world when you become blind to truth and totally consumed by your desires, lust, and ambition for it. Our master the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), in whom wisdom was as clear a crystal, was asked, "What is worldliness?" He answered, "Everything that makes you heedless and causes you to forget your Lord." Therefore the goods of this world are not harmful in themselves, but only when you let them render you forgetful, disobedient, and unaware of the Lord who has generously offered them to you. It is your sense of the world, your relationship to it, your preference of it over the One who gave it to you, that makes you insensitive and causes you to break your connection with divine truth.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Whoever prefers the world over the Hereafter is made to suffer three things: an unbearable load that is never lightened; a poverty that never becomes richer, and an ambition, a hunger, that is never satisfied."

Therefore the one who lives for this world alone is bound to bear its pains and difficulties - trying to resolve its problems by himself, being totally dependent on it like a beggar, trying to obtain the needs of his flesh and his ego from it. That flesh, that ego whose appetite never knows satiation, whose ambitions are endless, is always wanting, always hungry, always dissatisfied. These are the rewards of the world to those who make the world their lord, forgetting the Lord of all the Universes.

This does not mean that you should abandon the world, not do your duties in it or participate in its affairs - retiring to a corner, making no effort, doing no work. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) says, "Allah likes to see the believer working at his profession." "Indeed Allah likes the one who has a craft." "The one who earns his sustenance lawfully through his efforts is beloved of Allah." These sayings mean that Allah's beneficence

encompasses all who work hard in a craft or business in this world. It is for this reason that all the prophets worked for their sustenance.

It is related that one day Hadrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) met a group of people who were sitting around lazily doing nothing. He asked them who they were. "We are of those who put their affairs in the hands of Allah, and we trust in Him," they replied.

"Indeed you do not!" he angrily responded. "You are nothing but freeloaders, parasites upon other people's efforts! For someone who truly trusts in Allah first plants the seed in the belly of this earth, then hopes and expects and puts his affairs in the hand of the Sustainer!"

Some true theologians come close to claiming work - in the professions, crafts, and businesses that are lawful according to divine law - as a condition of faith. They have claimed that certainty of faith is defined by the carrying out of religious obligations, and that work is one of these. They based this on the verse:

But when the prayer is ended, disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah's grace, and remember Allah much that you may be successful. (Jum'ah, 10)

Thus to leave the worldly and the world does not mean not to do your duties in it.

Perhaps what is meant by being worldly is giving yourself up solely to gathering the world's benefits. The worldly person identifies with what he has gathered and is proud of it. Full of ambition, he devotes himself to amassing the goods of this world without any consideration of whether they are lawful or unlawful, his rightful portion or the portion of others. Worse still is not to see any wrong in all this, to think that it is the right way, the only way.

When the love of the world fills your heart totally, it leaves no space for the remembrance of Allah. Forgetting the hereafter, you prefer this temporal world. All that you need from the world is something lawful to satisfy your hunger, something with which to cover yourself, and a roof over your head. Let these be the only things you ask from this world, nothing more. Don't be envious of the apparent temporal abundance the world-bound seem to enjoy, nor wish for the riches they have gathered without any consideration of right or wrong, of lawful or unlawful. How long does one stay in this world?

Someone who chooses this temporal world over the true good of the eternal Hereafter will never reach his goal, either here or there. For the ambition of one who is ambitious for this world will never be satisfied. Don't you see that the Maker of Destiny decides your lot in this world, and that you receive neither more nor less than what you are destined to receive? Whether you care or not, what Allah has set forth does not change. Whether we want more or not, we can only attain that which is reflected in the mirror of our destiny. Allah says:

We portion out among them their livelihood in the life of this world. (Zukhruf, 32)

But people who take this world as their god have endless wants, and those wants of theirs that are not appointed to them, they will never receive. Thus they will be dissatisfied and unhappy all of their lives and in the Hereafter they will have to face the wrath of Allah.

The desires of this world are like sea water. The more you drink of them, the more you thirst. The Messenger of Allah likened this world to a garbage heap in order to tell you to keep your distance from it. Be satisfied with the portion of it that Allah has included in your fate. Whether you like it or not, that will be your lot. Allah advised and warned the prophet Moses (peace be upon him), "O son of Adam, if you are satisfied with what I have apportioned to you, I will set your heart at rest and you are worthy of praise. But if you are not satisfied with what I have apportioned to you, I will grant the world power over you. You will race in it as a wild beast races in the desert. And by My power and majesty, you will not receive from it anything but what I have apportioned to you, and you will be worthy of blame!"

