

THE THREE

Spiritual Awakening

STAGES OF

in Islam with Insights

THE SELF

from Various Paths

IN THE

to the One

QURAN

nejoud al-yagout

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the name of God, the *Compassionate*, the Merciful*

The Three Stages of the Self in the Quran:
Spiritual Awakening in Islam with Insights from Various Paths to the One

nejoud al-yagout

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Stay blessed.

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This book is dedicated to *Al Wahid* (The One)

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“O my God, You are the Truly Existent, while I am the fundamentally non-existent.”¹

Ibn Arabi

The Opening

“In the name of God, the [Compassionate], the [Merciful*]

All praise is due to God, Lord of the [Worlds];

The [Compassionate], The [Merciful*]

[Owner] of the Day of Judgment.

You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help.

Guide us to the straight path: the path of those You have blessed;

not of those who have incurred Your wrath,

nor of those who have gone astray.”

(Quran 1:1-7)

Dear Reader,

This is not the work of a scholar nor a researcher, nor an awakened self, but of one who is a work in progress—under construction, so to speak.

In this book, all are welcome to bask in the universality of God’s omnipresence, for His signature is everywhere. There is room on earth for a butterfly and a rhinoceros, a firefly and a gazelle, a bee and an elephant, a tiger and a pangolin, a peacock and a fly, a goose and a silverback gorilla, a zebra and a hippopotamus. There is room for an oyster and a dolphin, a whale and a crab, a starfish and a shark. There is room for a moon and a shooting star, a planet and a black hole, a lotus flower and a palm tree, a galaxy and an asteroid, a shore and a rainforest, a desert and a tree, a savannah and a mountaintop, a pebble and a gemstone, a valley and a horizon. There is room for a peasant and a tradesman, a merchant and a janitor, a sweeper and a ruler, a beggar and an executive. There is room for a Hindu, a Jew, a Muslim, a Christian, a Sikh, a Baha’i, a Jain, a Buddhist, a pagan, an atheist, an agnostic, a convert, a ‘spiritual but not religious.’ There is room for a rabbi, a pastor, a priest, an imam, a guru, a monk, a mystic, a singer, a writer, a poet, a rebel, a heretic. There is room for “you” and “me.”

For the Divine encompasses all.

Though the research in the following pages stems from the wisdom in the Quran, it dovetails with the wisdom found in all sacred scriptures and the wisdom inherent in all elevated souls. Reality is singular, but the ways of waltzing with the One Reality are plural.

Whatever our religion, whatever our inclinations, everything radiates with the signature of the One—whether He is called Allah, God, HaShem, Brahman, or any other name in any language.

If any words in this book uplift you, praise the One. This is but the presentation of a vessel.

Love and blessings to all,

Nejoud

An Introductory Note

The Noble Quran mentions three types of the *nafs*, or self—*al nafs al ammara bil su* (the self/ego that literally commands or inclines us to wrongdoing/sin/evil), *al nafs al lawwama* (the self/ego that literally blames itself), and *al nafs al mutma'inna* (the self which is at peace), which will be referred to as the lower self (or ego), the self-incriminating ego, and the self which is at peace, respectively. This book expands on the above-mentioned notions of the self by offering the addition of the concept of *stages* of the self and discusses spiritual awakening in the Noble Quran and in various sacred scriptures with insights from souls across the globe.

Although the three sections of the book refer to each *nafs* in a linear fashion, the chapters within each section—and even the sections, for that matter—do not have to be read in the order in which they appear. Consider both the chapters and sections and everything in between as arisings.

The Creator is referred to as God within this book except in the case of Arabic transliteration. Quran verses/excerpts are from the Wahiduddin Khan English translation or paraphrased from the translation in question. In a few instances, the English translations in this book are translated or paraphrased from the original Arabic Quran.

In Islam, God has ninety-nine names to describe His attributes. Some of the ninety-nine attributes are not mentioned directly, or in the exact manner they are presented, in the Noble Quran; other attributes are in the Noble Quran but missing from the list. God cannot be confined to these particular ninety-nine attributes. And the names are not confined to one faith. Our God is One. Any attribute in italics followed by an asterisk indicates one of these names taken from David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher's English translation of Abu Hamid Al Ghazali's *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (published by the Islamic Texts Society). Only the parts in parentheses are from Al Ghazali; there may be changes in spelling within the transliteration of the attributes. If there is no asterisk, and the attribute is not italicized, then the translation of the attribute is taken from Wahiduddin Khan's English translation of the Quran. The case of italics without an asterisk indicates that the translation is neither taken from Burrell/Daher or Khan's translations but garnered (or paraphrased) from general translations or a personal understanding of the attribute in question.

**Stage One: The Stage of *Al Nafs Al Ammara Bil Su*
(The Lower Self)**

“Our Lord, we have wronged our [selves]: if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we shall be among the lost.”

(Quran 7:23)

The Lower Self

In the Quran, the lower self is that which incites us to evil, and this *nafs* is revealed in an apt verse in the Noble Quran:

*And I do not claim innocence for myself:
...the self commands to wrongdoing
except for that which my Lord has mercy
My Lord is forgiving, merciful*

(Quran 12:53)

Depending on which interpretation of the Quran one follows, the verse above reflects either Prophet Joseph's master's wife confession in which she admits that Prophet Joseph is innocent of her wrongful accusations—which led to his false imprisonment; or the verse could be a statement by Prophet Joseph himself professing his innocence after being wrongly accused and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

We learn in the Noble Quran that Prophet Joseph's master's wife *attempted to seduce Joseph* (Quran 12:23). News of the incident found its way outside the walls of her home and the women of the city began to gossip about her, so she invited them to a feast and provided a knife for each woman to use to cut fruits. When she called for Prophet Joseph, the women were distracted by his beauty and cut their hands in absent-mindedness, exclaiming: "God preserve us! This is no human being but a noble angel!" (Quran 12:31).

Such was Prophet Joseph's handsomeness that the women who condemned his master's wife joined forces with her in tempting him. Prophet Joseph tells God that he "prefer[s] prison to what these women are inviting [him] to do" (Quran 12:33) and tells God that if He does not protect him from "their guile, [he] may yield to them and so become ... of the ignorant" (Ibid).

Prophet Joseph sought refuge in God, knowing he would not be able to resist temptation by himself. He preferred a life confined to a cell to a life in which he would be subjected to temptation. A story to ponder...

Attachment to the Ego

Mostly, we are not aware of our attachment to the self. It is only via divine guidance that we are able, through *Al Qadir* (*The One who is able*), to ascend from the quagmire of unconsciousness.

In the lowest levels of this stage, we are attached to the material and physical world, our desires, and our inner inclinations.

We ascribe to an ideology of ‘my way’ and reject those of other faiths, seeing only our differences. In spiritual blindness, we create unjust legal and political systems, until it is no longer our individual lower self that is inclined toward wrongdoing but myriad selves.

Once we take the first step of surrender, *Al Hadi* (The Guide*) will lead the way. God helps us climb the ladder of awakening, for “God’s guidance is the only guidance” (Quran 6:71).

It is a steep climb, but when, as advised in the Bhagavad Gita, we let go of desire² and are liberated from the idea of ‘mine’ and the ego³, the path of guidance opens to us.

The Collective Manifestation of the Ego

When we ponder the state of the world, it is apparent that plenty of us on this planet are slaves of the ego. This is collectively manifested in human trafficking, an erroneous system of wealth distribution, imperialism, capitalism, greed, dishonesty, self-obsession, dictatorship, the use of intoxicants, gambling, burglary, vandalism, abuse, false imprisonment, rape, drug dealing, racism, xenophobia, nationalism, objectification of men and women, materialism, consumerism, and distractions and perversions which permeate the mainstream. It is not happening *out there*. It is part of our collective (un)consciousness.

In order to collectively elevate the world, we are invited to elevate the individual ego within each of us. As a result, this transformation extends to how we interact with our families, communities, societies, nations, and the world. We hear of it: a shift in consciousness, an awakening, a global ascension. Many scriptures refer to a new earth. This new earth is reserved for those of us who seek or recognize the Divine Reality.

In the meantime, what arises when *we remember [our] Lord within [ourselves]* (Quran 7:205) is a world in which duality no longer affects us or causes us turmoil, for there is an intimate understanding, a heavenly grasping that what is, merely *is*. First, we become aware that it is our lower self which creates drama and pain. It is our lower self, in forgetfulness of its divine essence, that suffers in this paradigm of the yin and the yang.

