ʿIrfān-e-Ilāhī

True Recognition of God

Ḥaḍrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad
Khalīfatul-Masīḥ II

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'Irfān-e-Ilāhī - True Recognition of God

(English translation of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*)

An address delivered by

Ḥaḍrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad
Khalīfatul-Masīḥ II[ra]
at Jalsa Salana Qadian
on 16 March 1919

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Ḥaḍrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad
Khalīfatul-Masīḥ II[ra]

About the Author

Ḥaḍrat al-Hāj Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad (1889–1965), the Second Khalīfah (Successor) of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, was the son of the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him). His birth fulfilled the grand prophecy concerning Muṣleḥ Mauʿūd (the Promised Reformer), which the Promised Messiah had published as a sign of the truth of Islam in response to the challenge of the Arya Samaj.

From his early youth, he displayed extraordinary gifts of both secular and divine knowledge, developing a profound love for the Holy Quran. In 1914, at the age of twenty-five, he was elected as Khalīfatul-Masīḥ II. For nearly fifty-two years, he guided the Community with wisdom and foresight, expanding its reach to forty-six countries and overseeing the establishment of schools, hospitals, and missions worldwide. Under his inspired leadership, the historic schemes of *Taḥrīk-e-Jadīd* and *Waqf-e-Jadīd* were launched—initiatives that continue to serve the cause of Islam today.

A profound scholar and prolific author, he wrote extensively on theology, jurisprudence, history, and spirituality. His magnum opus, *Tafsīr-e-Kabīr*—a

ten-volume commentary of the Holy Quran in Urdu—remains an unparalleled treasure of knowledge. He was also a renowned orator of exceptional eloquence, capable of captivating audiences for hours with his deep insights.

Ḥaḍrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad[ra] also established the administrative structure of the Community, forming auxiliary organisations for men, women, and children. Among his many achievements were the creation of the Electoral College for the election of Khalīfatul-Masīḥ and the relocation of the Community's headquarters to Rabwah, Pakistan, following the Partition of India in 1947.

He passed away on 8 November 1965 in Rabwah, Pakistan and was succeeded by Ḥaḍrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad[ra] as Khalīfatul-Masīḥ III.

Foreword

'Irfān-e-Ilāhī - True Recognition of God is an English rendering of a landmark address delivered by Ḥaḍrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, Khalīfatul-Masīḥ II (may Allah be pleased with him), on 16 March 1919 in Qadian, India. The original Urdu text is published under the same title in the fourth volume of *Anwārul-'Ulūm*, a compilation of his collected works.

This book offers a profound exploration of what it truly means to attain a living recognition of God. It serves as a practical guide for those seeking to transcend mere theoretical knowledge and achieve an intimate, experiential awareness of our Beloved Creator—the very purpose of human life. In a world defined by spiritual fragmentation, it invites readers to move beyond the surface of ritual into a realm of personal transformation and genuine spiritual discovery.

Drawing upon the Holy Quran, the sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the insights of the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him), the author identifies the subtle barriers that obstruct the soul's path. He argues that *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* is neither a matter of chance nor a sudden

miracle, but the result of a deliberate methodology involving righteous effort, fervent prayer, and the cultivation of Divine attributes. For the seeker who has long struggled without solace, this work offers the keys to dismantling the walls between the servant and the Sought.

The lecture was translated into English under the Translation Committee based in Canada chaired by Hadi Ali Chaudhary.

This project was overseen and translated into English by Usman Shahid, based on an initial rendering by Shazia Rahman. Valuable assistance during various stages of preparation was also provided by Luqman Ahmad, Fazal Masood Malik, Farhan Naseer, Sajeel Ahmad, and Nauman Ahmad Hadi. May Allah grant them all the best of rewards. Amin.

Munir-ud-Din Shams
Additional Wakīlut-Taṣnīf
April 2026

Publisher's Note

Words included in square bracket [ ] are those of the translator and merely added for the purpose of clarification.

The following abbreviations have been used for salutations:

ṣas: *ṣallallāhu ʿalaihi wa sallam*, meaning 'peace and blessings of Allah be upon him', is written after the name of the Holy Prophet[ṣas].

as: *ʿalaihis-salām*, meaning 'peace be upon him', is written after the names of all other prophets.

ra: *raḍiyallāhu ʿanhu/ʿanhā/ʿanhum*, meaning 'may Allah be pleased with him/her/them', is written after the names of the companions of the Holy Prophet[ṣas] or the companions of the Promised Messiah[as].

All English renditions of the verses of the Holy Quran have been taken from the 2004 edition of Maulawī Sher Ali's translation.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ[1] نَحْمَدُهٗ وَنُصَلِّيْ عَلٰى رَسُوْلِهِ الْكَرِيْمِ[2]

'Irfān-e-Ilāhī
True Recognition of God

In the Annual Conventions of previous years, it has been my practice to offer such counsel on the opening day as is generally required for the reformation of the Community, reserving the second day for a more scholarly discourse that might assist in our practical reformation. However, owing to the circumstances of this year, I have resolved, should it accord with the will of God, to present the research-based lecture on the first day, and to deliver the address on various other matters on the second.

I wish to speak today on a matter of profound importance. But before I turn to the subject itself, I deem it necessary to mention that a recent spell of prolonged and severe illness, followed by a journey

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[1] *In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.* [Publisher]

[2] *We praise Allah, the Exalted, the Greatest, and we invoke blessings on His Holy Messenger ﷺ.* [Publisher]

to Lahore—where I was engaged for several days in religious dialogue and delivered two lectures—has left a marked effect upon my health, and I remain even now in a state of considerable weakness.

Thus, I find myself unable to speak for five or six hours as I would in the past; indeed, I doubt I can manage even two or three. I am also mindful that my voice may not reach everyone. Nonetheless, I shall strive, so far as God Almighty enables me, to project my voice clearly. Should some still be unable to hear, let them accept it as a matter of Divine wisdom; for He grants the ability to hear His word to whomsoever He wills, and withholds it from whomsoever He wills. None can contest His decree, and every soul must submit its will to His. In short, I will endeavour to acquaint you with the subject appointed for today, and the rest remains in God's hands.

In previous Jalsas, I presented my research concerning *Dhikr-e-Ilāhī* [Remembrance of God] and *Haqīqatur-Ru'yā* [The Philosophy of Dreams]. But today, I wish to address a subject so vital that no individual can hope for salvation without comprehending it. My earlier lectures dealt with secondary or peripheral topics; today's is fundamental and essential.

It is a matter of regret that I had to present this subject while lacking the strength to convey it in full detail. Even now, the strain of meeting visitors and the dust in the air have brought on such an intense headache that, despite having taken medicine, the slightest movement feels as though my head might burst. Nonetheless, if Allah so wills, I shall strive to deliver this message—which I regard as the beginning and the end of the matter for every Muslim.

As you are aware, I have been gravely ill of late. During this period, I suffered repeated bouts of cardiac weakness, each lasting up to six hours. In this state, a distinct impression was left upon my heart, compelling me to share something of great relevance to us all.

I reflected then on the immense favours God Almighty has bestowed upon us through the Promised Messiah[as]—drawing us out of a pit of darkness and elevating us to a pinnacle of light. Even so, the teachings he wished to impart, which are enshrined in the Holy Quran, still require great endeavour on our part to truly assimilate.

In those moments, when it seemed my final hour had arrived, the one thing gnawing at my heart was that our Community had not yet reached the station to which

the Promised Messiah[as] desired to raise it. In that hour, which I believed to be my last, I prayed: *O my Lord, avert this trial and grant our Community that light and spiritual excellence with which Thy righteous servants have always been distinguished*.

My Master accepted my plea and granted me this opportunity to draw your attention to your obligations, to the purpose of your creation, and to the path along which His Messenger sought to lead you.

I had begun a series of addresses last year on the theme of attaining *Ma'rifat-e-Ilāhī* and *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*[3], but they were left incomplete due to my declining health and subsequent absence from Qadian. Upon my return, illness struck once more, and the subject was deferred yet again.

Though the discourse remained unfinished, even a completed subject warrants repetition until it is fully implemented. The need for reiteration only ceases when action begins. Thus, I shall speak on this until it is acted upon.

I cannot speak at length; however, I believe that if I convey this message even in brief, I shall be absolved of

[3] *Ma'rifat-e-Ilāhī* and *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* are both terms that signify 'True Recognition of God'; the latter term is used throughout the text. [Publisher]

my duty before God. I shall be able to say: *I delivered the message; if they have not acted upon it, the fault is theirs, not mine.* Thus, if Allah the Exalted enables me, I shall be freed of this responsibility today.

'Irfān-e-Ilāhī is a matter of such gravity that no soul can afford to be indifferent to it; it is a need inherent in every human being. Many complain that they do not experience the sweetness and spiritual ecstasy that should naturally flow from faith. They say, 'We observe the prayers, we fast, we perform the Pilgrimage, we pay the *Zakāt*, we give alms, and we offer fervent supplications—yet, we remain distant from that station of true delight.' Such individuals plead to be taught the methods by which they might attain this enlightenment.

There is no doubt that this is a matter of supreme importance, for it is the very purpose of our creation. Indeed, the primary distinction between humans and the rest of creation lies in this: humans alone have been endowed with the faculty to attain true recognition of God. Should a person fail in this objective, they fall below the level of the beasts; for while animals are excused by their lack of capacity, a person is culpable for failing to utilise their inherent potential. *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*

is therefore essential; for without it, a human being remains incomplete and spiritually stunted.

Within our Community, there is a profound yearning to cultivate the love of God—a desire for His manifestation to illuminate every fibre of one's being. Despite this sincere longing, many find that this goal remains elusive. They rise in late hours of the night to weep in prayer and devote their days to the pursuit of God; yet, they remain far from their objective. In spite of their toil, they do not find their Beloved. The gates of *'irfān* remain barred, and a wall stands between the seeker and the Sought.

This raises the question: what are the means to dismantle this barrier and achieve the goal? After such exhaustive efforts, those who fail to find God often fall into utter despair, resigning themselves to the belief that He does not exist at all. Those who once burned with a desire for His nearness become His deniers. They argue, 'We were told that by following the path of Islam, we would find God. We spared no effort and exhausted our strength in this pursuit, yet we found

nothing. This proves that there is no God; for had He existed, He would surely have made Himself known.'[4]

In short, there are many who ache for the true recognition of God. They spend their nights in wakeful anguish, and by day they are like a mother who has lost her only child. They are, as it were, writhing upon burning coals. Does this failure then signify that God does not exist? Or does it mean that if He exists, there is no path to reach Him? Both conclusions are incorrect. In reality, there are specific ways to attain any objective; unless the correct method is applied, a goal remains beyond reach. Before I elaborate on the means of finding God, I must first clarify what is meant by the terms *Ma'rifat-e-Ilāhī* and *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*. Many people use these words because they have heard them from their forefathers, yet have never truly grasped their reality.

'Irfān and *Ma'rifat* are Arabic terms that are nearly synonymous with *'ilm* [knowledge]. However, there is a vital distinction: *'ilm* may be acquired without conscious effort or design, whereas *'irfān* is attained only through deliberate thought and reflection.

[4] A friend has just passed me a note requesting a formal definition of *Ma'rifat-e-Ilāhī* and *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*. He should rest assured that no subject can be fully understood without first defining its essence. As I stand here to address this theme, I shall certainly explain their meanings as we proceed. (Author)

While *'ilm* is a broad term, *'irfān* is conditional upon introspection. Thus, their relationship is one of the general to the specific: *'ilm* is universal, while *'irfān* is particular.

For this reason, in Arabic idiom one may say *'arafa rabbahū* ('the servant recognised his Lord') but not *'arafa 'abdahū* ('God recognised His servant'). In reference to God, only the term *'ilm* is used, for the Divine has no need of deliberation or discovery.

Irfān-e-Ilāhī, therefore, refers exclusively to human cognition; it signifies attaining a certain knowledge of God's existence through deep contemplation, whereby one truly recognises their Lord.

To 'recognise' is to identify a subject by the specific traits that distinguish it. For instance, if Zaid is said to have 'recognised' Bakr, it implies he identified Bakr by his unique features. In the same manner, *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* does not mean merely knowing the Divine attributes—such as *Raḥīm* [Merciful] and *Karīm* [Generous], *Sattār* [Concealer of Faults] and *Ghaffār* [the Great Forgiver], and so on—for they are already written in the Holy Quran and *Aḥādīth*. Every Muslim already knows God is *Rabb* [Lord], *Raḥīm* [Merciful], *Karīm* [Generous], *Ḥafiẓ* [Protector], and *Muhaīmin* [Bestower of Security]. If this were

sufficient, every person who memorised them would be an *'ārif* [one who possesses *'irfān*], yet we know this is not the case.