This means that man will attain peace of heart and the level of Allah's praise and grace if he accepts and is content with his lot in accordance with Allah's divine apportionment. On the other hand, if you do not accept the lot that is your fate, Allah will render the world, which you so desire, your enemy. The world will become like a desert to a hungry animal. You will run and run and tire yourself without being able to find anything in it. Allah vows for the world-bound that no matter how they run after the world, they will receive nothing more than their lot. The only things they will receive beyond that are fatigue, dissatisfaction, and disgrace.

Let us suppose that Allah has bestowed upon you all the goods of this world, all the material properties of which you may conceive - how much can you use besides the food and drink your stomach can take, the clothing that will cover your body, and a place to live? The humble of this world have no less, yet they are much better off. For they are at peace, without worry, in this world; and certainly in the hereafter they have less to account for.

Do not exchange your spiritual peace and the possibility of eternal bliss for the temporal, decaying goods of this world. No matter how grand and secure they look, they will die when you die. Death may come in your next step upon this earth, and all your dreams of this world will evaporate.

As the world-bound are sons of this world, there are also people bound for the hereafter, sons of the hereafter. As the Messenger of Allah advised, "be sons of the hereafter, bound for eternity, not temporal sons of the earth who will return to the earth." Read these words of your Lord and abide by them:

Whoever desires this world's life and its finery, We repay them their deeds therein and they are not made to suffer loss in it. These are they for whom there is nothing but fire in the hereafter. And what they work therein is fruitless, and their deeds are vain. (Hud, 15-16)

Whoso desires the harvest of the hereafter we give him increase in his harvest, and whoso desires the harvest of this world, We give him thereof, and he has no portion in the hereafter. (Shura, 20)

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AFTERWORD

May the Eternal Truth wake you from the slumber of heedlessness. May He make you aware of the origin, to which we will all return and in which we will all remain for the rest of eternity.

May the Divine Seer of all and everything open your inner eye, so that you can see and remember what you have done and said all through your life in this temporal realm of experiments. Then you will know and always remember that you must account for it all and that you will be judged on the day of final judgment.

Do not leave your accounting to the Day of Reckoning. This is the place and the time to do it. See yourself., close your accounts. The only way to salvation is to go into the Beyond clean and clear of debts. Give heed to the advice of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who said, "Make your accounting before it is made for you, weigh your sins before they are weighed for you." Examine your life; weigh your transgressions against your good deeds. Do it while you still have time in this world of numbered breaths, while you can, before you are left alone in that dark hole in the ground.

While you are alive, your worldly self is like a collector of benefits from Allah's bounties, which come to you from myriads of hands. What you receive is not really yours; you are like a cashier who distributes what he has received, and you are responsible for the accounting of it.

If you do not do this today, be sure that tomorrow on the burning Day of Reckoning you will scream and ask for help. No one will come to your aid. You will. hear the divine voice coming from the center of all divine orders, the voice of the Absolute Punisher who punishes the guilty, reducing them to nothing. it will be saying:

Read your book. Your own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day. (Bani Isra'il, 14)

Hasn't the Lord sent you messengers; hasn't He shown you the right way; hasn't He ordered you to remember Him and praise Him day and night? Hasn't He given you time within the day and within the night to follow His orders?

If you wait until the last minute, you will receive no good from your regret. If you insist on waiting and delay the accounting of yourself, know that all doors and windows will be closed to you and you will be left outside. If this is the case, know that there is no other door, no other place in which to seek refuge. There is no place to go - for you or for anyone or anything in the creation - except Allah's door of mercy. Go and kneel at its sill. Shed tears of repentance and beg for entrance. Try and see what is behind the curtains.

There are three dangers which may keep you from examining yourself making the accounting of your acts, and being thankful to your generous Lord. The first of these dangers is unconsciousness, heedlessness. The second is the flood of tastes and desires that gush from your

ego, your lower self. The third is bad habits, in fact all habits, which make one like a machine. The one who can protect himself against these three dangers, with Allah's help, will find salvation in both worlds.

Blessings be upon our master Muhammad and his progeny and his companions - in all tongues, in all places, and at all levels.

Whoever theorizes his religion
offends against the Way of God, and peace. Heretic!
Deviate toward the Law! Don't complicate.
All that is forbidden. All this learned talk
is ignorance. Station and state discard it.
It's not discussion: Religion's what my Lord said
or what he said - the master guide, the envoy
(and peace be his) - for he said not a word!

Footnotes

[1] Al-Shaykh al-Akbar. Hadrat Ibn 'Arabi had a shaikh who used to write down on a piece of paper everything he did or said during the day. At night he would make an accounting of that day's words and actions. If he had done wrong, he would repent and ask forgiveness; and if he had done right, he would offer thanks to Allah. Hadrat Ibn 'Arabi noted not only what he did and said, as his shaikh had done, but also his thoughts and feelings.