God explains in the Noble Quran that *in the heavens and earth, all from Him, are signs for those who reflect* (Quran 45:13) and we are even invited to *reflect within our very selves* (Quran 30:8). According to the Dhammapada, the Buddhist scriptures, contemplation frees us from passion, the lower self and ignorance.⁴ Thus, away from our distractions, let us ponder, let us contemplate, so we can rise from the shackles of the ego.

And in all our reveries, all our contemplations, let our mind (re)turn to our Creator.

Desire

When the devil was banished from paradise, he said *he would wait for us on the straight path of God* (Quran 7:16). He waits not on the crooked path, but the straight path to the Divine. So, even when we walk the spiritual path, we cannot become complacent, for there is inner work to be attended to, and vigilance is required on the way home.

On the path to the One, our desire for anything other than God points to a hellish reality, while our yearning to know God leads us to a heavenly paradigm. In fact, *if we each resisted desire, paradise would be our shelter* (Quran 79:40-41).

Yet we cling to our obsessions, we remain hypnotized by the lower self. Even while we acknowledge the reality of God through acts of worship, we find it hard to let go of our attachments or addictions.

And what does *Al Quddoos* (The Holy*) say regarding those who are slaves to desires in the Noble Quran?

“[C]onsider the one who has taken his own desire as a deity, whom God allows to stray in the face of knowledge, sealing his ears and heart and covering his eyes—who can guide such a person after God...?” (Quran 45:23)

This verse exemplifies the effects of our inclinations. Whatever we are drawn to from a lower level of consciousness translates into spiritual blindness and spiritual deafness in which the divine realm is no longer a possibility.

Scripture: A Spiritual Mirror

Whatever our path and wherever our spiritual journey leads us, scripture is our very own spiritual mirror. It can reflect back to us where we are on our spiritual journey, and it is filled with signposts for attaining purification. In the Noble Quran, we are told that “God guides to the ways of peace all who seek His ... pleasure, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path” (Quran 5:16).

God showers His grace upon seekers, those who yearn, the elevated, those of us who are ripe for awakening. If we have not experienced awakening, it is because there are parts of us that are not ready; or, in extreme cases, there are aspects of our being that reject the divine altogether.

As we look into the mirror of scripture, our discernment sharpens. And we find ourselves shifting, ever shifting into the scope of possibility.

God's Oneness and Expansiveness

The first half of the most essential pillar in Islam is the *shahadah*, or testimony, *La ilaha illa Allah*. Or: We bear witness that there is no deity except God. In Arabic, the phrase is simply *No deity except God*. The phrase “there is” in the translation of the testimony is redundant. God simply is. And there is no other. Uttering the name God with conviction can reestablish our connection with Him: *God. God. God.*

The *shahadah* is a declaration of the oneness of God; it testifies that anything in this world that we are consumed by or obsessed with cannot be the truth. It is a straightforward declaration and is the turning point of our awakening. When we surrender all objects of worship and focus on the Divine alone, we forsake even the self and align ourselves with the will of *Al Ahad (The Only)*. When we unite in this testimony, there is no place for *My God is not the same as your God*, or *My religion is the only way to God*. In a low level of consciousness, we focus on theological differences. We see separation. But all of the sacred texts, all of the poems of the mystics, all of the messages of the sages are pointing toward the Divine, albeit from different angles.

When we accept the diverse paths to God, we live in a state of acceptance. We do not have to partake in rituals that contradict the teachings of our respective faiths, but we respect that each community has its own dance. We also ensure we do not impose our way on others.

In any case, we cannot limit God to one book or one path. God's ways are inclusive.

And so, we declare *la ilaha illa Allah* to say *la*, or no, to anything that takes us away from the One. We say yes to that which alone is: God.

The Path of the People

May we remember God's words in the Noble Quran:

“If you obey the majority of those on earth, they will lead you astray from God's way. They follow nothing but conjecture...” (Quran 6:116)

This verse alerts us to the fact that being a part of the majority does not indicate we are on the right path. The verse is also humbling. It reminds us that, in many cases, we have no knowledge of that which we speak of. We interpret the world based on our limited conditioning and through the filter of the ego. In this way, we are led astray, and we lead others astray. Sometimes, as we read words of scripture, a means of grasping the essence of divine language is to ask God the meaning and wait for an answer in silence. What comes up for us? What do we grasp beyond conjecture? God speaks to us through the verses, but we have to get out of the way to fathom the beauty of what is presented to us.

Instead, we turn to everyone else for affirmation and imbibe trends to remain relevant. In the Holy Bible, we are told: “[T]hat which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”⁵ We esteem wealth; we esteem adulation; we esteem prestige. When we esteem *Al Muta'ali* (The Exalted*), however, we rise above the trappings of the world and the ego. We rise above the need to impress; we rise above the need to follow others. We get back in touch with the part of us that is able to detach by reconnecting to Source through meditation, prayer, and witnessing the flowering of our hearts.

When this love begins to blossom within us, it naturally extends to others. The more we are attuned to the fountain of unconditional love that is available to us, the more we can lead ourselves and others back to the path of God. Once on the path, we would not exchange it for all the wealth and vanities in the world.

As we evolve in consciousness, we know that what is given to us, in terms of material objects, can be taken from us at any moment. And so, we are asked to *find joy in God's grace and mercy, which is far better than what [we] gather* (Quran 10:58). In meditation, silence, and prayer, we attain realization that God's gifts of peace and love are eternal.

Worshippers of the One

It is written in the Noble Quran that “[t]he ... [worshippers] of the [Merciful*] are those who walk upon the earth with humility and when they are addressed by the ignorant ones, their response is, ‘Peace’” (Quran 25:63). We can carry this verse with us when we are insulted or when we are in conflict with others.

In this state of peace, we are no longer pulled into negativity: neither that of others nor that which we hold inside us. We surrender negativity to God. We remain calm in the face of antagonism. The more we set an intention to forsake arguments and retaliation, the more peaceful we become. Dadi Janki, an inspiring spiritual teacher, invites us to remember that our primordial nature is peace.⁶ When we reply with the word *Peace*, we are affirming who we are. When we invite peace into our encounters, however stressful they may be, we are able to recognize the peace in others (and in ourselves) beneath their (and our) anger.

A good practice for shifting away from defensiveness is to recall how often we have insulted others. We often speak of karma, forgetting it affects us as well. When we acknowledge the pain that we, ourselves, have inflicted upon others, it is a gift. It creates a vortex of repentance and compassion which, in unison, serve to raise our frequency. Feeling the pain of another reminds us how similar we are. Instead of hurting others, we carry peace with us wherever we go. If we slip up and argue back, or if we instigate an argument, we make a resolve to try again. Giving up on peace is not for the ambassadors of *Al Salam* (The Source of Peace).

Another aspect to take into consideration is that when we argue with someone, we are not stooping down to their level. Our reaction or response indicates that we are on their level, and that they are on ours. Nobody ‘out there’ brings us into their negativity: We meet on the same level of our mutual negativity, each one bringing a trigger for the other to resolve. Sometimes, it takes a tense encounter with another for our buried resentments to surface. What we do with such an encounter speaks volumes about our resolve to awaken. It is essential that we are not tricked by the ego. The more we defend ourselves and blame others, the more we forsake opportunities to rise above our ego.

If we respond peacefully the next time, it does not mean we are peaceful. We may just be good at hiding our anger—sometimes to anger the person even more, other times because we want to build a reputation as a ‘peaceful’ person. In such a situation, we can investigate where the false sense of peace is coming from in order to connect with the true peace that resides within us.

The Trust

In the Noble Quran, God states that He “offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to [undertake] it [in fear]” (Quran 33:72), and “mankind [undertook] it” (Ibid) because he is “unjust and ignorant” (Ibid).

We were not ready to be caretakers; but, in our state of ignorance, we jumped at the chance to prove we were worthy of the task at hand. This is why we are suffering, and the world we see is a manifestation of our ignorance.

Indeed, “[c]orruption has [manifested] on land and sea because of ... [what man’s hands have earned]” (Quran 30:41). The good news is that we can raise our frequency; we can ascend from our ignorance. This is what our scriptures have been inviting us to do for eons.