True *'irfān* is to move beyond theory and to discover the Being who possesses these attributes, witnessing their manifestation personally. An *'ārif billāh* is one who identifies those unique characteristics in God that are found in no other.

Consider an illustration: suppose a person has heard a detailed description of a man named Zaid—his appearance, his temperament, his stature, and even his style of dress. If he were later to encounter a man possessing all these specific traits and conclude through reflection that 'This is indeed Zaid,' he is said to have recognised him.

Similarly, *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* means that after learning of God's attributes, one is able to identify the very Being to whom they belong. Such an individual does not merely believe in a *Muḥyī* [Life-Giver] in theory; they discover Him by witnessing His life-giving power. Thus, *'irfān* is the transition from theoretical knowledge to the certain realisation that the Being before one is indeed the One described by those magnificent attributes.

Alas, many have no idea what *'irfān* signifies. They cling to words they have heard, weeping and wailing to be granted a gift they cannot even define. If questioned, ninety-nine per cent would be unable to explain what they are seeking.

Such individuals are like a person who stumbles about in the darkness of night, searching aimlessly for something without knowing what it is they seek. Even if they were to come across the very thing they had heard of by name, they would fail to recognise it, being ignorant of its nature, its attributes, and its form, and would cast it aside to continue their fruitless search. For example, consider a man who says he must meet a particular person named Zaid, but does not know where he lives, what he looks like, or what his habits are; now if he were to pass by Zaid himself, he would walk right past without recognising him.

In the same way, those who do not understand the essence of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* are, in the first place, not truly deserving of attaining it, or finding God. Even if they were to witness the attributes of God Almighty, what could they possibly discern? They would behold His very Being and, failing to recognise Him, simply move on.

The state of those who pursue *ma'rifat* and *'irfān* without understanding their reality is like the man who heard a passer-by reciting verses in praise of a beloved. The verses described her as being so beautiful that the whole world had fallen in love with her. He thought to himself, 'If the whole world is enamoured with her, why should I not be as well?' Thus, he began to call himself her lover, reciting poetry in her praise and lamenting their separation.

This man was a teacher at a school. One day, a friend went to visit him there, only to find that he had not attended for some time. The friend then went to his home and said to the maidservant, 'Tell your master that someone has come to see him.' She replied, 'He is not seeing anyone at the moment, for he has suffered a profound grief.' The friend insisted, 'Go and mention my name; if he still refuses, I shall leave.'

Upon hearing the name, the teacher invited him in. When the friend entered, he was shocked to see that the teacher had become emaciated and frail.

'What is the matter with you?' the friend asked.

'I have suffered a great affliction', the teacher whispered.

'Has a relative passed away?'

'Death is a constant in this world.'

'Then what has happened?'

'My beloved has died.'

The friend was bewildered. 'Who was she? Where did she live? What was her name?'

'I do not know her name', the teacher replied. 'Nor do I know where she lived, or even what she looked like.'

'But without knowing her appearance, how could you have fallen in love with her?'

'The truth is', the teacher said, 'one day I was sitting in the mosque when a man passed by reciting a couplet about how the entire world had fallen in love with a certain woman. Upon hearing this, I decided that I, too, should become her lover.'

'Then one day, I heard someone reciting a verse stating that Umm-e-'Umar had set off somewhere mounted on a donkey, but neither she nor the donkey ever returned. I thought to myself, "This must surely be my beloved, and since she did not return, she must have perished. Otherwise, what reason could there be for such a long delay?" You can well imagine that even the greatest display of grief is not enough after such a heart-rending tragedy.'

At this, the friend stood up and took his leave, outwardly expressing his condolences for the loss,

but inwardly lamenting his friend's sheer absurdity. In short, there are indeed such people in this world who cry out, 'Alas, we cannot find God!' yet have no conception of Who God is.

'Irfān-e-Ilāhī signifies 'true recognition of God.' However, this does not merely mean acquiring knowledge of the Divine attributes, for these have already been expounded in the Holy Quran and the *Aḥādīth*. If *'irfān* simply meant identifying these attributes, such knowledge would be superfluous, as these are already known.

As for the Essence of God Almighty, no one has ever fathomed it, nor can anyone ever do so. It is evident, therefore, that *'irfān* carries a deeper meaning. It is the realisation of the very Being who perfectly manifests those attributes which one has only heard of and studied. This is the way to attain *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* which is known by various other names.

The Means of Attaining *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*

We must now consider how this recognition can be achieved and what means are available for its pursuit. The first point I wish to highlight is that there are some who strive but do not attain *'irfān*. Setting them aside

for a moment, I wish to speak of those who make no effort at all, yet still claim they wish to find God.

If we examine the actions of such people, it is obvious that they do nothing to reach Him. Their state is like that of a person who only thinks of someone because their name happens to be mentioned in a gathering. Whenever they hear talk of seeking and finding God, they too express a passing desire to attain Him. Yet, such individuals can never find God.

'Irfān-e-Ilāhī is an exceedingly rare and precious treasure. In this world, we observe that even the most trivial of things cannot be attained without effort and toil. Consider how children pick wild berries from thorny bushes; though berries are very common, freely available, and grow abundantly in the wild, even they cannot be obtained without scratching one's hands and tearing one's clothes.

If something as trivial as a berry cannot be acquired without labour and hardship, how then can one hope to attain God without striving? If there is anything truly worth seeking in both worlds, it is God. When even the most trifling of objects demand efforts to acquire, how is it possible to find God, the Creator of all things, through mere sighs and passing expressions of regret?

Such individuals have never found God, nor can they, nor will they; for to find God, it is essential to undergo spiritual strivings. If anyone enters into *baiʻat* hoping that the mere act of placing their hand in another's will instantly bring them to the Divine threshold, they are sorely mistaken and shall never succeed.

Some naïve souls believe there were saints in the past who could, with but a single glance, wash away a person's spiritual impurities and transform them into a *quṭb* [high-ranking saint]. This notion is utterly false. True Recognition of God has never been so easily won, nor shall it ever be. To this day, not a single instance can be found where *maʻrifat* was granted without sacrifice, without striving, and without toil.

The most exalted of men are the prophets; saints occupy a far lower station in comparison. Therefore, to claim that Sayyid ʻAbdul Qādir Jīlānīra looked upon a thief and turned him into a *quṭb*, or that Ḥaḍrat Muʻīnuddīn Chishtīra reached the pinnacle of spiritual rank through a single gaze from his teacher, is entirely false.

We must look at how that very Messenger of Godsas, through whose servitude and grace these saints attained everything, himself found God. The answer

lies within the Holy Quran and the *Aḥādīth*. In the Quran, God Almighty addresses the Holy Prophet[sas]:

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَآلًّا فَهَدٰى[5]

Meaning that, when We found you so deeply immersed in Our love that you had completely lost your sense of self; and you had become so lost in Divine love that you were no longer mindful of your own existence—it was then that We guided you.

The true meaning of ضال [*ḍāll*] is to be lost or wholly consumed in love. The Holy Quran bears witness that the Holy Prophet[sas] was never misguided or astray, for it declares:

مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوٰى[6]

['Your companion has not erred, nor has he gone astray.']

Rather, it proclaims every act of the Holy Prophet[sas] to be a perfect model:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيْ رَسُوْلِ اللّٰهِ اُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ[7]

['Verily, you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent model.']

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[5] *Sūrah Aḍ-Ḍuḥā,* 93:8 [Publisher]

[6] *Sūrah An-Najm,* 53:3 [Publisher]

[7] *Sūrah Al-Aḥzāb, 33:22* [Publisher]

Therefore, the meaning of ضال [*ḍāll*] must be understood in a manner that is consistent with these other verses. In other words, God declares: 'You were so absorbed in My love that you had lost your bearings; in your search for Me, you had lost all sense of self; all your thoughts and emotions were consumed in My love.'

We are not only prepared to accept that the Holy Prophet[sas] became 'lost' in this sense, but we affirm that it was certainly so. It was after the Holy Prophet[sas] developed such intensity of love that God declares: فهدى or 'thereafter We guided you'.

Such was the state of Prophet Muhammad[sas]. From this, one may infer the state of other prophets, for he is the Leader of all Prophets and a personification of their collective perfections. It cannot be suggested that he had to endure such labours to attain the true recognition of God, while others attained it effortlessly.

Had it been possible for anyone to acquire this blessing without striving, then surely it would have been granted to the Holy Prophet[sas]. Since it is established that even he found God only after the total effacement of his self, the notion that any saint within his ummah possessed the power to transform others into saints with a single glance is utterly baseless.

If Muhammad[sas] did not attain this rank without striving, then how can anyone else?

Those who seek this blessing must exert extreme effort; without it, attainment is impossible. It is astonishing that a young person will toil for at least sixteen years to acquire a high secular education, yet expects to attain *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* in a single day.

There is no doubt that such Divine enlightenment can only be granted through the grace and enabling power of God. Indeed, if the time and effort required for its attainment were in proportion to that expended on worldly objects, it would take millions of years. People demand that it should be attained with a single glance, yet I ask: could its attainment be made any easier? Through the prophets and the saints, it can be acquired within a few years or even a few months. The greater one's capacity and the more intense their striving, the sooner they shall attain it.

Remember well, therefore, that true recognition of God is not something to be attained with ease. One often sees people who desire to find God, yet they wish to do so in an instant. The members of our Community have been graced by God, and they are of a different mettle. Others cannot even bear listening to this kind of discourse; they expect to become

'ārif billāh [one who has attained true recognition of God] the very moment a sentence is uttered.

In truth, this bounty is not won through mere speeches; it is attained only after great efforts and travails, by shattering one's ego, losing oneself in the love of God, and effacing one's being in this quest in accordance with the model and practice of Prophet Muhammad[sas].

Those among you who long for *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* must fully internalise this reality. I cannot imagine anyone who does not share this desire, as it is the primary reason for accepting the Promised Messiah[as]. Therefore, you should listen attentively to what I have to say and endeavour to put it into practice.

I do not claim that the means I shall describe for attaining *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* are entirely new to you; you may have heard many of them before. My purpose today is to present these essential matters, alongside the insights God has granted me, in such a way that you may easily apply and remember them.

God Almighty has granted me particular knowledge regarding this subject. This is not due to any personal merit or acquired learning on my part, nor has my own effort played any role in it. It is purely by the grace and mercy of God that He has vouchsafed this knowledge

to me. I am certain that those who benefit from it will be able to bring about a swift transformation within themselves.

For a long time, I have wished to acquaint the Community with this knowledge. However, as this subject is of great importance and has many branches, it requires a vast amount of time to expound. At present, neither my time nor my health permits a lengthy discourse. I have, therefore, selected only one aspect today, with the intention that, if God so wills, I shall elaborate upon the other branches at another time. But whether I shall be granted that opportunity, I do not know. For my friends and I have seen certain cautionary dreams concerning my health. I shall, therefore, cover one branch of this subject as the present occasion allows, leaving the rest to the will of God. Although I have also received some glad tidings from Him, they are not of such a nature that one can say with absolute certainty whether I shall have the chance to explain the remaining aspects, but my intuition suggests that I shall.

A Dream with Glad Tidings

Among these glad tidings is a dream in which I saw myself seated in Bait-ud-Duʿā, supplicating in the

posture of *Tashahhud*: *O Allah! Let my end be like that of Ibrāḥīm*[as]. Overcome with fervour, I stood up and continued to offer this same prayer. I then saw that the door was open, and Mir Muhammad Ismāʻīl Sāhib was standing there, holding a light.

The name Ismāʻīl means 'God has heard.' Furthermore, to have an end like Ibrāhīm[as] alludes to the fact that upon his passing, two successors, Ḥaḍrat Isḥāq[as] and Ḥaḍrat Ismāʻīl[as], were appointed by God. This is indeed a glad tiding in which you should all rejoice.

Advice to Listen Attentively

Now, I return to my subject. I have stated that the true recognition of God requires immense effort; without such striving, this blessing cannot be achieved. Nor can it be attained without perfect knowledge. Therefore, listen carefully to what I say, for nothing can be remembered without attentive listening—and that which is not remembered can never be put into practice.

I urge you with the utmost love and sincerity: if anyone is asleep, let him awaken; if anyone is heedless, let him become alert; and if anyone's attention is wandering, let him focus it here. What I am about

to share is solely for your own benefit. I seek nothing from you in return, nor do I make any demands. I deliver this message to fulfil the duty entrusted to me and that you may benefit through it.

If you act upon what I tell you, you will indeed witness the immense blessings and exquisite pleasures that follow. But remember, what I share is no magic spell that can transform you into an *'ārif* overnight. As I have already stated, true recognition of God is attained only by effacing one's self.

By keeping these guidelines in mind, you will be spared the common complaint that effort yields no results. You will behold God Almighty through those very attributes described in the Holy Quran. *InshāAllāh*.