The trust is there for each of us, regardless of where we are from, what path we are on, and who we are (or think we are). When we uphold the trust, we keep our covenant to *Al Khaliq* (The Creator*). We take care of the environment and our communities. We give of our wealth to our “parents, ... relatives, orphans, the needy, and [the traveler]” (Quran 2:215). We provide hospitality to visitors from all nations. Refugees and immigrants fall under the category of travelers. We welcome them as part of our extended human family.

When each of our individual hearts is aligned to the One, we are inspired by the Divine to alleviate sorrow in our world. He guides us to create a balanced earth in which each member is a divine relative of the other. *Al Basit* (He who expands*) stretches our love in each moment. In this expansion, we evolve from lovers of sects, tribes, belief systems, nationalities, and ethnicities, to lovers of the One who loves. As a result, we love God’s creation and begin to uphold the trust.

In this millisecond, by transforming our egos, one at a time, we create a sustainable and inhabitable earth for us all. Skies clear. We say goodbye to zoos and cages and slaughterhouses and circuses. Borders dissolve; walls break down; poverty vanishes. Ah! Can we see it? It is not a pipe dream, but a possibility. Until then, how much longer will we continue to hurt earth, its inhabitants, and each other?

If people abuse our property or are ungrateful to us or ignore us, we leave them. And yet God, in His compassion and mercy, remains with us. He can easily *replace us with other people* (Quran 47:38), and yet He keeps us here. What a Friend is this!

The Testimony of Yes

We did not come here to eat, sleep, reproduce, indulge in desire, and then die. When God created us, He asked the descendants of Adam: “Am I not your Lord?” (Quran 7:172). *They responded in the affirmative, bearing witness (Ibid).* The testimony was taken so *we cannot say we were unaware of this on Resurrection day (Ibid).*

Even though we do not remember testifying, it is in our consciousness. We are here to awaken, to remember. The covenant is ever present in our hearts.

The journey back to God is done alone. Even when we pray in a congregation, we are connecting to God alone. We alone are responsible for our relationship to God “lest [we] say, ‘Our forefathers associated others with God ... and we are only the descendants who came after them’” Quran 7:173). God wants us to be independent. Religion and scripture may guide us to Him, but what use are they when we continue to lean on the understanding of others? It becomes second-hand knowledge that is not experienced after a while. God invites us to wake up, and to do so we must take to the wilderness by ourselves without our fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers and gurus and scholars. Here, we are able to witness for ourselves, firsthand, what has been pointed to by God and His divine vessels throughout the ages.

Al Ghafoor (The Forgiving)

Some of us might feel we have strayed too far to return to the straight path. God anticipates our every thought and has an answer:

“[And] anyone who does evil or wrongs his own [self] and then asks God for forgiveness will find God most forgiving and merciful.” (Quran 4:110)

This verse reminds us not to be hard on ourselves, for God is forgiving. The lower self is an unconscious part of us. When *Al Noor*, ([The] Light*) shines on it, the ego is able to align with the divine.

Here is a testament to the power of a good deed and the mercy of God:

“Whoever does a good deed will [have ten like it], but those who do a bad deed will [not have but like it] and they shall not be wronged.” (Quran 6:160)

One good deed is equivalent to ten good deeds and one evil deed is worth one like it. God is *Al Rauf (The One who is kind)* and His calculations are merciful. May we be inspired to appreciate the goodness of others (and ourselves) and not magnify their (or our) evil deeds.

Purification of our thoughts is essential as well. The inner and outer are interconnected. Good deeds purify our thoughts, and good thoughts purify our actions. We do not have to wait until our minds are pure to perform acts of service or worship, nor do we have to wait until we have disciplined our minds to give to charity, pray, fast or awaken from the stupor of our ego.

Love on The Way

Love is a faithful companion on our spiritual path. Where is the love inside of us waiting to be resurrected?

Al Hakam (The Judge) hides our sins from others, so who are we to expose the sins of others? We each have shadows within us that we would never want others to see. Sometimes the shadows are manifested on the outside through our actions, and other times we conceal them deep within us.

God knows our hearts. He knows those of us who are pure and those of us who are impure. Judgment is His domain, not ours. What we can try to do, no matter how challenging, no matter how many times we fail, is to keep trying to love, to bring love to every situation, whether inside of us or in the outer world. In this state of aiming toward love, there will no longer be a part of us that claims to be loving. Even the attachment to the loving side of our 'personality' can stall us on our journey of awakening. When we love for the sake of *Al Wadood (The Loving One)*, our ego cannot cling to the desire to appear or act loving to others. We simply dissolve in our love for the One and become love.

Stage One: Pause and Ponder

The path of self-discovery is a blessed gift that brings us closer and closer to *Al Wadood* (*The Loving One*). As we navigate unknown terrain, we may struggle, but we turn (or return) to God's path. We also have a built-in moral compass, so we instinctively know the divine remedies. However, our ability to rise above this stage depends on our willingness to surrender the lower self. Below are a few questions to help us ascertain our spiritual stage.

What about God?

We can get close to God through scripture, through contemplation of His attributes, through nature, through looking into each other's eyes, or through meditation and prayer. But God is beyond form. The more we think we know God, the more elusive His reality. It is as though He wants us to come closer and closer, for close is not enough, neither for Him nor for us. It is this yearning to know Him that prods us along the spiritual path. And we begin to notice that the more attuned we are to The One, the less room we have for ourselves.

In the dissolution of this notion of I, we give back the illusory self to its rightful owner: *The Only*. Our *fitra*, or innate state of awareness of the Truth or Reality, comes to life when we fulfill our *purpose to worship God* (Quran 51:56). The lower self is triggered by the notion of worship. It believes only in itself and has its own code of conduct and inclinations. "Why should we worship God?" it asks. And the answer is: "And whoever strives, strives only for himself" (Quran 29:6).

Alignment to the Divine purifies our essence and reconnects us to the Source from which we came. As time elapses, we shed layer upon layer of the lower self, and instead of attaching ourselves to vices, virtues attach themselves to us. As the inner landscape reforms, the outer world transforms.

What is our relationship with scripture?

Many of us use scripture as a talisman, a book we keep on our bedside table to ward off evil. In the Noble Quran, God tells us He sent the Book down for us to *ponder its verses* (Quran 38:29) and *as a reminder with a messenger to lead those of faith and who perform acts of righteousness from the darkness into the light* (Quran 65:10,11).

Divine scripture is a key that opens the doors to the temples of our hearts and attunes us to God's frequencies. Through holy texts across the lands, the Divine touches our hearts through the sacred vibrations of verses. We dive into the ocean of our faith as the words play tunes with our hearts, and we acknowledge the Highest of the High. However, when

any scripture becomes a tool to separate ourselves from others, we have turned far away from the essence of oneness.

We can love our books, but we have to remember that God is beyond the grasp of words and His truth shines on all His creatures. For us to condemn someone who does not believe in the book we follow only reflects that we suffer from a fragmented self. When we embrace the universal law, we appreciate the waltz of the divine in heavenly texts far and wide. We read and absorb, read and absorb, until the Truth becomes alive for us.

As Paramahansa Yogananda reminds us, we have to remember that we cannot simply read truths but put them into practice. Wisdom is not attained by reading but by realization.⁷ This is why billions of us read scripture but those of us who are realized are few. Still, *Al Saboor (The Patient One)* gives us a taste of eternity and waits for us to embrace reality.

How is our relationship with our parents (or guardians)?

Honoring our parents is good practice for the ego, which is repelled by authority. When we remember God, *being good to our parents* (Quran 4:36; Quran 17:23; Quran 46:15 et cetera) becomes an obligation for us. It even becomes our duty to *spend of our wealth on them* (Quran 2:215).

In various sacred texts from the Analects of Confucius to the Holy Bible, filial piety is emphasized.

Do we contribute to the community?

As Muslims, we are required to *give of our wealth to others* (Quran 2:43; Quran 2:274; Quran 22:41; Quran 27:3 et cetera). Whatever our faith, we are invited to be generous to others. Apart from financial assistance, we can buy clothes and provide basic necessities to the needy. We can stock a hungry person's kitchen with food or buy shoes for their children. Sometimes, just checking on others and asking if they need assistance—and actually helping if they do—is also a way to contribute to our society. We cannot “attain to righteousness [until we] spend for the cause of God out of what [we] cherish” (Quran 3:92). So, even though it is acceptable to give away our secondhand clothes—which we no longer hold dear to us—to the needy, how much better would it be to buy them new clothes? How much more righteous would it be to treat them to the same food we eat? Money is also an important charitable transaction; it ensures that the needy buy what they require, that they keep a roof over their heads, and that they keep themselves and their loved ones warm. If we are wary of charities, there are many people we can help directly. And a good practice to keep our egos in check is not to tell another soul about our charitable efforts.

Are people intimidated by us? If so, does that fill us with pride?

These days, it is admirable to be considered intimidating. It denotes status. When we remember, as mentioned previously, that the worshippers of God are “those who walk upon the earth with humility” (Quran 25:63), all traces of arrogance will dissolve. It is a blessing when others feel comfortable around us. And what better compliment is there than someone telling us that we are kind or peaceful?

What are some negative character traits that we want to give up for the sake of God?

Answering this question takes a lot of courage. Many justifications will arise. Our ego will argue that we are only unforgiving because many people have hurt us, refusing to acknowledge that we may have hurt others in a similar manner. It will argue that we are angry because the world is filled with negativity, ignoring the negativity within us. Our acceptance of the ego’s defenses will only plunge us into denial and stall our spiritual evolution. But further introspection leads us to a more profound level: a level in which we acknowledge our negative traits, surrender them to God, and ask Him to replace them with virtuous character traits such as compassion, humility, generosity, and kindness. We are reminded in the Sikh sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, that it is the grace of God that enables us to recall Him and to carry His name in our heart.⁸ And when we remember God in our heart, we will naturally incline toward goodness.

When we think of someone who is annoying, do we recognize that person’s annoying trait(s) inside of us?

If we answer “yes” to this question, then, again, we ask God to replace the annoying trait(s) inside ourselves with better ones. Also, we ask God to remove any resentment we harbor toward the person in question and pray that they are forgiven. We also ask God’s forgiveness for harboring judgment toward such a person. We may repeat this with more than one person, depending on how many people annoy us. If many people annoy us, it is obvious that we need to address our intolerance and judgment of others.

Are there attachments we find difficult to give up?

In prostration, we ask God to remove our attachment to any addictions or bad habits, even if we are not ready to give them up. *Al Mujeeb* (The Answerer of prayers*) will answer our prayers and may even place elevated people in our lives to assist us. Some of us have learned to curb our desires, but we may still engage in *mocking others* (Quran 49:11) or *spying on or backbiting others* (Quran 49:12). In time, even these attachments will transform into words of kindness and trust.

Could we have handled a tense discussion with a loved one in a better manner? Were we too harsh?

Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, we lash out at family members or friends. It is essential that we apologize if we hurt someone, even if the other person instigates the argument. Sometimes, all it takes is to say: *I am sorry for the way I treated you. I had no right to say what I said. I ask God to make me gentler and to purify me.* There is no reason to justify the apology or tell the other person we reacted in such a way because they hurt us. If we still feel pain, even after the apology, we can ask *Al Basit* (He who expands*) to expand our heart and teach us how to love the person in question.

In the presence of the person, we can utter *Bismillah Al Rahman Al Raheem* (In the Name of God, *The Compassionate, The Merciful**) in order to remember to engage with them from a place of compassion and mercy.

We may have slipped up with our loved ones, over and over again in the past, but each present encounter becomes an opportunity for spiritual maturity. We resolve to be kind, or, at the very least, in the beginning of our journey, polite and civil.

Divine Supplications of the Heart for Stage One

Ya Wadood (Oh *Loving One*) You are the source of love. May our love for You come first in our lives, and may You teach us how to love.

Ya Raheem (Oh Merciful*), we ask for Your mercy as we surrender our ego to You. Guide us in how to be merciful.

Ya Hayy' (Oh Living*), we are dead without You. Bring us to life with knowledge of Your Reality.

Ya Ahad (Oh *Only*), we seek refuge in You from idolatry and worship of other than You. Let us recognize your oneness.

Ya Noor (Oh Light*), we are in darkness without you. Fill our hearts and minds and temples with light so that we shine as beacons of your Light wherever we are.

Stage Two: The Stage of *Al Nafs Al Lawwama* (The Self-Incriminating Ego)

“Our Lord, do not let our hearts deviate after You have guided us. Bestow upon us Your mercy. Surely You are [The Bestower*].”

(Quran 3:8)

The Self-Incriminating Ego

The self-incriminating ego is mentioned once in the Quran. Interestingly enough, it is mentioned in a Chapter titled *The Resurrection* or *The Ascension*. In this chapter, God *testifies to the self-incriminating ego* (Quran 75:2). And although the chapter mainly discusses the Day of Resurrection, the fact that the self-incriminating ego is referred to in this chapter is telling; it may be an indication of the self that is ascending and coming back to life. God knows; He is *Al Aleem* (The Omniscient*).

The stage of the self-incriminating ego is the transition phase between the realm of the lower self and the paradigm of the enlightened self. Though it is the second stage, it can be described as the inception of our spiritual awakening. In this stage, we begin to grasp that true freedom is not being given permission to indulge our desires but freedom *from* our desires, addictions, greed, vanity, lust, and arrogance. This is the essence of freedom: liberation from the prison of the senses.

In attachment, we chain ourselves to misery, but when we walk on the path of the Divine Reality, the shackles are removed.

When the self-incriminating ego has been resurrected, the inner struggle, known as *al jihad al nafs*, begins. The ascension of the ego is a crucial stage because we can either climb the spiritual ladder or fall back into the abyss of the lower self. The path is not linear.

In this stage, we may even experience what St. John of the Cross referred to as a dark night of the soul where we are plunged into a profound darkness in which we no longer experience pleasure in meditation or spirituality, but a form of bitterness.⁹

This is where most of us leave religion or the spiritual path altogether. Instead of waiting it out, we reject what we have learned and return to the ways of the world. A few of us remain, however; and a very fortunate few of us live to describe the experience of awakening to the Reality.

During the dark night of the soul, the wait for God's presence is unbearable to endure, yet waiting is a part of the journey, at least for some of us. It is a consolation to know that "God does not [give] a [self] ... more than it can bear" (Quran 2:286). If we were to keep close to the original text of Arabic as possible, this verse would be translated to: *God does not assign [anything to] the self without [a possibility for] its expansion* (Quran 2:286). This notion of expansion is essential to understanding the malleability of the ego. It reveals to us that at any moment, under any circumstance, we are given the ability to expand in consciousness. To draw even closer to the original meaning of the phrase, the Arabic word for expansion in the verse in question is *wus'iha* which is etymologically related to one of God's divine attributes—*Al Wasi'* (The Vast*). When God places us in a situation beyond

our comprehension, it is only because He knows that we can, through His guidance, become embraced by His vastness and expand far beyond the parameters of our limited understanding in order to navigate the challenging situation at hand. One of God's divine attributes is *Al Basit* (He who expands*). God is also *Al Qabid* (He who contracts*). So, on the path, as we contract and expand, we know that the Divine is working on us, through us, to guide us to attain realization of His glory.

As touched upon by the verse in question, God has designed the challenges we face in ways that are custom-built for each of our egos. Once aligned with the Divine, all falls—nay, rises—into place.

Fear and Awakening

A catalyst for awakening from the lower self is *taqwa*, or mindfulness of God. *Taqwa* is incomplete without fear of God. In the Holy Bible, it states: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...”¹⁰ And thus, we can say that fear is the first chapter of our love story with God.

In the Guru Granth Sahib, we are told that fear scurries away from us when we fear God.¹¹ This is because our attention is no longer attached to the ephemeral fear of worldly matters but to the realm of the otherworldly. Of course, this does not mean we never feel afraid; it means that the weight of the fear on our shoulders is no longer burdensome, for we are focused on the Almighty.

Fear is an aspect of our being. It is part of the human experience. We cannot run away from it, but when we redirect this charcoal energy of fear toward God, He—the eternal alchemist—transforms it into a diamond.

And as we fall in love with God, fear is alleviated.

The Voice of Blame Within

We seek to be true to our ‘self.’ But who is this self we seek to be true to? Is it the lower self? Is it the self-incriminating ego? Perhaps we can shift from being true to the self to being our true self. When we are in truth, we radiate truth. We feel joy and peace. In the stage of our lower self, we are unaware of how we affect ourselves and others. When we awaken to *al nafs al lawwama*, however, we begin to perpetuate feelings of guilt.