Effort as a Prerequisite for the Acceptance of Prayer

The first point I wish to make is a specific instruction regarding effort. It should be borne in mind that there are particular means for the attainment of any objective; unless those means are employed, the goal cannot be reached. People say that God is found through prayer; and while prayer is indeed a powerful instrument, it requires the support of other means. For instance, if a man marries, and without consorting

with his wife, continues to pray for children, will his supplications be accepted? Never.

The Account of a Holy Man

It is related that a person once met a holy man and said, 'Please pray that God grants me a son.' Having made this request, he turned to leave. The holy man asked, 'Where are you going?' to which the man replied, 'I am going to find work.' The holy man remarked, 'If you are going out to work, how can my prayer be of any avail?' Thus, unless one employs the necessary means, prayer alone achieves nothing; it yields no fruit without effort.

When is Prayer Effective Without Action?

Prayer is effective only when accompanied by action. There are, however, two instances in which prayer may benefit a person even without worldly effort.

The first is when God Almighty specifically commands a person to supplicate regarding a matter and not to employ any worldly means. For instance, the Promised Messiah[as] was instructed by God to focus on prayer for protection against the plague, while he and his Community were forbidden from being

vaccinated.[8] Although the vaccine was, and remains, a remedy for the plague, God Almighty forbade its use in that instance and commanded him to pray instead. By the grace of Allah, the Ahmadiyya Community suffered far fewer losses from the epidemic than those who had been vaccinated.

The second instance is when a person's circumstances render action impossible. Imagine, for example, a person who is imprisoned in a forest, their hands and feet bound. Since such a person is physically incapable of taking any practical steps, prayer alone suffices for them. However, when no such constraints exist, prayer must be accompanied by effort. These are the only two scenarios in which prayer may be accepted without action; in any other case, it is not.

Yet, even the combination of prayer and effort does not guarantee that one will find God. I have personally seen individuals who strive with great earnestness, but still fail to find Him. This demonstrates that even these two, prayer and effort, are not, in themselves, sufficient.

The question then arises: if one employs both prayer and effort, why does one still fail to attain God? The

[8] See *Noah's Ark*, Ḥaḍrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad—the Promised Messiah[as]. Islam International Publications Ltd. 2018. pp. 2-3 [Publisher]

answer is that the effort is misdirected. They strive, indeed, but not in the right way.

The Necessity of Correct and Purposeful Effort

Making an effort, and doing so in the right manner, is a condition for success. Consider a student; it is necessary for one to acquire books and study them. But if a student neglects their studies and merely prays for knowledge all day, will they ever succeed? Certainly not. Or, if he were to suspend himself upside down or pierce his body with needles, thinking, 'I am enduring great hardship, so I will certainly pass,' would he be successful? Absolutely not.

Likewise, if someone wants to learn the craft of a blacksmith, yet spends the entire day in prayer and the whole night reciting: سُبْحَانَ اللّٰهِ وَبِحَمْدِهٖ سُبْحَانَ اللّٰهِ الْعَظِيْمِ[9]—about which the Holy Prophet[sas] said:

كَلِمَتَانِ حَبِيْبَتَانِ إِلَى الرَّحْمٰنِ خَفِيفَتَانِ عَلَى اللِّسَانِ ثَقِيْلَتَانِ فِي الْمِيْزَانِ[10]

'There are two phrases beloved to the Gracious God which are light on the tongue but heavy on the scales.'—or spends his days digging a well or rolling

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[9] Glory be to Allah and all praise belongs to Him. Glory be to Allah, the Most Great. [Publisher]

[10] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* Kitābut-Tauhīd, Bāb Qaulillāhi Taʻāla: wa Naḍaʻul-Mawāzīnal-Qista liyaumil-Qayāmah, hadīth *7563 [Publisher]*

upon the ground under the scorching sun, will he learn the trade of a blacksmith? Certainly not.

Therefore, success in every pursuit requires prayer and right effort. One who fails to use both means can never succeed, no matter how much they pray or what hardships they endure.

Three Steps for Attaining Divine Cognition

Since success depends on using the proper means, I begin by outlining the three essential requirements for attaining the true recognition of God.

First, one must pray.

Second, one must strive.

Third, one must strive in the correct manner.

Next, remember the guidelines I am about to share, and then make efforts in the manner I shall describe. You will succeed, *InshāAllāh*.

The Scope of Right Effort

There is yet another condition necessary for making the right effort: your striving must encompass every aspect related to the goal. For instance, a student preparing for an entrance examination must not only study history and geography, but also mathematics; they must master all information relevant to the exam.

If a single subject is neglected, they will never pass—no matter how much diligence is applied to the rest. To achieve any objective, therefore, one's efforts must be comprehensive.

An Objection Against Islam and its Refutation

Some critics contend that Islam is narrow-minded, for it asserts that no faith, other than itself, holds the path of ultimate truth. They argue that Islam ought to have declared salvation attainable for the adherents of all religions alike. It is remarkable that such critics choose to overlook the immutable laws of nature and the inevitable outcomes they produce in every sphere of existence. They ask: if a Hindu, a Christian, or an Arya truly loves God and strives to find Him, why should they not succeed?

It is for the same reason that one cannot master the craft of a blacksmith by rolling upon the sun-scorched earth, nor acquire knowledge by hanging upside down. It is a universal truth that no objective can be achieved without the application of the appropriate effort. If this law governs the material world, why should it not govern the spiritual? Success in matters of faith, therefore, remains out of reach unless the specifically ordained conditions are fulfilled.

Two Principles of Success

There are two ways to achieve success in any endeavour. The first is through general principles, by which people learn and progress. For instance, students attend school to acquire knowledge; they follow the prescribed course of study and, through it, they succeed.

The second consists of specialised techniques—specific methods or formulas which, once mastered, assist in accomplishing a particular task. In algebra, for example, once a student learns the formulas, they are able to apply them. Similarly, merchants use particular shortcuts to perform rapid calculations.

Hence, in every field, there exists a general method that leads to success, alongside certain specialised techniques that enable one to reach the desired outcome with relative ease. This holds true in every sphere of life, whether material or spiritual.

However, it must be remembered that these techniques are only effective and yield results when the general principles have first been learned. It is not as if someone can learn a few techniques for reading English and suddenly become an expert. Such techniques are meant to shorten a task and hasten

its completion; they do not, in and of themselves, guarantee success.

Today, I intend to discuss the general principles of this subject. I shall not speak on the specialised techniques, as that is an independent topic. There is no harm in setting it aside; for while such methods may compress hours into minutes or years into months, they are only useful if the foundational principles are already known.

It is necessary, therefore, first to learn and act upon the general principles. Only thereafter should one seek the techniques that shorten the journey and lead more swiftly to the goal. Since that is a separate and independent topic, I will not address it today. If Allah the Exalted grants me the opportunity, I shall address it at another time; for now, I will confine myself to the general principles.

Irfān-e-Ilāhī: Beyond Verbal Expression

It must be clearly understood that the true essence of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* cannot be conveyed through words. Were it possible to express it verbally, it could easily be impressed upon every mind, and all would comprehend it. But this is not so.

Who could possess greater love and compassion for humankind than the Holy Prophet Muhammad[sas]? Concerning him, Allah the Exalted says:

لَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَّفْسَكَ أَلَّا يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ[11]

'Will you grieve yourself to death because they do not all believe?'

Had the Holy Prophet[sas], the greatest benefactor of humanity as attested by God Almighty in the verse [quoted above], been able to articulate *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* in words, he would surely have done so. The fact that even he did not do so demonstrates that this is a reality which eludes verbal expression and is, instead, a matter of the heart.

As mentioned, *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* means to find God, and the reality of this experience cannot be confined to words. Had that been possible, the Holy Prophet[sas] and the Promised Messiah[as] would have turned every soul into an *'ārif*. Thus, I shall not articulate its reality; nor *can* I. However, I will highlight the means that have been prescribed for its attainment.

It is said that a disciple is unaware of the inner state of his master, and the master knows not the true condition of his disciple. This simply means that their

[11] *Sūrah Ash-Shu'arā,* 26:4 [Publishers]

spiritual conditions are not known to each other and one cannot discern the inner state of the other.

In truth, this is a spiritual capacity that cannot be uttered in speech. Even the one who possesses it cannot describe it. What can be described, however, are the methods of attaining it—and these I shall set forth.

As for the state that arises once these means are employed, no one has ever been able to define it, nor can I. One may describe the preparation of a delicacy and detail its every feature, but its essence—its flavour—defies explanation; it must be tasted to be truly understood. In the same way, one may speak of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*, but its true nature remains a mystery until it is experienced firsthand.

Means to Discover the Existence of God

I shall now explain the true means and methods for attaining *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*. It must be remembered that if we take 'recognising' God to mean that one should find God before them, as one does physical objects, and perceive Him through the physical faculties, it would presuppose that God Almighty possesses the same properties and characteristics as human beings.

In the material world, our physical senses can only perceive that which is itself material. The more subtle a substance is, the less perceptible it becomes. This is because no bond can exist between two entities unless there is some measure of commonality and likeness between them.

For instance, a buffalo has nothing in common with science; you could deliver a philosophical discourse before it, yet it would never comprehend a word. Likewise, a parrot possesses the physical capacity for speech but is devoid of reason; it may imitate a sound, but it cannot understand the meaning.

Cultivating an Affinity with God

It is clear that *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* requires a degree of commonality and likeness; this is only possible when one develops an affinity with God by way of adopting His attributes. I am not suggesting that one must be like God in essence; I am simply reiterating what was stated by the Holy Prophet[sas]: تَخَلَّقُوْا بِأَخْلَاقِ اللّٰه, 'Cultivate within yourselves the morals of Allah.'

Embodying Divine Attributes

The Holy Prophet[sas] gave these instructions in this very spirit: to develop an affinity and likeness with God; for once such commonality is formed, one may behold Him. It is important to note that the Holy Prophet[sas] did not say, 'Become like God Himself,' but rather, 'Model your morals after His.' This is because the Divine Essence is beyond human comprehension, and that which cannot be understood cannot be imitated.

Therefore, a person cannot perceive the Being of God in the same way they perceive worldly objects. However, one *can* come to know His attributes, embody them within oneself, and through this means, 'behold' God. This is why the Holy Prophet[sas] directed our attention toward adopting the morals of God—which is to say, His attributes.

The moment the word *ṣifāt* [attribute] crossed my lips, I was reminded of a friend's dream. He saw that I was delivering an address at the Jalsa Sālāna regarding *Asmā'Allāh* [Names of Allah]. Subsequently, he requested that I speak on this very subject. Although another topic had been selected by the time he shared this with me, the mention of *ṣifāt* brought his dream to mind.

Indeed, cultivating the attributes of God within oneself is essential to attaining *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*. Until one becomes, in some measure, a reflection of *Rabb* [Lord], *Raḥmān* [Gracious], *Raḥīm* [Merciful], *Muhaīmin* [Bestower of Security], *Sattār* [Concealer of Faults], and *Ghaffār* [Most Forgiving], one cannot become a manifestation of Allah the Exalted. The more these Divine attributes are reflected in one's being, the more vividly one begins to behold them.

The perfect human being, the true '*ārif*, is one who develops within themselves all those attributes of God that relate to His servants. Once this is achieved, finding God becomes effortless, for a bond of affinity will have been forged between the individual and their Creator.

The Path to Attaining Divine Attributes

The question then arises: how are these Divine attributes to be cultivated? As a poet aptly observed:

دردِ سر کے واسطے صندل کو کہتے ہیں مفید اس کا گھسنا اور لگانا درد سر یہ بھی تو ہے

['Sandalwood is said to soothe headache; yet, its grinding and application is in itself a headache']

One might say that while the principle is clear—that one must adopt Divine attributes to find God—

the actual assimilation of these traits remains the formidable challenge.

Many endeavour to be compassionate and gentle, yet the inherent hardness of their hearts thwarts their efforts. Others resolve to conceal the faults of their fellows, but in the heat of the moment, such words escape their lips. Still others desire to cultivate a spirit of forgiveness, yet find themselves powerless to act upon it.

When earnest striving and struggle fail to produce these noble qualities, the question naturally arises: how may one refine their conduct so that the Attributes of God truly begin to manifest within them?

The First Method: Knowledge of Divine Attributes

The first essential step is to acquire deeper knowledge of the Divine attributes. Do not dismiss this as a trivial matter. Many people are unable to recall the attributes of God at all; even those who can are often unaware of their true significance. It is a common practice among Muslims to memorise the Names of God, yet few understand what they actually signify. Without a deep comprehension of their meanings, these words exert no spiritual effect and fail to produce any transformation in one's conduct.

In short, many fail to remember the attributes of God altogether; others know them but only superficially; and still others understand the literal definitions but experience no spiritual resonance within their hearts. Until such an inner state is awakened, mere words yield no benefit.

Consider a simple example: the Arabic word *shātun* means 'goat'. If a person is told that *shātun* refers to a 'goat' but they have no concept of what a goat actually is, the information remains meaningless. To know a definition without perceiving its reality or feeling its essence is futile. Hence, it is not enough merely to know the dictionary definition of God's attributes; one must inwardly envision and deeply feel them. Yet, most people remain unacquainted with this inner dimension.

For instance, if asked the meaning of *Rabb*, one may readily say, 'The Sustainer.' However, the reality of Divine sustenance does not take root in their heart, nor do they truly visualise its majesty. True knowledge of the Divine attributes, therefore, does not consist merely in memorising their names or reciting their definitions; rather, it lies in remembering them, grasping their essence so that, when they are spoken

or heard, the heart is moved to a state that corresponds to their reality.

Take the attribute *Ar-Raḥmān*, which signifies 'the One who bestows blessings which have not been earned by any effort.' When this word is uttered, it should not merely evoke a memorised phrase. Instead, the countless unearned favours of Allah the Exalted should flash before the mind's eye like lightning, creating a vivid mental portrait of the attribute. If such awareness does not arise naturally, one should consciously reflect upon these favours until the heart is fully permeated by the reality of this attribute.

Many can provide a textbook reply when asked for the definition of a Divine attribute, yet they fall silent when asked to explain its deeper significance. They resemble the man who, upon reading the poetic verse:

ہم ہوئے، تم ہوئے، کہ میر ہوئے ان کی زلفوں کے سب اسیر ہوئے

['Whether it be we, or you, or Mīr himself, all became captives of her tresses']—explained it by saying, 'It means that you, I, and Mīr Sāhib were all tied up with locks of hair and dragged to prison.'

In short, it is not enough to possess a literal understanding of these words; one must also develop the inner states associated with them. Not only must a person learn the definition of each Divine attribute,

they must also ponder its reality until a vivid image is formed within the heart.

For example, the attribute *Rabb* is defined as 'the Creator and Sustainer.' One should explore this further: what does sustaining truly imply? In what manner does God nurture His creation, and through what diverse means does He guide it toward perfection? One must continue this detailed reflection until the full weight of this attribute is felt within the soul.

Consequently, whoever desires to embody the attributes of Allah the Exalted must first grasp their true significance; only then can genuine knowledge be attained.

Remember well: once a deeper understanding of the Divine attributes dawns upon a person, the distinction between virtue and vice becomes self-evident. Righteousness is nothing other than the adoption of these Attributes and acting in harmony with them; conversely, evil is nothing but their abandonment, or acting in direct opposition to them.

The Holy Quran teaches this fundamental principle: Align your conduct with the attributes of God and abstain from anything that contradicts them. All further elaborations of virtue and vice are mere

extensions of this single truth. Many people remain ignorant of what constitutes good and evil; thus, they often mistake vice for virtue and virtue for vice. This confusion stems entirely from their failure to comprehend what the Divine attributes truly demand of us.

Distinguishing Between Virtue and Vice

There are those who possess the knowledge of good and evil, and who are well aware of the Divine commands and prohibitions, yet find themselves unable to act upon these injunctions. What, then, is the remedy for such souls? What path must they take so that their earnest desire to follow God's commands is translated into resolute action? How can they be empowered to refrain from the forbidden, purify their souls, and finally attain *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*?

As for those who exert no effort whatsoever in the pursuit of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*, they remain essentially bereft of any true realisation of the Divine attributes. Such individuals require a fundamental introduction to the knowledge of God. However, as this discourse is addressed to those who already profess faith, adhere to Islam, and yearn for Divine nearness and *ma'rifat*, we shall focus our attention upon their specific

circumstances—identifying the barriers that hinder their ascent and exploring the means by which they may be removed.

The Cultivation of Divine Attributes

As I have explained, the sole means of attaining *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* is to cultivate the Divine attributes within oneself. Yet, these attributes cannot take root in a person until the heart has first been purged of all traces of evil.

Three Ways Sins Manifest

The foremost obstacle to attaining *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* is the commission of sin, which manifests in three distinct ways.

The *first* occurs when people sin out of ignorance. Unaware that certain actions are inherently sinful, they fall into them unknowingly. Undoubtedly, the more conspicuous vices, such as theft, robbery, adultery, and falsehood, are well known, and most people understand they must be avoided.

Consider, for example, how a house cannot be secure unless it is complete in every respect. If one builds four walls but neglects the roof, the dwelling remains exposed to rain and sunlight. To be safe and whole,

it must also have a roof, windows, and skylights. Likewise, a person cannot attain true purity of soul unless they guard against every facet and shade of evil. Some sins are so subtle that they can only be discerned through meticulous scrutiny and arduous striving.

In any undertaking, there are elements essential for preservation and others intended for embellishment. Neglecting decorative features may be of little consequence, but to omit the protective ones renders the entire structure deficient. Consider a house built without doors or windows: it is fundamentally insecure. Conversely, if the flooring or plastering remains unfinished, the dwelling may lack beauty, yet its primary purpose as a sanctuary remains intact.

By the same token, one who remains oblivious to certain vices can never hope to attain *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*, though they may strive day and night. They will inevitably neglect that which is mandatory and indulge in that which is forbidden. In such a state, what is the pursuit of perfection if not an exercise in futility? Success demands a tireless vigilance over every facet of one's conduct; so long as a single vice remains unrecognised, the goal will remain beyond reach. Therefore, the first indispensable step is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of these evils.

The *second* reason individuals fall into sin is that, despite being aware of the evil, they succumb to a sudden surge of passion, momentarily losing all restraint. For instance, a person may know full well that they should not lie, yet they do so in the heat of the moment, only to be overcome by remorse later. Another knows that abusive language is wrong, yet they utter abuses regardless, only to lament their conduct thereafter.

Thus, while the first obstacle is a simple lack of awareness, the second arises when one is overtaken by such intense emotion that one's knowledge is momentarily eclipsed. Having sinned, they are left only to wring their hands in regret.

There remains yet a *third* scenario. At times, a person is fully aware that an act is evil—and is even conscious of this fact at the very moment of committing the sin—yet they proceed nonetheless. For instance, they may know that lying is a grave sin which will incur the displeasure of God, yet they utter the falsehood regardless. Likewise, they may recognise that backbiting is a transgression loathed by God, yet fail to restrain themselves, as their lower self compels them to the deed.

In sum, these are the three barriers that obstruct the path to overcoming sin. The removal of each is an absolute necessity before one can advance toward those stages through which the attainment of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* becomes possible.

Before discussing the specific means of dismantling these obstacles, I wish first to set forth a fundamental solution that applies to the latter two groups—setting aside, for the moment, the first group who sin out of a simple lack of awareness.

Physical Causes for Spiritual Ailments

This is a profound subject, and Allah the Exalted has granted me special insights into it; it is my intention to expound upon this in detail. When this knowledge is fully realised, those currently deemed spiritually ill will seek treatment from physicians. Even now, certain eminent doctors are turning their attention toward this field, though their research remains in its infancy. By the grace of Allah, the knowledge vouchsafed to me is far broader in scope than their current findings.

This is not a *new* knowledge in the sense of never having been disclosed; rather, it has always been bestowed upon God's chosen servants. It is enshrined within the Holy Quran, and the Promised Messiah[as]

was also granted insight into it, having alluded to its principles within his writings. Yet, regrettably, the public has neither understood nor benefited from it.

God Almighty has now conferred upon me a more expansive understanding of this subject. My investigations have led me to the conclusion that sins can be classified in such a way that one type of transgressor should seek a physician, while another should turn to a spiritual guide. I have observed that some individuals commit certain sins solely due to underlying physical maladies.

What remains is to determine the precise criteria for these categories—to distinguish those who require medical intervention from those who need spiritual healing. Once this distinction is finalised, my research may be presented in its entirety.

The truth is that the connection between body and soul is so intimate that the slightest affection of one exerts a profound influence upon the other. The Promised Messiah[as] wrote extensively on this, explaining that when illness afflicts the body, it inevitably affects the soul. This is self-evident: a person in the throes of intense physical pain cannot offer prayer with true peace of mind. Now, is this inability to pray not a spiritual ailment? Indeed it is—yet its

remedy lies with a physician, not a saint. These are the truths articulated by those before me, which God Almighty has now caused me to comprehend with profound clarity.

Just as the treasures of the material world are inexhaustible and constantly being unearthed, so too does spiritual knowledge reveal itself at its appointed times. In this age, God Almighty opened the door to this field of wisdom through the Promised Messiah[as], and after him, his *Khulafā'* shall continue to expand it. Whether I shall be granted the opportunity to further this work, I cannot say; even now, I stand before you having taken medicine merely to sustain me during this address.

Nonetheless, it is vital that you bear in mind that many spiritual ailments can, in fact, be treated by physicians. A person who reads and understands the Holy Quran and strives earnestly to act upon its teachings, yet still finds themselves falling into certain sins, should consider whether they are suffering from a physical malady—likely of a neurological nature. Such an individual ought to consult a physician regarding their health.

It is true that in our country, physicians pay little heed to disorders of the nervous system. However, I

am hopeful that, in many instances, by treating such physical weaknesses, an individual will experience a marked advancement in their spiritual life. They will gain a new-found strength to abstain from vice and develop the capacity to exercise true self-control.

One must remember, however, that a state of helplessness in the face of sin is not invariably the result of a physical ailment—though it is frequently so. At times, such a condition is imposed upon a person as a form of Divine chastisement; in other instances, it arises merely from entrenched habit. The former can only be addressed by spiritual mentors, while the latter requires the guidance of either spiritual mentors or experts in moral discipline. Consequently, this principle of medical intervention should not be regarded as an absolute rule.

One might ask: 'If a person strives to avoid sin but fails due to illness, why should they face punishment?' The answer is that accountability lies in the neglect of the remedy. The responsibility for failing to seek treatment rests with the individual alone.

If time permits, I shall complete my research into these matters. Should I be unable to do so, remember this well: certain spiritual ailments possess remedies that lie within the realm of medical science. Keep this

principle in view, continue your own inquiries, and assist those who are turning their attention to this field. Through this, a new revolution may be sparked, and the world may take yet another step forward in its progress.

For now, I shall conclude by observing that for certain spiritual maladies, one should seek out a physician rather than a saint or a mystic. Many such conditions originate from deficiencies in the spinal nerves or as the result of specific physiological disorders.

In some instances, for example, adultery may not be a moral or religious transgression in the conventional sense, but rather a manifestation of an underlying psychological disorder. Likewise, certain acts of robbery, theft, or deceit may also stem from specific internal dysfunctions. In such cases, spiritual disciplines may prove far less effective than medical remedies.

However, as my research on this subject is not yet complete, I cannot elaborate further at this time. I shall reserve its full exposition for another occasion—to be delivered either by myself, or by any among you whom God Almighty may grant the capacity to expound upon it in due course.

How to Abstain from Sin

Having established the principle that the treatment of sin, at times, involves medical intervention, I shall now set out the other measures that may be employed to safeguard oneself against vice.

The first step towards avoiding sin is to rectify one's past accounts. Many who desire to attain *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* neglect this point and therefore fail. They strive earnestly to reach their goal, yet they attempt to add something pure to that which is already spoiled. Their situation is like that of a person who pours fresh milk into a vessel of milk that has already soured. Even if one were to pour a great quantity of fresh milk into a small quantity of soured milk, the entire mixture would turn bad.

The gravest mistake people make is neglecting this initial condition. It is an absolute requirement that one sets right their past accounts before advancing further. If the initial entry in a ledger is incorrect and the balance is unsound, then no matter how much is added thereafter, the final tally will remain erroneous. But if the opening balance is correct, every subsequent calculation will naturally be in order.

Hence, whoever desires to draw near to God and attain true *Ma'rifat-e-Ilāhī* must first clear the

unbalanced records of their past. The means to achieve this is *taubah* [repentance].

The First Step: Repentance

Repentance is the primary and most essential requirement for the true recognition of God; it is the very first step on this path. Let no one dismiss this as a trivial matter by saying, 'We repent every day.' The repentance to which I refer is not the customary lip-service uttered out of habit, but something altogether different. As I have stated, a mere verbal admission—'I repent'—does not constitute true *taubah*.

The Seven Conditions of Repentance

Genuine repentance comprises seven essential conditions. Without fulfilling each of them, the act remains incomplete:

1. Profound Remorse: One must experience deep, heartfelt remorse for past transgressions. When recalling their sins, they should be so overcome with shame and anguish that it is as if they are drenched in the sweat of their own regret.