Sadly, we see feelings of guilt as enemies. To be sure, guilt indicates we are not embodying our natural state, but when we resist it, we turn away from the message it conveys. Are we disconnected from Source? Are we taking responsibility for our shadows? Have we hurt someone? What is God conveying to us through these feelings of guilt?

The more we attune to the guilt inside of us, the faster we awaken. Awakening is not a race, but nor is it something we should postpone, for we do not know how long we will reside on this planet. Each time guilt arises, let us investigate it right away, even if it takes time for it to disintegrate. As light is shed on guilt, we have the opportunity to let it go by not indulging in any action that fortifies it.

If we notice that we are becoming more and more blameless as time elapses, we have to remember to be grateful to God, to thank Him at all times. The ego will latch on to the spiritual identity. Also, if at any point we believe ourselves to be a guide to others, we can be certain our lower self is in charge. For our lower self, attached to the glory of being a doer, thrives on the praise of others. As a result, it separates itself from others in its false sense of superiority. Jesus reminds us that “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”¹² In the Quran, among God’s attributes are *Al Rafi’* (The Exalter*) and *Al Khafid* (The Abaser*).

When we get attached to ourselves as the doer, we suffer from a false sense of self and will be abased.

The notion of you and me–us versus them–fuels our ego. It stems from pride. This is what keeps religions, races, and genders separate: the notion that we exist separately from others when God *created [us] from one [self]* (Quran 4:1, 7:189). God calls us to be humble, to remember we are one community made up of many communities.

Apart from humility, the remembrance of death is essential. It places us in a spiritual state in which we recognize the transiency of life and reminds us that what we do will be accounted for in the next life.

Al Jihad Al Nafs: The Inner Struggle

As we strive, we face the anger, jealousy, lust, greed, and impatience inside of us. We shatter the idols of vanity, arrogance, doubt, and prejudice. Our ego and the devil will try to derail us but can only succeed when we refuse to acknowledge the Divine Reality and remain stubbornly attached to the illusion of our autonomy. With *Al Muhaymin* (The Protector) leading us, the inner struggle is facilitated. It is always God's grace.

When Prophet Muhammad fought in the Battle of Badr, God reminded him: *You did not throw when you threw, but God threw* (Quran 8:17). In Genesis 49:24 of the Old Testament, we are told that *the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong by God Almighty's hands*.¹³ God fights our battles. This is clear. All we have to do is become vessels of His truth.

The ego will put up a heroic fight. It wants to be autonomous. But our Creator tells us that *he succeeds who purifies [his ego] and he fails who corrupts it* (Quran 91:9-10). This is divine success. God also tells us in this chapter that *He created the self and inspired it with [the knowledge] of immorality and righteousness* (Quran 91:7-8). While the lower self is comfortable in its immorality, the self-incriminating ego becomes attuned to righteousness.

In *al jihad al nafs*, we surrender our desire for recognition or fame or popularity, or at least set an intention to do so. In this way, we will be of service to others only to be of service to our Creator. Upon awakening, neither praise nor humiliation faze us. We fulfill our duties and bask in the Divine.

Al jihad al nafs begins in our thoughts. And, thus, during this struggle, many negative thoughts may plague us. God knows the *whisperings of the self* (Quran 50:16) and He is "closer to [us] than [our] jugular vein" (Ibid). We have God as *Al Hafeedh* (*The One who protects/preserves*). It is also a consolation to know that negative thoughts only plague those of us who are in the stage of the self-incriminating ego. Otherwise, we would not be bothered by their presence. In addition, the awareness of negative thoughts indicates we have gone within. When we succumb to the dark thoughts, we succumb to darkness. When we align to *Al Noor* ([The] Light*), we ascend from darkness and enter the realm of light.

The One who knows us better than we know our very own selves is close though. We are not alone in the struggle of our inner self and the battle against the devil. God is with us. He is *Al Shaheed* (The Universal Witness*).

We are informed in the Noble Quran that "whether [we] disclose what is in [our] minds or keep it hidden ... God will call [us] to account for it" (Quran 2:284). Thus, each time we find ourselves back in the web of the ego, even if merely in the realm of our thoughts, let us remember to ask God for assistance and forgiveness. Our loving Creator states that:

“I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then, respond to Me...” (Quran 2:186)

Even while we struggle with ourselves day and night, night and day; even while the ego is shaken, our foundation remains unshaken because God is near. He responds and asks us to respond. Perhaps the deeper we go into understanding this wondrous notion of *mutual* responding, the more the meaning of this verse opens up to us.

In the meantime, as we tread along the path of awakening, self-awareness of our impurity is a sign that we are being guided and are ready to purify our egos.

It is a blessed gift from God that He allows us to discover our shadows. Gratitude makes *al jihad al nafs* worthwhile. God Himself is *Al Shakoor* (The Grateful*). When we are grateful to Him for all our experiences, good and bad, we are awakening. And then we will have faith when *God's promise will be fulfilled* (Quran 19:61; Quran 77:7). His promise that He will save us when we turn to Him manifests not just in the afterlife but even in this life. We find ourselves drawn to prayer, silence, meditation, helping others, pondering our existence, taking ourselves into account; and we begin to experience God's love for us and our love for God in a manner beyond the perception of the ego. When we reap the rewards of peace, joy, faith, and certainty, His promise not only rings true but becomes a sacred reality for us on earth, encouraging us to go deeper into ourselves and to establish a firmer connection with Him—the One.

Are We Awakening?

We know we are awakening when doubts begin to dissolve, when acts of worship are less burdensome, when we feel moments of peace stirring within us no matter what is arising in the world, when we begin to respond to insults with kindness, when our hearts come alive with love and compassion, albeit transiently, and when our minds experience momentary epiphanies of wisdom and understanding. These flickering instances of awakening are indications of what is to come.

Along the way, negative feelings and thoughts of resistance may surface, but we recognize them as reflections begging to be purged once and for all. We are not attached to negative thoughts or feelings. We know that God is guiding, purifying, and giving us certainty in faith.

We Are the Other

When we transform ourselves, we transform the lives of others, one by one. Many noble souls have walked the planet and changed the lives of others for the better because they faced their inner shadows. But, when we deny the presence of shadows within us, the darkness extends outward to our community.

Dictators, human traffickers, or loan sharks are simply manifestations of our shadows.

When we harm ourselves, we harm others. If we are angry with ourselves, we take our pain out on others. When we are in a negative state of mind, it makes others anxious, uncomfortable. We ruin an opportunity to connect when we are in a bad mood. But, when we feel peace, this permeates and touches the hearts of those around us.

We are the other.

A Divine Invitation to Unity

Throughout the Quran, God emphasizes that a messenger was sent to each community. We are *not to make a distinction between any messengers* (Quran 4:152). We are also informed that “[e]ach community has its own direction in which it turns” (Quran 2:148) and *God has not sent a messenger except that he spoke in the language of his people to make it clear for them* (Quran 14:4).

Here are some verses in the Noble Quran that invite us to respect other scriptures and to remind us that various messengers came to different peoples:

"We have revealed the Torah, in which there is guidance and light" (Quran 5:44).

"We [sent] Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, [confirming] what had been revealed before him in the Torah. We gave him the Gospel, which contained guidance and light..." (Quran 5:46).

"To every one of you We have ordained a law and a way..." (Quran 5:48).

"[D]o not revile those ... whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God ... out of ignorance (Quran 6:108).

"Every nation has a messenger. Once their messenger has come, [judgment] will be passed upon them in all fairness and they will not be wronged" (Quran 10:47).

"We raised among every people a messenger who enjoined, ‘Worship God alone and shun the evil one’" (Quran 16:36).

"We have created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes, so that you might come to know each other" (Quran 49:13).

"You have your [way] and I have mine" (Quran 109:6).

How is this relevant to the stage of *al nafs al lawwama*, one might ask? Well, part of spiritual awakening entails the realization that we are all brothers and sisters and we are to respect all paths. In fact, God’s message is so vast that He even says: “We have told you about some messengers sent previously, while We have not ... told you about others.” (Quran 4:164). And so even when not mentioned in our scriptures, messengers have been sent to all of us. It is the same message, though delivered in different languages and ways.