2. Fulfilment of Obligations: One must, as far as possible, discharge any neglected duties. While certain acts—such as years of missed prayers—cannot

be 'made up' in a literal sense, nor are they strictly commanded by the Shariah, one must promptly offer the prayer due at the very moment of their resolve. Furthermore, if one possesses the means for Hajj or has neglected *Zakāt* in the past, they must now fulfil these obligations faithfully.

3. Restitution: One must make amends for past wrongs. This does not imply the impossible—such as restoring life to the murdered—but refers to tangible restitution. If, for example, one has stolen a neighbour's livestock, it must be returned to its rightful owner without delay.

4. Seeking Forgiveness from the Wronged: If one has caused pain to another, they must make amends and seek that person's pardon. This is a subtle point: God has decreed that for sins committed against His servants, forgiveness must first be sought from the servants themselves. If they forgive, God does not hold the individual to account.

However, it must also be remembered that God Almighty is *as-Sattār* [the Great Concealer], Who veils even the gravest of sins. Thus, a person should follow this Divine principle of concealment and not expose the very faults that God has hidden. For instance, if one has stolen secretly, they should not openly confess,

'I stole from you,' for to unveil what is hidden would itself be a transgression. One must make amends for evils that are already exposed—such as seeking pardon from one who was struck—but as for transgressions that God has concealed, they should not be revealed of one's own volition.

5. Kindness as Amends: One should show active kindness toward those they have wronged. If material restitution is impossible, one should resort to fervent prayer. The saints have taught that if you have usurped another's wealth and are now destitute, you should pray: *O Lord, I lack the means to repay my debt; I implore You to compensate them from Your own boundless favours.*

6. Firm Resolve: One must firmly resolve never to return to the sin. At the moment of repentance, there must be a sincere and unwavering intention to abandon all transgression from that point forward. If one later falters due to human frailty or sudden compulsion, that is a separate matter—but at the inception of repentance, this resolve must be absolute. Repentance is not the act of sinning by night and casually declaring by morning, 'I shall not do it again.' Rather, it demands genuine determination and a

vigilant spirit to guard oneself against a relapse into sin.

7. Moral Inclination: One must begin to consciously incline the soul toward virtue, instilling righteous thoughts within the heart and preparing the inner self to embrace a life of purity.

These seven conditions constitute the pillars of *taubah*; without fulfilling them, true repentance cannot be attained.

Each of you should therefore reflect: does the repentance you offer comprise these essential conditions, or is it something else entirely? Ordinarily, people remain unaware of what must be kept in view when repenting, or even the purpose of the act itself. The word *taubah* escapes their lips as a mere reflex—much like an English speaker might say, 'I beg your pardon,' without the slightest intention of seeking forgiveness. Such repentance is neither genuine nor can it offer any spiritual benefit.

Every individual must offer true repentance, observing the conditions I have outlined, so that their past record may be cleansed. So long as one's earlier account remains unsettled, the path ahead cannot be traversed with purity; the deficiencies of the past will

only continue to accumulate. One must, therefore, repent with sincerity to clear the ledger. When repentance is made in this manner, a person's entire debt of sin is wiped away—not a single penny of it remains. Only after this purification can an individual, through diligent effort and steadfastness, become an *'ārif billāh*.

Once the past is cleared, the account of one's future begins. Here, a question may arise: how can one possibly bear such a heavy burden—settling past debts while simultaneously striving to do good deeds?

It must be remembered that spiritual matters are often paradoxical; they appear burdensome, yet within that very burden lies the secret of success. Consider the man who came to the Holy Prophet[sas] in a state of destitution. The Holy Prophet[sas] prescribed marriage as the remedy for his poverty. The man complied, but returned soon after, still complaining of want. The Holy Prophet[sas] advised him to marry again. He did so, but returned once more, saying, 'O Messenger of Allah, I cannot even feed one wife; how shall I provide for two?' The Holy Prophet[sas] told him, 'Marry yet again.' The man married a third time, but returned once more lamenting that the situation had become unbearable. Still, the Holy Prophet[sas] instructed him

to marry a fourth time. Some time later, when the Holy Prophet[sas] inquired after him, the man replied, 'O Messenger of Allah! I am now possessed of great wealth.'

These are intricate matters of the Shariah that not everyone can comprehend. However, let me explain the principle briefly. First, as I have already stated, unless a person clears their past account, they cannot make progress. Until the impurities are purged from a vessel, any pure substance poured into it will be spoiled. It is vital to cleanse past faults so their corrupting influence does not persist.

Second, at the start of any new undertaking, there is unique zeal and fervour which naturally diminishes over time. When a person makes a solemn vow, 'I will no longer commit such-and-such a sin', they are poised to endure the most difficult of trials. However, this fervour will inevitably fade. Therefore, the very moment of repentance is the most opportune time for decisive action.

Rectifying the Past and Embracing Virtue

Once a person has fully settled their past account, they will naturally find within themselves the strength to act righteously in the days ahead. When the weight

of past errors is lifted, the path of progress becomes easier to tread.

I shall now outline the essential measures for maintaining a clean record and advancing in goodness. The first and most vital step for attaining *taqwā* [righteousness], the ultimate fruit of which is true recognition of God, is to cultivate purity of thought. Let me explain this more fully, for it is indeed a remarkable method for acquiring true piety.

By *purity of thought*, I do not mean that no unworthy idea should ever cross the mind; such a state is an impossibility for most. Rather, it signifies that if an impure thought should arise, it must not be allowed to take root or expand within the heart. For instance, if the thought of taking a bribe occurs to a person, they must not begin to dwell upon it or devise schemes for its execution. Instead, they should strive to expel the thought as swiftly as possible.

If, despite one's resolve, a mistake occurs in a moment of sudden temptation, that is a separate matter. But when the thought first appears in the mind, one must make every effort to drive it out immediately. This practice yields immense benefit. Consider two individuals: one constantly entertains thoughts of bribery, pondering where and how he might take it,

while the other strives to banish such ideas whenever they arise, even if he eventually falters in practice. The latter is a thousand times nearer to reformation than the former.

The reason for this is that any thought that habitually occupies the heart engraves itself upon it, and such impressions become exceedingly difficult to erase. Conversely, a thought that is resisted and expelled can never leave a permanent mark. Therefore, the moment an evil thought emerges, dismiss it instantly and redirect your attention elsewhere. Do not imagine this effort to be futile; the longer an evil thought resides in the heart, the deeper its roots grow. If it is expelled swiftly, one is shielded from countless grievous consequences.

Nor should anyone think that driving out such thoughts is an arduous task; it is, in fact, quite simple. The moment an evil thought arises, one should immediately occupy oneself with some wholesome engagement—begin a discussion, resolve a long-standing dispute, or busy oneself with a productive task. In this way, one will be saved from committing a grave sin.

Thus, even if a person is occasionally overpowered by the impulse to do wrong, they must ensure that,

both before and after such moments, they guard their heart against the contemplation of that vice. By persevering in this, they will eventually gain mastery over their lower self and become ready to abandon sin altogether.

Importance of Thoughts

Do not regard thoughts as trivial. Every endeavour in this world is the fruit of a thought. When a person embraces the Faith, it begins with the intent of accepting Islam. Likewise, every human action originates from an initial idea. Therefore, do not say that thoughts possess no reality—for a thought is a fact, a phenomenon, and a profound truth.

One may object: 'Thoughts are invisible; how can they possess any reality?' To this I reply: consider the seed from which a great Banyan tree grows—was that massive tree visible within the tiny seed? Consider also the very origin of man: does human life not begin with an impulse stirred by a thought in the heart? When even the birth of humankind is governed by the influence of a thought, who can deny its reality?

In truth, all human actions are mediated through thought. Some may argue that an idea only bears fruit when combined with other factors—that a

lone thought achieves nothing and is, therefore, insignificant. Yet, by that logic, one must also dismiss the seed of the Banyan tree. A seed does not become a tree in isolation; it must draw nourishment from the earth to flourish. If a seed cannot be called 'unreal' simply because it requires external elements to grow, then neither can a thought be deemed meaningless.

Remember, then, that a thought is no illusion; it is the elemental source of all things. All outcomes spring forth from thoughts. It is for this reason that, addressing all of humanity, God Almighty declares:

وَاِنۡ تُبۡدُوۡا مَا فِیۡۤ اَنۡفُسِکُمۡ اَوۡ تُخۡفُوۡہُ یُحَاسِبۡکُمۡ بِہِ اللّٰہُ[12]

'Whether you act upon what is in your mind or keep it hidden, Allah will call you to account for it.'

This does not imply that one will be punished for every fleeting or involuntary thought. Both Allah the Exalted and the Holy Prophet[sas] have affirmed that a person is not accountable for that which is beyond their control.

For instance, if a person happens upon some wealth and the fleeting thought arises, 'I could take this,' they are not liable for the mere occurrence of that thought. However, if they begin to deliberate, formulating a

[12] *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, 2:285 [Publisher]

plan as to how and when they might seize it, then those deliberations and designs become a matter of accountability.

When this verse was revealed, the Companions[ra] approached the Holy Prophet[sas] and asked, 'At times, evil thoughts enter our hearts unbidden; shall we then perish?' The Holy Prophet[sas] replied:

'When an evil thought arises in the heart and one does not act upon it, that itself is recorded as a good deed.'

Therefore, this verse refers specifically to those thoughts that take root in the heart—those upon which a person dwells and begins to translate into a deliberate plan of action. Conversely, should the thought of theft or even murder enter the mind but be immediately expelled, the individual is credited with a virtue. One becomes liable for punishment only when they wilfully persist in such contemplations.

Keep this point firmly in mind, for it is a crucial milestone on the path to moral reformation. While it is true that the emergence of an evil or stray thought is beyond your control, the act of dismissing it lies entirely within your power. Therefore, you must cast it out promptly.

Parable of the Orchard

The Promised Messiah[as] would often relate a parable: A man was once seen carrying a basket of grapes out of someone's orchard. The owner appeared and demanded, 'Why are you stealing grapes from my garden?' The man replied, 'First, hear my explanation; then you may do with me as you wish.'

The owner agreed, and the man began: 'A sudden whirlwind lifted me off my feet and cast me into your orchard. By chance, I fell right among the grapevines. In such a moment, as you know, a man's only instinct is to save his life. As I flailed my arms to steady myself, the grapes began to fall from the vines, landing, by sheer coincidence, into a basket that happened to be lying nearby. Tell me, then, what fault is mine in this?'

The owner replied, 'That may well be true. But tell me this: who told you to lift that basket onto your head and carry it toward your home?' The man said, 'Indeed, that is what I have been wondering myself—who told me to do that?'

Such is the state of one who gives harbour to evil thoughts. They are not culpable for the initial stirring of the thought, but they are certainly guilty of entertaining it. They will not be taken to task for the emergence of an evil idea, but they will surely be

questioned as to why they allowed it to fester. The punishment is not for the initial thought, but for its retention; for to cast out the first whisper lies within a person's power and is never beyond it.

In short, the first step in self-purification is to relentlessly expel evil and impure thoughts.

The Second Step

The Holy Quran sets forth a second essential principle for attaining self-purification and, indeed, for success in any endeavour whatsoever. Allah the Exalted says:

وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِاَنْ تَاْتُوا الْبُيُوْتَ مِنْ ظُهُوْرِهَا وَلٰكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقٰى ۚ وَاْتُوا الْبُيُوْتَ مِنْ اَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُوْنَ[13]

Meaning that, it is not righteousness to endure hardship by leaping into homes from the rear; rather, true righteousness is attained through *taqwā*. Therefore, adopt the correct and prescribed methods for every endeavour, and fear Allah so that you may prosper. This verse teaches that success depends upon employing the proper and lawful means that Allah the Exalted has ordained for each task. Since the path to *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* lies through the purification of the self—

[13] *Sūrah Al-Baqarah,* 2:190 [Publisher]

and since such purification is impossible without first abstaining from evil and subsequently adopting virtue—it follows that an individual must possess a comprehensive knowledge of both: that which is pleasing to Allah and that which is displeasing to Him.

It is related that the Promised Messiah[as] had marked a list of every Divine commandment and prohibition within the copy of the Holy Quran he recited daily. This demonstrates his profound commitment to the meticulous implementation of Divine injunctions. For self-purification, such knowledge is indispensable. Once the path is illumined by knowledge, the journey becomes far easier, as the seeker emerges from the darkness of ignorance into the light of understanding.

However, once the Divine injunctions are understood, one must strive earnestly to translate them into action. After the proper means have been identified, sincere effort becomes the sole key to success. Even if one errs or falters in practice, the effort must never be abandoned. Perseverance is the engine of progress.

However, keep this firmly in mind: regarding those fundamental deeds without which faith itself remains incomplete, not a single one should be neglected. Every

believer must strive to fulfil these core obligations with total and unwavering commitment.