God’s message of oneness is not exclusive to one faith. We are told that:

“[Those of faith], the Jews, the Christians¹⁴, and the Sabaeans—all those [who have faith]¹⁵ in God and the Last Day and do good deeds—will be rewarded by their Lord; they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (Quran 2:62)

Though specific faiths are mentioned above, the phrase *all those [who have faith] in God* indicates the inclusion of those outside of the religions that are referred to in the verse. In fact, if we go further, we can conclude that it even points to those outside of religion altogether, for the stipulations are having faith in God and the Last Day and doing good

deeds. Our ego may ask why faith in God is necessary. This is because we resurrect our *fitra* only when we are aligned with the One, when we recognize God's reality. The resistance to having faith in God dissolves as His messages in holy verses are revealed to us. As a result, our certainty in God's presence manifests. And then, we no longer question, for the answers are clear. It takes time and practice. This is why we are told to remain *patient and mindful of God* (Quran 3:186).

At this stage, we begin to be drawn to souls who bring communities and peoples together. We expand our love to insects, nature, and animals. We reach out to minorities and provide them succor. And if we are of a minority, we behave responsibly and shine our light as divine ambassadors, knowing that when we represent our faith or communities in truth, people will no longer fear us.

When one faith suffers, we all suffer. Each is a holy tree in the shared rainforest of existence. When we cut down a sacred tree, we cut off our collective spiritual oxygen. Each of us holds a sacred responsibility as divine gardeners of our individual faiths to nourish and sustain the essence of our individual trees and protect the other trees.

We breathe in unison when we remember our connectedness. We no longer fight because we realize that the message from *Al Wahid* (The One) is one.

In this stage we realize that though our ways of reaching God differ, He is One God and we are one.

Surrender to the One

When we see Islam as a path of surrender to the One, we realize that the way is inclusive of all. The signature of God's Oneness is found in sacred texts and in blessed revelations across the lands. The gift of surrendering to the Only is ever here, now, inviting us in each moment to awaken. And so, Islam manifests in many ways for any self that chooses surrender. As Jeffrey Moses reminds us in his book, *Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions*:

“Even though different religions may appreciate various aspects of God, this cannot diminish the wholeness of the Divine—and should not be the source of divisions between us.

Instead, our universal belief that there is one God should strengthen our convictions that an ultimate existence pervades all boundaries of the universe, and that all people and all things are of one essence.”¹⁶

With God-realization, we collectively rise from form to formlessness, from the material to the ethereal, from flesh to spirit; we transcend imagination, images, statues, stones, idols, material objects, intercessors, and the association of partners with the divine. God-realization entails linking directly with *Al Ali'y* (The Sublime), even when our communities choose to do otherwise.

When we love God, we have no need for intercessors. We reach Him through His words and His path. This is what it means to love God: We place His guidance above all. And though we may have teachers and guides along the way, our love for God ensures that we venerate Him alone.

In whatever way we reach God, there is no path to Him without love. Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani states: Knowing God, loving Him and being close to him must be in our hearts.¹⁷ And so, to love God, we worship Him from the temple of a heart that is cleansed, purified, and surrendered completely to Him alone.

Here is an enlightening prayer by Ibn Arabi:

“O my God, You are the One who encompasses what is unseen by every seer, and the One who occupies and holds sway over the interior of every exterior. I ask of You by the light of Your Face, before which all foreheads prostrate ... that You guide me on Your private path, turning my face to You away from whatever is other than You.”¹⁸

Why Diversity?

“[H]ad God so willed, He would have made [us one] community” (Quran 5:48) but He chose to *test [us] by what we were given* (Ibid). Furthermore, in the same verse, God tells us to *stay ahead of one another in terms of good works* (Ibid) and that “to God [we] shall all return; then He will make clear to [us] about what [we] have been disputing” (Ibid).

This is a revealing verse. The reason for our diversity is to race toward goodness. Instead of racing to perform good deeds, however, we race toward competing and exploiting one another. This is why there is so much turmoil in the world.

As we awaken, though, we race toward good and are good to all races, all nationalities, followers of all religions, and those who follow no religion. We embrace diversity as part of the divine dance. We love those who are hated, include those who are excluded, make peace with those upon whom war is declared and befriend our enemies. We kiss those of other sects and faiths and join hands with the ostracized. We did not come all the way to earth to love only ourselves or those who are similar to us.

Love is everywhere when we embrace the glory of *Al Wasi'* (The Vast*). The moment, however, we see another as ‘an’ ‘other,’ we define them according to our limited sense of self which is not aligned to the vastness of the divine.

What a blessing it is to have a heart that roots for everyone, a heart that prays for all, a heart that has experienced and has faith in God’s love and, as a result, lives only from that spectrum.

As Rabbi David Rosen points out:

“It should be obvious to us ... that if God relates to all of us - His Creatures - in all our diversity ... there must be diverse ways of relating to Him. The idea that any one Tradition can totally encapsulate the Divine is ridiculous. Indeed it is a heresy, as it seeks to limit the unlimited Omnipresent Divine. God is more than any one religion! When we understand this very basic and ... obvious truth, we will not allow exclusivism to limit our conduct and comprehension. Exclusivism is often a reaction to persecution and disparagement (we know the proximity of a “superiority complex” to an “inferiority complex”.) However, ultimately exclusivism is a reflection of a deficiency of imagination and love.”¹⁹

And Reverend Steven Greenebaum tells us that “[w]hat we need to give up are the arrogant, unreasonable assumptions that 1) God has only one voice, 2) that one voice is knowable and 3) we alone know what it is.”²⁰

When our vessels overflow with love, oneness is all we see, all that we experience.

We Belong to the One

We do not belong to our governments. Our parents and guardians are merely custodians. We do not belong to them. They do not belong to us. Our friends do not belong to us. Our belongings are not ours but gifts from God. Everything is God's. "We belong to God and to Him we shall return" (Quran 2:156).

The peace that arises when we acknowledge God's sovereignty over us enables us to inhabit higher realms even within the density of earth's matrix. Dadi Janki tells us that when God witnesses our faith in Him, He increases it, and we begin to realize He is responsible for us.²¹ When we know God is in charge, we forgo the idea that we are the ones that make something happen.

The ego struggles with possessiveness. It thrives on a sense of ownership. And yet, inside of us is a higher self—the self which is at peace—that basks in *Malik Al Mulk* (The King of Absolute Sovereignty*).

In the divine realm, we let go of the feeling that people and things and ideas belong to us and we inch closer to connecting with the part of us that is ever connected, ever surrendered to God.

Does Evil Exist?

Evil is mentioned in all scriptures. The epitome of evil is the devil. In the Noble Quran, God states that the devil “has no power over those who [have faith] and [depend upon] their Lord” (Quran 16:99) and that *the devil’s strategies are weak* (Quran 4:76). Thus, when we acknowledge the Divine Reality, we have nothing to worry about when it comes to the notion of evil. Those of faith “seek refuge in the Lord of people ... from the mischief of [the] ... whisperer, who whispers into the [breasts] of people” (Quran 114:1,4,5).

In the Noble Quran, we are reminded that *good comes from God, evil from ourselves* (Quran 4:79). Undoubtedly, divine retribution is attributed to God, but we bring it onto ourselves by aligning ourselves with transient illusions that harm us and others.

We bring the concept of pain and evil and suffering to the world, and we punish ourselves when we exploit others, when we deprive the needy of food and basic necessities. We bring evil to the world when we abandon our children or shun the elderly. Evil exists, yes, but we rise above it when we are connected to *Al Mutakabbir* (The Supreme).

Many people may not grasp how God is merciful yet takes into account what we do. How can God be good, yet punish? For those of us on a spiritual path, God’s wisdom surpasses the domain of the ego, and we know that even punishment is a blessing if we learn from it.

Whatever happens to us—“good” or “bad”—invites us to awaken. Divine retribution could be a reminder of the harm we caused to others. Or it may be a reminder to make amends. We avoid the raging fire of hell when we are inclined to the gardens of joy, generosity, love, wisdom, and peace. In any given moment, we choose heaven or hell in this life and in the afterlife by where our inclinations lie.

Lovers of God adore His commandments and ways. Lovers of God welcome anything from Him. When we love God, we know that “God does not wrong [us] at all, but [we] wrong [our]selves” (Quran 10:44).

This is why scriptures invite us to morality and goodness. God is good and invites to goodness. His Kingdom is holy and reserved for those who bask in *Al Quddoos* (The Holy*).