The Third Step

The third means of reflecting Divine attributes within oneself is to consciously and repeatedly bring to mind those actions, both commandments and prohibitions, through which self-purification is achieved. Whatever is recalled frequently becomes deeply engraved upon the heart. Let me illustrate this with an example. Suppose a person is prone to sudden fits of anger. During moments of calm reflection, they should earnestly ponder this weakness: *I am quick to lose my temper. This is an unworthy habit and a barrier to my spiritual progress. Therefore, I firmly resolve that I shall never again act in this manner.* This resolve should be rehearsed until it is etched into the soul and the individual is liberated from the vice. If a long-term resolution, such as 'I will never do this again', proves too difficult to sustain, there is another effective strategy. A life-long pledge can often feel overwhelming to one's temperament; therefore, instead of an indefinite commitment, one should resolve for a single day: *Today, I shall perform this good deed*, or *Today, I shall refrain from this transgression.*

In this way, the self remains restrained for that day, for one will reproach himself, saying: *Can I not remain true to my word for even a single day?* The following day, the commitment should be renewed for one more day, and so on, until mastery over the self is achieved. To overcome a harmful habit, one must engage the self in a steady, manageable struggle rather than overwhelm it with a sudden, heavy burden. Success is won gradually—through consistency and perseverance. Compel the self to perform a virtuous act once, then again, and again, until it becomes second nature. In truth, the human self is like a child. It must be nurtured through spiritual education just as a student is trained in school: beginning with simple lessons and progressing, step by step, to the more advanced stages. This method of repetition is established in the Holy Quran. Allah the Exalted states:

لَيْسَ عَلَى الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيْمَا طَعِمُوْٓا اِذَا مَا اتَّقَوْا وَّاٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَّاٰمَنُوْا ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَّاَحْسَنُوْا وَاللّٰهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِيْنَ[14]

Meaning that, there is no sin upon the believers concerning what they eat, provided they are righteous, believe, and do good deeds. That is, they must first

[14] *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah, 5:94* [Publisher]

adopt such *taqwā* as leads to faith and righteous action; then continue in *taqwā* and strengthen their faith; and then again advance in *taqwā* until they become *muḥsinīn* [those who excel in goodness]. And Allah loves the *muḥsinīn*.

In this verse, Believers are enjoined to adopt *taqwā* three times, with each stage yielding a distinct spiritual outcome:

The First Stage: *Taqwā* leads to belief and good works. In this context, 'good works' refer to deeds performed with all their requisite conditions and in a state of pure faith.

The Second Stage: *Taqwā* leads to a deeper degree of belief. One might wonder why, at this stage, only belief is mentioned as an outcome of righteousness, unlike the preceding level. It must be understood that because the initial stage of belief lacks the ingrained conviction to invariably result in good works, the command to perform those works is mentioned explicitly. However, the second stage of faith, being of a more steadfast level, naturally and effortlessly results in righteous action; hence, good works are not mentioned separately.

The Third Stage: *Taqwā* leads to the rank of *muḥsinīn* [those who excel in doing good]. This indicates that

through the consistent repetition of virtue, a person attains distinct progress in faith, advancing further with each successive righteous act.

The term *Iḥsān*[15], as used in the verse above, has been profoundly explained by the Holy Prophet[sas] himself. He has defined *Iḥsān* as:

اَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللّٰهَ كَاَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَاِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَاِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ[16]

'To worship Allah as though you see Him; and if you cannot attain this state, then at least be certain that He sees you.'

This is the very essence of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*, true recognition of God.

From this verse, it becomes evident how essential the repetition of righteous deeds is, and how each stage yields results far greater than the last. It establishes that when a person initially acts with *taqwā*, they are granted true faith and the strength to perform good works. Thereafter, as they advance in *taqwā*, their faith grows even stronger, becoming so firm that righteous deeds become an inherent part of their belief, and virtue flows from them naturally.

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[15] Same root word as *Muḥsinīn* mentioned earlier. [Publisher]

[16] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* Kitābul Īmān, Bābu Suwāli Jibrīlan-Nabiyya[sas] 'anil-Īmāni wal Islāmi wal Ihsāni wa 'Ilmis-Sā'ati, hadīth 50 [Publisher]

Finally, as they progress yet further in *taqwā*, they reach a higher stage: the rank of a *muḥsin* [one who excels in doing good]. Regarding this stage, Allah the Exalted has declared that such a person becomes His beloved; and who would remain hidden from their beloved? The Holy Prophet[sas] has stated in clear terms that such a person comes to behold God—and this, indeed, is *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*.

The Fourth Step

The fourth principle for attaining self-purification is constancy in righteous deeds. Allah the Exalted commands:

وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتّٰى يَاْتِيَكَ الْيَقِيْنُ[17]

Meaning, one should worship God continually, without ever ceasing, until the moment of departure from this world.

There are those who claim, 'We have already found God; why then must we continue these arduous acts of worship?' Such individuals are deeply deluded. They argue that prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and charity are merely vessels used to reach God—and that to remain

[17] *Sūrah Al-Ḥijr, 15:100* [Publisher]

upon the vessel once the destination has been reached is foolish.

Such ideas are propagated by deceitful pretenders to Sufism, who suggest that good deeds are no longer required once God has been found. But the very premise of this argument is flawed; for the Being we seek is infinite, and the sea upon which we sail is boundless. We are not like a traveller merely crossing from one riverbank to another, but rather like a mariner whose purpose is to reach the vast, open expanse of an endless ocean.

Since God is limitless, the deeds required to reach Him must also be without limit. Indeed, if He were finite, then our prayers, fasts, almsgiving, and pilgrimage might likewise have been finite. But when our God is boundless, how can our deeds ever be constrained by a limit?

In recompense for our actions, the reward we receive today shall exceed that of yesterday, and tomorrow's reward shall be greater still—such that our progress increases with each passing day.

Therefore, worship must be performed with unwavering continuity, not intermittently; otherwise, all prior effort may prove futile. Allah the Exalted warns:

وَلَا تَكُوْنُوْا كَالَّتِيْ نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ اَنْكَاثًا[18]

That is, be not like the woman who spins her yarn until it is firm and ready for use, only to tear it into pieces and cast it away.

The Fifth Step

The fifth means of purification recognises that many spiritual truths remain impenetrable without the aid of a teacher. It is essential to have a guide to navigate these complexities. Allah the Exalted commands:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ وَكُوْنُوْا مَعَ الصّٰدِقِيْنَ[19]

'O ye who believe! Fear Allah and be with the truthful.'

This verse instructs us to keep company with the righteous so that we may become steadfast in faith. It is vital to benefit from a perfect teacher. In every age, God maintains a succession of *mujaddidīn* [reformers], *awliyā* [saints], and perfect believers; and when this succession is interrupted, God raises a prophet.

Just as a student cannot master a complex subject merely by reading books in isolation, but requires a teacher to clarify its nuances, so too spiritual heights

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[18] *Sūrah An-Naḥl,* 16:93 [Publisher]

[19] *Sūrah At-Taubah*, 9:119 [Publisher]

cannot be attained on one's own; a guide is indispensable. For this reason, the Holy Quran states:

وَعَدَ اللّٰهُ الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِى الْاَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِيْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ[20]

['Allah has promised to those among you who believe and do good works that He will surely make them successors in the earth as He made successors from among those before them.']

This means that God will always raise *Khulafā'* within the ummah of Prophet Muhammad[ṣas]. The verse does not specify the exact nature of these successors; it simply declares that they will mirror those of previous communities, some wielding political authority, others purely spiritual.

And what is their purpose? Allah says:

وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِيْنَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضٰى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ اَمْنًا[21]

Through them, faith is established and the people are reformed; they serve as the ultimate spiritual guides. Thus, God Himself has declared the necessity of having

[20] *Sūrah An-Nūr,* 24:56 [Publisher]

[21] *Sūrah An-Nūr,* 24:56 [Publisher]

a teacher, demonstrating that they are indispensable to the spiritual journey.

Indeed, many truths that might take an individual years to uncover independently can be grasped in a matter of minutes through the guidance of a teacher. If a student were to rely solely on dictionaries from the very outset, they would not master in years what a teacher could impart in a few days.

Consider this very moment: the insights I am presenting—had you sought to discover these independently, it would have required years of arduous study. Yet, in just a few hours, you have gained knowledge that would otherwise have taken years to acquire. Therefore, a teacher is an absolute necessity.

God has promised to continue providing you with these guides. In fact, you are spared even the burden of searching for them; you belong to an organised community for whom God Himself appoints the teacher. You do not face the spiritual dilemmas that others do; therefore, you must derive the full benefit of this Divine blessing.

The Sixth Step

The sixth means of self-purification, from which a person can derive immense benefit, is *muḥāsabah*

[self-accountability]. By utilising this tool, they can swiftly attain the purification of the soul. However, *muḥāsabah* is not what most people imagine it to be. I shall, therefore, explain its nature, the challenges it entails, and the proper method for its implementation.

Let us begin with the Holy Quran, which clearly establishes the necessity of self-accountability. Allah the Exalted says:

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللّٰهُ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا عَمِلُوْا ؕ
اَحْصَاهُ اللّٰهُ وَنَسُوْهُ ؕ وَاللّٰهُ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيْدٌ[22]

'Remember the Day when Allah will raise them all together and will inform them of their works. Allah has kept a count of them, while they whose obligation it was to remember have forgotten. And Allah is Witness over all things.'

In other words, it was those subject to the reckoning who should have been mindful of their records; yet they remained forgetful while Allah continued to keep count. This is a remarkable state of affairs—and one entirely contrary to wisdom.

This verse underscores that *muḥāsabah* is vital. It was the duty of the servant to continually examine their own deeds, knowing they would eventually

[22] *Sūrah Al-Mujādalah, 58:7* [Publisher]

face a final reckoning on the Day of Judgement. One ought to have kept their own actions constantly in view, yet they failed to do so. Thus, the principle of self-accountability is firmly established by the Holy Quran.

Furthermore, there is a maxim by Ḥaḍrat Umar[ra], often mistaken for a *ḥadīth*:

حَاسِبُوْا اَنْفُسَكُمْ قَبْلَ اَنْ تُحَاسَبُوْا[23]

'Call yourselves to account before you are called to account.'

Two Kinds of Self-Accountability

It is essential to remember that there are two distinct forms of *muḥāsabah*. Many fail to grasp this distinction; and because this difference remains misunderstood, they can neither master the practice themselves nor effectively guide others toward it. You must, therefore, keep both types firmly in mind.

The first form concerns specific actions, whereas the second concerns one's conduct as a whole. It is the failure to distinguish between these two that prevents

[23] *Jāmi' at-Tirmidhī,* Abwābu Ṣifatil-Qiyāmah, Bābu ḥadīth: al-kaiyyisu man dāna nafsahu wa 'amila lima b'ad al-mauti, ḥadīth 2459 [Publisher]

the average person from understanding the true nature of self-accountability.

1. The Particular: This pertains to individual action. Its primary function is the correction of one's individual deeds.

2. The Collective: This concerns the entirety of one's conduct over time. Its purpose is to refine and polish the soul.

People have either conflated the two or focused solely on the latter. However, true self-accountability, the kind that yields the greatest spiritual benefit, requires the seeker to undertake both forms simultaneously.

The First Kind of Self-Accountability

I shall now explain each type in turn. The *muḥāsabah* of individual deeds comprises three phases: the preliminary, the intermediate, and the final.

First Stage

Before embarking upon any action, one must pause to interrogate the self on two fundamental points:

1. *What is the purpose of this act?*
2. *For whose sake am I performing it?*

The first question reveals the true nature of the deed; for it is the motive that defines the act. When

the self responds and a wrong intention is exposed, the heart naturally recoils in shame, causing the fire of temptation to subside. Shame and remorse are potent forces that quell the unruly passions of the self.

Consider the example of theft. When the thought arises, ask yourself: *Why am I about to do this?* The answer may be: *To acquire wealth*. Then probe further: *Has God not provided lawful means of earning, that I should resort to this? Would I not abhor it if another did the same to me?* Confronted by this logic, the self will fall silent, and the impulse will be restrained.

This is the first stage of self-accountability, to be undertaken before any act. Yet, bear in mind that the self may initially attempt to mask an evil deed as good; it is only through probing that the truth is unearthed. Many sins will dissolve after the first question, and others after the second or third.

However, even if this process confirms that an act is indeed good and beneficial, the reflection must not end there. One must proceed to the second question: *For whose sake am I performing this act?* This second inquiry often reveals that deeds which appear to be virtues are, in reality, subtle vices.

For example, while offering prayer, giving charity, or doing an act of kindness, the soul may affirm that

these are indeed virtues. Yet, if they were done for the sake of ostentation or reputation, then upon asking the second question, the robe of virtue with which the self had adorned these deeds will instantly fall away. One will realise that this 'virtue' was actually a vice. Instantly, they will pivot their intention, resolving to perform the act solely for the sake of God or the benefit of humanity, thereby transforming a potential vice into a virtue.