Social Activism

On the path, there are many schools of thought when it comes to activism. Some say we are not to interfere with the ways of the world: *It is perfect as it is*. Others say that we are responsible for each other. Our scriptures invite us to help the needy. And in the stage of *al nafs al lawwama*, we cannot help but help others. When someone asks for our assistance, we know it is an opportunity to awaken love in ourselves. Regardless of where we stand, perhaps we can all agree that there is always something we can do to manifest peace and harmony.

Rahim Snow says:

“God is always calling you to be His helper. You are not here to save anyone. You are not here to fix the world. You are here to bless the world, listen to the world, hold hands with the world, build homes for the world, plant seeds for the world, cook food for the world, sew clothes for the world, speak up for the world, write new stories for the world, and make good art for the world. And in that holy space that you hold open, people can more easily receive the blessing and healing that God is always pouring on them. You save no one. You fix nothing. You simply become a helpful reminder. Then people remember and return to the truth of who they really are.”²²

Snow manages to seamlessly blend both schools of thought: the passive and the active. In such a way, we admit we do not save anyone, but still build homes, plant seeds, cook food, and sew for others. Thus, we change the world and, in turn, become true versions of ourselves. Most importantly, we know that we act from God’s power and His doing. Fixing the world is God’s domain, not ours.

Where Is the Darkness?

When we turn inward and listen to our thoughts, we may be surprised. All the blame we placed on the outside world is inside of us. We blame society, governments, our friends, our parents, or our colleagues—everyone but ourselves. We are quick to notice anger in others, remaining oblivious to our own short fuse. But in this stage, we listen. We may shrink from the darkness, but we go back into it and listen some more. Then we find ourselves listening to our thoughts even while engaging in conversation with others. We learn to restrain ourselves from disagreeing with others. Instead of proving ourselves right, we agree to disagree.

We are more at peace with being proved wrong. Something is shifting. We let go of our desire to control situations.

The Esoteric Essence of Acts of Worship

Some people find the notion of prayer tedious. And it is exactly for this reason that we must exert ourselves to set aside time to pray. The lower self gives way to the higher self in the domain of self-discipline. The more we adhere to prayer, the closer we come to unveiling the layers within us that eclipse us from our essence and from the Divine Reality.

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani states that the temple of this act of worship is the heart,²³ and there is no sense of completion if outer worship is not united with the inner worship of the heart.²⁴ Thus, prayer opens our heart to God. If it is aligned, worldly desires and distractions dissolve and prostration in prayer becomes an act of surrender. By placing our foreheads on the ground, we surrender our thoughts and our pride.

As the ego dissolves, prayer is no longer a prescribed rite but a sacred meeting with the Divine which we anticipate throughout the day. Paramahansa Yogananda describes the importance of seeking God for the right reasons:

“If you pray until the ether churns with the light of your prayer, then you will find God. But if while you are praying for God to come, you are thinking of something else—that is, wanting God because you want something from Him—you won’t find Him. Your purpose of seeking God must be straight, and your efforts intensified by the sense of necessity for God that you awaken in yourself.”²⁵

As for fasting, it is a way to engage in self-discipline, a symbolic act of worship in which we give up desires to our Creator. Fasting has been prescribed in various scriptures. It is a form of self-discipline because it weakens the ego’s hold on us, disciplines the body, and facilitates the surrender of the self to God.

Giving to charity can also be considered an act of worship, and it is considered a virtue in all faith communities. First, we must acknowledge that *the self contains stinginess* (Quran 4:128). Instead of resisting this aspect of ourselves or denying it, we welcome it gently into our awareness and give to others despite the prodding of the lower self to keep what we have to ourselves. In Islam, the obligatory charity is known as *zakat* and, interestingly enough, is etymologically derived from the stem of the word for “purity” in Arabic. For, whatever our religion, *zakat* purifies us of our miserliness.

When we take care of the needy, we become an extended family in our community. God is *Al Kareem* (The Generous*). As willing vessels, we are ever ready to share His generosity to us with others. *Sadaqah*, or voluntary charity, is given throughout the year. Thus, charity becomes an ongoing act of sharing with others and distributing our wealth.

As for pilgrimage, it is a way to prepare us for our return Home. We begin to ascend when we set out from the comfort of our transient homes and walk toward the unknown. Pilgrimage is tiring, but when it is over, we are recharged, replenished, renewed and, if

touched by God's grace, ready to return to the material world with a higher sense of purpose and an ascended self.

In the beginning of the journey, we need these acts of worship. As we progress, however, we still pray, but are in a constant state of prayer. We also give to charity willingly, not out of a sense of obligation or a feeling of duress, but because our hearts are unlocked of the need to keep what we earn to ourselves.

And, in each moment, we are in a pilgrimage toward God, whether walking to the supermarket or running errands, for we have found that the holy site we gravitate toward has always been inside our hearts.

In the Direction of Higher Love

The signpost of this second stage is an aspiration for harmony, unity, joy, love, and peace—both in the world and within our very selves—even while we cannot attain such states on a constant basis as of yet. This stage is not for the lighthearted or for those with a victim mentality. We are neither slaves of the past nor the future, nor of the present moment, for that matter. We accept God’s decree, *qadr*, rather than resist it. Somehow, we fall in love with it all. We begin to understand even while knowing we will never be able to grasp divine understanding. We rise and rise as our love rises and rises.

Higher love is where *Al Wadood (The Loving One)* is. It is a paradigm where there is neither a “you” nor a “me”. It is a love that is selfless—literally without a self—and ever occupied with and dissolved in God.

What is the direction? There is no direction. It is everywhere. Higher love is everywhere for *wherever you turn, then there is God’s face* (Quran 2:115). In this divine omnipresence, we are ever embraced by *Al Ahad (The Only)*.

To take a step toward Him, we begin with taking that first step inside ourselves.

Remedies in our Scriptures

When we read our sacred scriptures, let us read them humbly, with open hearts and minds. When we have doubts, let us give them to God to transform into *yaqeen*, or certainty. When something is unclear, instead of rejecting our faith, let us ask for clarification from *Al Hakeem* (The Wise*).

As Karen Armstrong states in *The Spiral Staircase*:

“Theology is ... a species of poetry, which read quickly or encountered in a hubbub of noise makes no sense. You have to open yourself to a poem with a quiet, receptive mind, in the same way as you might listen to a difficult piece of music. It is no good trying to listen to a late Beethoven quartet or read a sonnet by Rilke at a party. You have to give it your full attention, wait patiently upon it, and make an empty space for it in your mind. And finally the work declares itself to you, steals deeply into the interstices of your being, line by line, note by note, phrase by phrase, until it becomes part of you forever. Like the words of a poem, a religious ... doctrine points beyond itself to truths that are elusive, that resist words and conceptualization. If you seize upon a poem and try to extort its meaning before you are ready, it remains opaque. If you bring your own personal agenda to bear upon it, the poem will close upon itself like a clam, because you have denied its unique and separate identity, its own inviolable holiness.”²⁶

In the Tao Te Ching, we are told that words that are faithful are often not pleasant.²⁷ This is why we reject scripture. We do not want the truth. Scriptural wisdom is faithful to us because it is from God; and Our Creator does not assuage our egos or flatter us. He tells it as it is. God does not want or need anything from us, but He invites us to salvation through His words.

We have to be patient when it comes to imbibing spiritual texts, for *God is with those who are patient* (Quran 2:153).

The Ninety-Nine Names/Attributes of the One

Call upon God or call upon [The Compassionate]—by whichever [name] you call [upon], He has the beautiful names (Quran 17:110).

God is One and He has many attributes. Each attribute can be repeated as a mantra or in accordance with any given situation. For example, when a thought makes us anxious, we acknowledge the presence of *Al Salam* (The Source of Peace) and meditate upon this divine attribute. When we harbor a grudge toward someone, we align to *Al Ghafoor* (The Forgiving) and opt for forgiveness. When doors close, we recall that God is *Al Fattah* (The Opener*). He finds ways for us where there are none. When we are unkind, the name *Al Rauf*, (The One who is kind) will remind us of God's kindness toward His creation and encourage us to be kind to others.

When we are persecuted, we remember God is also *Al Haseeb* (The Reckoner*), and He brings sacred recalibration to all occurrences.

What arises when we meditate upon each attribute? Which names trigger our ego? And which names are we drawn to? By investigating our feelings toward the attributes, we can reflect on who we perceive ourselves to be, where we are on our journey, what qualities are lacking in us, and most importantly, our relationship with God.