Second Stage

Following the preliminary stage, the second form of accountability begins once an act is set in motion. This form of self-examination is of immense benefit. It is practised by asking oneself, while performing a deed: *How am I doing this?* Or *What avenues am I using to complete this act?*

This inquiry is vital because one often undertakes a virtuous act with sincere intent, yet employs improper means to carry it out, or fails to fulfil the essential conditions for its completion. Therefore, pausing in the midst of every deed to ask, *In what manner am I doing this act?*, allows any flaw in the method to be exposed and corrected.

Third Stage

Following this comes the third and final stage of self-accountability, undertaken once the act is complete. At this point, one must ask the self: *What effect has this deed produced in my heart?*

This question is of paramount importance; for a person may perform a righteous act through righteous means, yet afterwards fall prey to self-admiration and arrogance, thereby bringing themselves to ruin. However, if one examines their soul immediately after the deed, they will become aware of any budding pride before it takes root like a sturdy tree. By reproaching the self, they can safeguard their deeds from being wasted.

Conversely, if one finds that the act has deepened their sense of humility and self-effacement, they will be encouraged by this blessed result to pursue further righteousness with even greater fervour and zeal.

In summary, *muḥāsabah* of individual deeds consists of three phases:

Preliminary: When the intention arises, ask: *For what purpose and for whose sake am I doing this?*

Intermediate: While the act is underway, ask: *How am I performing it?*

Final: After completion, ask: *What effect has it left upon me?*

If a person adopts this practice, it will eventually become second nature, and the soul will instinctively raise these questions at every turn. This concludes the *muḥāsabah* pertaining to individual deeds.

The Second Kind of Self-Accountability

The second kind of *muḥāsabah* is collective accountability. To hold oneself accountable for all deeds at once is exceedingly difficult, as man is prone to forget his own actions. Since the scope of this accountability is so vast, many deeds are inevitably overlooked.

Allah the Exalted has drawn attention to this inherent weakness of human perception, saying:

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هٰذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ
غِطَآءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيْدٌ [24]

This implies that while you were heedless of your actions in the world, the veil has now been lifted, and you remember them clearly. Hence, there must be a practical method whereby one can easily account for

[24] *Sūrah Qāf, 50:23* [Publisher]

the entirety of their deeds without overlooking a single one.

Method 1: Categorisation by Domain

The first natural method is to categorise one's actions by domain. For example, virtues can be divided into three domains:

1. Those pertaining to God Almighty.
2. Those pertaining to one's own self.
3. Those pertaining to fellow humans.

A similar classification can be applied to vices. By keeping these specific categories in mind during self-examination, many forgotten details will naturally resurface.

Method 2: Functional Classification

Actions can also be classified by their outcome and impact. For example, virtues may be divided into four functional types:

First: Deeds that benefit both oneself and others. Sometimes, an individual refrains from these out of sheer stubbornness; one should evaluate if they have neglected such opportunities.

Second: Deeds that offer no gain to oneself but benefit others.

Third: Deeds which, if not performed, offer neither harm nor gain to oneself, yet result in harm to others.

Fourth: Deeds that involve personal loss but serve to benefit others.

By examining virtues through these lenses, the process of accountability becomes simpler. The same framework can be applied for examination of vices.

A Simple Method for Self-Accountability

Another significant advantage of this classification is that it enables a person to recognise the 'roots' and 'branches' of their deeds. Consequently, whenever a flaw arises in an action, they can correct it with ease. However, not everyone possesses the capacity to undertake self-accountability in such a structured manner. Therefore, I shall propose an easier method.

Instead of reflecting on your deeds once a year, or after a few months, you should mark the commands and prohibitions within the Holy Quran. Resolve to recite as many *rukū'* each day as you can manage—but with one caution: *do not recite mindlessly like a parrot*. Instead, reflect deeply upon the Divine injunctions. As you encounter each commandment in

your recitations, ask: *Do I act upon this?* When you read a prohibition, ask: *Do I refrain from this?* In this way, self-accountability is achieved with ease.

When a person builds a house, they consult an engineer or an expert to ensure no detail is overlooked and the structure is sound. In the same way, the Quran serves as the Engineer for the construction of your spiritual edifice. One must turn to it to discover exactly what is required for the perfection of faith. Weigh your conduct against every command and prohibition. This is a practice that anyone, through sincere effort, can adopt. However, there is one point of caution: *do not take the word of your own self in this matter*.

The Reality of Backbiting

Take, for example, the sin of backbiting. If your self assures you, *I have never engaged in backbiting*, do not accept this claim at face value. First, examine your actions with scrutiny. If you still appear innocent, then turn your attention to the precise definition of the act. Often, upon careful reflection, one discovers they had never truly understood the nature of this vice, and had therefore only imagined themselves free of it.

Many speak ill of others, yet when admonished, they protest, *We are simply telling the truth.* This reveals their profound misunderstanding about backbiting. They assume it means to speak a falsehood behind someone's back—but that is slander. Backbiting, on the contrary, is to speak a truth about someone in their absence. Under this false impression, when a person reads about this Divine injunction, they wrongly assume it does not apply to them. Only when they take the correct definition to heart and contrast it with lying, do they realise that they are guilty of the very sin they denied.

Others justify themselves by claiming, *I am prepared to say this to their face!* They wrongly define backbiting as something one would be unwilling to say to someone directly. In reality, one who discloses a brother's faults behind his back and is then willing to repeat it to his face commits not one, but two sins: first, backbiting; and second, hurting his feelings. To expose a fault that God has concealed is a sin in itself. The Holy Prophet[sas] has said:

'God conceals the faults of one who conceals the faults of others.'[25]

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[25] *Jāmiʿ at-Tirmidhī*, Abwāb al-Birr wa aṣ-Ṣilah, Bābu Mā Jā'fis-Satri ʿalal-Muslimi, ḥadīth 1930 [Publisher]

In short, most people fall into backbiting simply because they do not understand its true meaning.

Understanding the Nature of Vice

Now, one may ask: how is a person to discern the true nature and definition of various sins and vices? The first method, as I have stated, is to learn from a teacher. However, since it is not always possible to learn every minor detail from a teacher, let me share a useful technique.

God Almighty has instilled within human nature an inherent sense of honour, such that a person may willingly commit an act himself, yet feel a deep aversion if another were to do the same in his presence.

Ḥaḍrat Khalīfatul-Masīḥ I[ra] related that he once asked a thief: 'Do you not find it wrong to steal?'

The thief replied, 'Why would I? We labour and endure great hardships to acquire these goods; it is not as if we simply pick things up.'

Hearing this, the First Khalīfah changed the subject, later asking: 'How do you divide the stolen goods among yourselves?'

'We hand all the jewellery to a goldsmith in our group, who melts it down; and then we divide the gold or silver according to our fixed shares.'

'And what if the goldsmith keeps some for himself?' asked Ḥaḍrat Khalīfatul-Masīḥ I[ra].

'If that rogue dares to try it, we would have his head! Does he imagine it is his father's property, that he should simply keep a share for himself?'

This perfectly illustrates the double standard we often apply: we view our own actions through one lens and the actions of others through another. Therefore, one should not seek to define a sin by looking at their own conduct, as the ego will always provide an excuse. Instead, identify the nature of a vice by observing it in others. Through this objective lens, even the smallest of faults become perceptible.

In short, do not determine what is right or wrong based on your own self-justifications. Rather, discern the true nature of an act by reflecting on how you judge that same act in others. When a person applies this rigorous standard to themselves, they will realise that many actions they undertook without hesitation are, in truth, grave sins. This is an ingenious principle for discerning the reality of sin, leaving very little room for error.

The Seventh Step

The seventh essential point for the purification of the soul is to cultivate the habit of reflecting upon the commands and prohibitions one has learned. As previously explained, evil thoughts must be purged from the heart, for they lead to ruin if allowed to fester. Conversely, Divine injunctions must be firmly anchored within the heart—a process that yields immense benefits.

For instance, one should contemplate the profound blessings of *Ṣalāt*, and reflect upon the reality and virtues of fasting and other righteous deeds. Similarly, one ought to ponder the true nature and consequences of sins such as falsehood, deceit, betrayal, and indecency. For once the true reality of a matter is unveiled, the heart instinctively responds with either love or aversion. The Holy Quran declares:

لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُوْنَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ اَعْيُنٌ
لَا يُبْصِرُوْنَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ اٰذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُوْنَ بِهَا[26]

'They have hearts but they understand not therewith, and they have eyes but they see not therewith, and they have ears but they hear not therewith.'

[26] *Sūrah Al-A'rāf, 7:180* [Publisher]

In other words, until one learns to employ the inner faculties—the eyes and ears of the heart—true spiritual success can never be attained.

The Eighth Step

The eighth point is that one must possess a receptive nature. It is not enough to simply hear advice; one must strive to act upon it. The verse cited above also alludes to this very point: those who hear yet act as though they did not hear, and who see yet act as though they did not see—for such individuals, progress is impossible.

The Ninth Step

The ninth principle for the purification of the soul is that when one is admonished for an error, they should accept it with patience. Many fail to reform, because, instead of correcting a mistake when it is pointed out, they become indignant. This should not be; when reproved, one must maintain composure. Allah the Exalted says:

وَاِذَا قِيۡلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللّٰهَ اَخَذَتۡهُ الۡعِزَّةُ بِالۡاِثۡمِ فَحَسۡبُهٗ جَهَنَّمُ ؕ
وَلَبِئۡسَ الۡمِهَادُ[27]

Meaning, there are those who, when exhorted to fear Allah, find their sense of honour provoked. With their pride wounded, they perversely oppose the one who counsels them. The abode of such individuals is Hell, for rather than showing gratitude, they contended with the very person who pointed out their mistake.

However, this does not grant everyone the right to publicly rebuke others. Counsel should always be offered in confidence. Furthermore, the one offering advice must consider their own competence and standing, asking whether they are truly equipped to guide, lest their efforts yield the opposite of what is intended. Thus, while the one who errs must develop the patience to listen with a calm mind, the counsellor must show discretion, ensuring they do not violate the dignity of the person, whether in public or in private.

The Tenth Step

The tenth principle is that one must never succumb to despair, but instead place full trust in Allah. Some

[27] *Sūrah Al-Baqarah, 2:207* [Publisher]

labour diligently, only to abandon their efforts in despondency at the very moment the fruit of their toil was about to appear.

Tale of a Saint

It is recorded that a certain saint would wake every night for prayer, beseeching God earnestly. A disciple came to stay with him for several days. When the saint awoke for his nightly worship, the disciple also arose and offered prayers. When the saint had concluded his supplications, a voice was heard saying: 'No matter how much you weep and implore, your prayer shall not be accepted.'

The disciple was astonished but remained silent. The following night, the same occurred. On the third night, when the voice spoke again, the disciple could no longer restrain himself. He said, 'Master, for three nights you have heard this voice—why do you not cease your prayer?'

The saint replied, 'O foolish one, how easily you lose heart! I have heard this same voice for twenty years, yet I have never slackened. For supplication is itself an act of worship, and the duty of a servant is to worship. God Almighty is the Master; it is His prerogative whether to accept it or reject it. He attends

to His work, and I to mine. Who are you to come between us?'

The next morning, the saint received a revelation: 'Every prayer you have offered over these twenty years has been accepted! You have succeeded in your test of steadfastness!'

The saint turned to his disciple and said, 'Imagine the loss I would have suffered, had I listened to your advice. God has finally granted me His nearness—because I placed my trust in Him.'

Steadfastness in Prayer

Consider for a moment: had that saint yielded to his disciple's advice and abandoned his prayers just as they were on the verge of acceptance, how perilous it would have been. All those years of toil would have been utterly wasted.

Therefore, a believer must never fall into despair. One must press forward with courage, refusing to abandon efforts after temporary setbacks. Evaluate the reasons for the setbacks and strive to remove them—but never, under any circumstances, lose hope in the grace of Allah.

To those who stop doing good deeds because they do not yield results, I say: even if that is so, do not

falter. Persist in your virtues and, ultimately, success shall be yours.

Allah the Exalted describes how believers attain success through absolute trust in Him:

اَلَّذِيْنَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ اِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوْا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ اِيْمَانًا ۖ وَّقَالُوْا حَسْبُنَا اللّٰهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيْلُ[28]

That is, people attempted to intimidate the Muslims, taunting them: 'What happened to your prophecies? The world has united against you—be afraid!' Yet, these threats only served to fuel their faith. They had been forewarned that the enemy would gather with overwhelming force to crush them, but they had also been promised victory. Their only response to such people was: 'Let those who will, turn against us. Sufficient for us is Allah, and an excellent Guardian is He.' When we have placed our trust in Him, why should we fear anything else?'

This verse teaches us that the more formidable the opposition, the more firmly a believer must stand his ground. A person who is physically ill does not stop seeking treatment altogether if one remedy fails. Rather, he persists in the effort: either he dies striving or he finds the remedy. Those suffering from spiritual

[28] *Sūrah Āl-e-'Imrān*, 3:174 [Publisher]

maladies must adopt the same resolve; indeed, if the affliction is great, the effort to overcome it must be greater still. If they succeed, they will have attained everything; and should they die while yet striving, God will overlook their shortcomings as a recompense for their sincere efforts. But if one abandons the struggle altogether and passes away in such a state, what can they hope for but punishment? Therefore, one must persevere in this pursuit and never succumb to despair.

Such tenacity is often observed in [worldly pursuits]. I once heard of a man who failed his examinations for seven consecutive years; by his final attempt, even his own son was sitting for the same exam. Yet, he felt no shame in sitting for it once more—and, at last, succeeded.

Therefore, do not lose heart, belittle your own worth, or underestimate your capacities. I am not teaching you conceit, but rather steadfastness. Do not say, 'I cannot do this,' or, 'It is beyond me.' Say instead, 'Allah the Exalted has endowed me, too, with every necessary strength.' He describes the true believers in these terms:

مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوْا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللّٰهَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ قَضٰى نَحْبَهٗ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَّنْتَظِرُ[29]

'Among the believers are men who have been true to the covenant they made with Allah. Of them are some who have fulfilled their vow, and some who still wait their turn.'

It is related in a *ḥadīth* that a certain Companion[30] said, 'I wish I had also been present at the Battle of Badr; I would have fought valiantly.' When such words spring from a heart filled with sincere longing, they are not a mark of arrogance. Rather, they are like the smoke that rises from a fire smouldering deep within.

Such was the spirit of this companion. He later took part in the Battle of Uhud. When the rumour spread that the Holy Prophet[sas] had been martyred, Ḥaḍrat Umar[ra] was so overwhelmed with grief that he sat down, as did another companion beside him, with his head lowered. At that moment, this same companion approached and asked, 'What has happened?' Upon being told that the Messenger of Allah[sas] had been martyred, he declared:

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[29] *Sūrah Al-Aḥzāb*, 33:23 [Publisher]

[30] This Companion was Ḥaḍrat Anas bin Naḍr[ra]. [Publisher]

'If the Messenger of Allah[sas] has indeed been martyred, then this is the very moment to fight! Why should we linger any longer in this world?' With these words, he charged into the fray and fought until he was martyred. When his body was finally recovered, it bore more than seventy wounds.[31]

Difference in Conceit and Despair

In short, this is a vital point: one should never harbour negative thinking against oneself. Just as it is wrong to think ill of others, it is equally detrimental, even sinful, to entertain such thoughts about oneself. Instead, place your trust in Allah and resolve not to allow Satan to prevail over you.

There is a difference between rejecting self-doubt and falling into vanity. The former relates to future endeavours, while the latter usually concerns past works.

An arrogant person is easily dismayed when undertaking a task; yet, once it is finished, they are eager to boast. Conversely, one who trusts in God and refuses to entertain negative thoughts remains

[31] *The Life of Muhammad* (*Sīrat Ibn Hishām)*, Alfred Guillaume, Oxford University Press, 1982. p. 381 [Publisher]

optimistic until the goal is achieved; and once it is achieved, they feel no need to even mention it.

The Eleventh Step

People tend to regard certain sins as grave and others as trivial, thus exercising little caution against the latter. However, according to the Holy Quran, no sin is inherently *minor*. From the Quranic perspective, a minor sin is merely an evil thought not yet put into practice; once committed, this sin becomes *major*.

Terms such as *Saghīrah* and *Kabīrah* have been coined by people, but the Holy Quran does not use them in the sense they imagine. Therefore, no sin should be dismissed as *minor*, for such a view breeds heedlessness.

The story is told of a man who, fancying himself brave, asked a tattooist to engrave a lion upon his arm. As the needle pricked his skin, the man winced in pain and asked, 'Which part of the lion are you making?'

'The right ear', replied the artist.

'Tell me', said the man, 'would it still be a lion if it had no ear?'

'Yes', replied the artist.

'Then leave out the ear and continue.'

Soon, the man flinched again. 'And now?'

'The left ear', came the reply.

'Would it still look like a lion without it?'

'Yes,' the artist sighed.

'Then leave that as well.'

This continued with every limb and feature until the artist threw up his hands and said, 'There is nothing left of your lion now; you may take your leave.'

This is precisely the state of those who undermine the importance of individual deeds. They neglect one virtue after another—until, at last, they are completely devoid of goodness.

First, as I have explained, no deed is minor. Second, every act serves as a catalyst. Just as one sin begets another, so too does one virtue inspire the next. Never regard any good or bad deed as insignificant.

Ḥaḍrat Anas[ra] once cautioned those who joined Islam later, saying: 'Today you commit certain evils and regard them as minor; yet in the days of the Messenger of Allah[sas], such deeds were considered tantamount to death.'

Likewise, it is narrated that the Holy Prophet[sas] once passed two graves and remarked: 'The occupants of these graves are being tormented for matters that seemed minor, yet were serious. They were minor because they could easily have been avoided, yet major

because they led to Hell. One had been negligent in shielding himself from the splashes of urine, while the other was given to spreading slander.'

Thus, no deed is minor in itself; it is only minor or major in relative terms. Any deed a person already performs or has the capacity to do, no matter how difficult it may seem to others, is *minor* for him. But a deed he refuses to do or finds himself unable to do, however small it may objectively be, becomes *major* for him. For instance, consider a person who prays, fasts, gives *Zakāt*, and performs the pilgrimage, yet cannot refrain from hurling abuse. If asked why he does not eschew this evil, he might claim that he is powerless to stop; and it is precisely for this reason—his inability to conquer the habit—that renders it a *major* sin for him.

Hence, any evil a person is entangled in and feels unable to give up is *major* for him; likewise, any virtue a person finds himself unable to adopt is *major* for him.

The Promised Messiah[as] has written that a person is not rewarded for what he does naturally. Reward is granted only for an act that the self resists—where, despite having the capacity to indulge in a vice, one chooses to refrain. For example, if a person lacks the

physical capacity for lust and says, 'I do not commit adultery,' this is no virtue. However, if that same person were to abandon backbiting, that would indeed be a virtue, for he would be overcoming a vice he is actually drawn to. It is the very vice we find hardest to conquer that constitutes a *major* sin for us.

Levels of Divine Enlightenment

I have briefly outlined how *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī* may be attained. If you act upon these guidelines, then, God willing, you shall derive immense benefit.

I will now touch upon two or three signs of *'Irfān-e-Ilāhī*, for time does not permit a more exhaustive explanation. These signs are of two kinds: external and internal.

Regarding the external signs, it is recorded in a *ḥadīth*: 'Through voluntary acts of devotion [*nawāfil*], a servant draws so near to Me that I become the hand with which he holds, the feet with which he walks, and the tongue with which he speaks.'[32]

This demonstrates that true recognition of God is not achieved merely by discharging obligatory duties; rather, it requires the earnest performance of voluntary

[32] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb ar-Riqāq, Bāb at-Tawāḍu' [Publisher]

acts as well. At this station of spiritual enlightenment, a person attains such proximity that God becomes, as it were, his hands, his feet, his eyes, and his tongue.

This means their actions are transformed into the actions of God. Just as the works of God are inevitable and none can hinder them, so too do the works of such individuals come to pass with Divine certainty. Whomever they seize finds no escape; whomever they hear, their plea is granted. Whomever they turn their spiritual attention upon is reformed, and every word they utter is the truth itself, fulfilling the verse:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوٰى اِنْ هُوَ اِلَّا وَحْیٌ یُّوْحٰی[33]

'Nor does he speak out of *his own* desire. It is nothing but *pure* revelation *that has been* revealed *by God*.'

Their grasp is formidable: none can break free from it. Thus, to attain *'irfān* means that the attributes of God begin to permeate through a person; and Divine works are manifested through them. God employs them in such a manner that the world beholds a glimpse of Divine majesty—a manifestation so profound that the ignorant are sometimes led to mistake them for God Himself.

[33] *Sūrah An-Najm*, 53:4-5 [Publisher]

To reach such a station, internal transformations must occur. The first of these is the gift of discerning between good and evil. At times, an act may seem harmless on the surface, yet as one moves to carry it out, an inner realisation dawns that it is, in fact, sinful—and so they abstain. Conversely, one may shun a deed thinking it blameworthy, only to be granted the insight that it is actually virtuous.

Thus, the first stage of *'irfān* is that a servant is granted a reflection of that Divine discernment which distinguishes virtue from vice—a level of perception that is withheld from others.

Consider the Holy Prophet[sas]: he offered the same prayers and observed the same fasts as others, yet did anyone else attain his exalted rank? Certainly not. The reason is that beyond the virtues visible to ordinary people lie deeper virtues that only the Holy Prophet[sas] perceived and practised; and beyond the evils other perceived lay subtler shades of evil that he alone discerned and avoided. For this reason, he attained a station that none other could reach.

Thus, beyond the veil of apparent good and evil lie subtler shades of virtue and vice that defy verbal description. These can only be comprehended by those who have been endowed by God with a specialised

faculty of insight. Once this faculty is received and acted upon, it flourishes continually, growing day by day. This, however, is but the first stage of *'irfān*.

The second stage of *'irfān* is when hidden evils are unveiled. Some vices are shrouded behind a veil and remain imperceptible until that veil is lifted. Others lie in plain sight, yet remain unrecognised for what they truly are. For instance, if pork were passed off as mutton, an ordinary person might remain unaware; or the meat might indeed be mutton, yet be rendered unlawful by some hidden circumstance. Such matters are made clear to those endowed with *'irfān*. When confronted with such things, a specific sense of unease or a natural aversion is cast into their hearts, alerting them to the truth.

It is related that an elder once sat down to dine with a group of people, but rose and departed without touching the food. Seeing this, the others also refrained and later sought the reason for his departure. He replied, 'I felt an uncharacteristic surge of desire to eat that food, and from that very urge, I realised there must be some hidden flaw within it—so I withdrew.'

In this way, those whose souls are under discipline are safeguarded; though their lower self is not yet fully transformed, they discern evil through the reactive

stirrings of their conscience. But those who ascend to a higher stage of *'irfān* become righteous souls. No matter how artfully evil disguises itself, they recognise it instantly, as if saying:

بہر رنگے کہ خواہی جامہ پوش من اندازِ قدت را می شناسم

'In whatever garb you choose to clothe yourself, I recognise you by your very stature.'

This is the final stage of *'irfān*: when a person perceives virtue as virtue and vice as vice, however deeply they may be shrouded. Such individuals have no need to declare their identity; the world recognises their light of its own accord.

May Allah the Exalted enable you to act upon these teachings and enrich you with the bounty of His true recognition. *Āmīn*.

Glossary

'Abd: a servant or slave, often used to denote servitude to God.

'Ārif billāh: one who has attained *'Irfān* or true recognition of God.

Auliyā: saints; holy men of God.

Bait-ud-Du'ā: literally 'house of prayer'; refers to a particular room that the Promised Messiah[as] especially used for offering prayers and supplications.

Dhikr-e-Ilāhī: remembrance of God; refers to a lecture on this topic by the author.

Ghaffār: an Attribute of God; The Great Forgiver.

Haqīqat-ur-Ru'yā: the philosophy of dreams; refers to a lecture on this topic by the author.

Hajj: pilgrimage to Mecca; one of the five pillars of Islam.

Ilhām: revelation of God; Divine inspiration.

'Irfān-e-Ilāhī: true recognition of God.

Jalsa: a gathering or assembly; also refers to the Annual Conventions held by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Karīm: an Attribute of God; Most Generous.

Khalīfah: a term used for Islamic spiritual leaders, particularly successors of the Holy Prophet[sas] and the Promised Messiah[as].

Maʿrifat-e-Ilāhī: true recognition and insights about God.

Mujaddid: reformer; a reviver of Islam.

Muḥāsabah: self-accountability or self-assessment.

Nafs: self or soul.

Raḥīm: an Attribute of God; Most Merciful.

Rabb: an Attribute of God; Lord; Creator and Sustainer.

Sattār: an attribute of God; Concealer of Faults.

Ṣalāt: the Islamic practice of ritual prayer.

Shariah: the law of Islam derived from the Holy Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad[sas].

Sūrah: term for a chapter of the Holy Quran.

Sunnah: the example and practice of Prophet Muhammad[sas].

Taqwā: righteousness, piety, or fear of God.

Zakāt: alms giving or charity; one of the five pillars of Islam.