Allahu la ilaha illa Huwa (God: There is no God but He):

1 *Al Rahman* (The Compassionate)

2 *Al Raheem* (The Merciful*)

3 *Al Malik* (The King*)

4 *Al Quddoos* (The Holy*)

5 *Al Salam* (The Source of Peace)

6 *Al Mu'min* (The Faithful*)

7 *Al Muhaymin* (The Protector)

8 *Al Aziz* (The Mighty)

9 *Al Jabbar* (The Compeller*)

- 10 *Al Mutakabbir* (The Supreme)
- 11 *Al Khaliq* (The Creator*)
- 12 *Al Bari'* (The Producer*)
- 13 *Al Musawwir* (The Fashioner*)
- 14 *Al Ghaffar* (He who is full of forgiveness*)
- 15 *Al Qahhar* (The Dominator*)
- 16 *Al Wahhab* (The Bestower*)
- 17 *Al Razzaq* (The Provider*)
- 18 *Al Fattah* (The Opener*)
- 19 *Al Aleem* (The Omniscient*)
- 20 *Al Qabid* (He who contracts*)
- 21 *Al Basit* (He who expands*)
- 22 *Al Khafid* (The Abaser*)
- 23 *Al Rafi'* (The Exalter*)
- 24 *Al Mu'izz* (*The One who honors*)
- 25 *Al Mudhill* (He who humbles*)
- 26 *Al Samee'* (The All-Hearing*)
- 27 *Al Baseer* (The All-Seeing*)
- 28 *Al Hakam* (*The Judge*)
- 29 *Al 'Adl* (The Just*)
- 30 *Al Lateef* (The Subtle)
- 31 *Al Khabeer* (*The Aware*)
- 32 *Al Haleem* (The Forbearing)

- 33 *Al Adheem* (The Almighty One)
- 34 *Al Ghafoor* (The Forgiving)
- 35 *Al Shakoora* (The Grateful*)
- 36 *Al Ali'y* (The Sublime)
- 37 *Al Kabeer* (The Great*)
- 38 *Al Hafeedh* (The One who protects/preserves)
- 39 *Al Muqeet* (The Nourisher*)
- 40 *Al Haseeb* (The Reckoner*)
- 41 *Al Jaleel* (The Majestic*)
- 42 *Al Kareem* (The Generous*)
- 43 *Al Raqeeb* (The Observer)
- 44 *Al Mujeeb* (The Answerer of prayers*)
- 45 *Al Wasi'* (The Vast*)
- 46 *Al Hakeem* (The Wise*)
- 47 *Al Wadood* (The Loving One)
- 48 *Al Majeed* (The Glorious)
- 49 *Al Ba'ith* (The Raiser of the dead*)
- 50 *Al Shaheed* (The Universal Witness*)
- 51 *Al Haqq* (The Truth*)
- 52 *Al Wakeel* (The Guardian*; *The One who all rely upon*)
- 53 *Al Qawi* (The Strong*)
- 54 *Al Mateen* (The Firm*)
- 55 *Al Wali'y* (The Patron*; *The Friend*)

- 56 *Al Hameed* (The Praised*)
- 57 *Al Muhsi* (The Knower of Each Separate Thing*; *The One who takes all into account*)
- 58 *Al Mubdi* (The Cause*)
- 59 *Al Mu'eed* (The Restorer*/*The One who repeats*)
- 60 *Al Muhyi* (The Life-Giver*)
- 61 *Al Mumeet* (*The One who causes death*)
- 62 *Al Hayy* (The Living*)
- 63 *Al Qayoom* (The Self-Existing*)
- 64 *Al Wajid* (The Resourceful*)
- 65 *Al Majid* (The Magnificent*)
- 66 *Al Wahid* (The One)
- 67 *Al Ahad* (*The Only*)
- 68 *Al Samad* (The Eternal*)
- 69 *Al Qadir* (The All-Powerful*; *The One who is able*)
- 70 *Al Muqtadir* (The All-Determiner*)
- 71 *Al Muqaddim* (*The One who advances*)
- 72 *Al Muakhir* (*The One who postpones*)
- 73 *Al Awwal* (The First*)
- 74 *Al Akhir* (The Last*)
- 75 *Al Dhahir* (The Manifest*)
- 76 *Al Batin* (The Hidden*)
- 77 *Al Wali* (The Ruler*)
- 78 *Al Muta'ali* (The Exalted*)

- 79 *Al Barr* (The Doer of Good*)
- 80 *Al Tawwab* (The Ever-Relenting*; *The One who accepts repentance*)
- 81 *Al Muntaqim* (The Avenger*; The One who calibrates)
- 82 *Al Afuw* (The Effacer of Sins*; *The Extreme Pardonner*)
- 83 *Al Rauf* (*The One who is kind*)
- 84 *Malik Al Mulk* (The King of Absolute Sovereignty*)
- 85 *Dhul-Jalal Wal-Ikram* (The Lord of Majesty and Generosity*)
- 86 *Al Muqsit* (The Equitable*)
- 87 *Al Jami'* (The Uniter*)
- 88 *Al Ghani* (The Rich*)
- 89 *Al Mughni* (The Enricher*)
- 90 *Al Mani'* (*The One who prevents*)
- 91 *Al Dharr* (*The One who causes distress*)
- 92 *Al Nafi'* (He who benefits*)
- 93 *Al Noor* ([The] Light*)
- 94 *Al Hadi* (The Guide*)
- 95 *Al Badee'* (The Absolute Cause*)
- 96 *Al Baqi* (The Everlasting*)
- 97 *Al Warith* (The Inheritor*)
- 98 *Al Rasheed* (The Right in Guidance*)
- 99 *Al Saboor* (*The Patient One*)

There are those who “remember God while standing, sitting, and [lying] on their sides, and who ponder over the creation of the heavens and earth” (Quran 3:191), and God refers to them as *people of higher understanding* (Quran 3:190). May we be of those who have attained understanding and are in constant remembrance of our Lord.

Guidance and Striving

If God guides according to His will (Quran 28:56), why make an effort? The answer is that God guides to His ways those who strive for Him (Quran 29:69).

There is no transformation without striving. Our loving “God does not change the condition of a [people]... [until] they change what is in [themselves]” (Quran 13:11).

This invitation to investigate appears over and over again throughout our journey back Home. What lies within us? In which direction are we facing? What is calling to be transformed?

In the Noble Quran, we are told that “God has not placed two hearts in any man’s [depth]” (Quran 33:4). Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani clarifies this verse by stating that love for God and others cannot merge within one heart.²⁸ Al-Jilani also states:

“A heart that loves both the Creator and creation is unsound. A heart that contains both this world and the Hereafter is also unsound. If the heart belongs to the Creator and the face is turned towards creation, this is permissible. It is permitted to direct one’s attention towards creation in order to look after their best interests, out of compassion for them.”²⁹

The One does not coerce us. He waits patiently for us to realize that He is the Only, the One we have been seeking. And in our heart, we remove all that is other than *Al Haqq* (The Truth*).

The Invitation

As we work on self-purification, we also follow God's instruction to *invite to what is good and put an end to what is denied to us* (Quran 9:71) and to “[c]all to the way of [our] Lord with wisdom and [good teaching]” (Quran 16:125). This is about inviting others to attune to divine frequencies, not proselytizing or trying to convert others. We walk our respective faiths yet recognize the truth of other ways. We invite others to the ways of the Divine, knowing that our Creator accepts all efforts to reach closer to Him alone. And we recognize the One as the highest form of Love in the planes of existence and non-existence.

We invite each other to pray, to meditate, to sit in silence, to sing of God's glory and oneness and to rejoice as we create sacred and inclusive communities.

Forgiveness on the Path of Awakening

Let us “[r]epel [wrongdoing] with what is better; then [we] will see that one who was once [our] enemy has become [as a dear] friend” (Quran 41:34).

We are promised “a [p]aradise as vast as the heavens and earth, which has been prepared for ... those who ... restrain their anger and are forgiving” (Quran 3:133-134), for “whoever is patient and forgiving, acts with great ... resolution” (Quran 42:43). And in the Holy Bible we are told that when we forgive, we are forgiven.³⁰

Being patient and forgiving means grudges cannot stick to us for there are no longer the cobwebs of disdain and contempt inside of us. We can think of a person who angers us as a gift from God to shatter our ego. The person we are angry toward is here to teach us the essence of forgiveness, and one day this person will be buried in a cemetery. Their soul will return to our Creator and, chances are, we may be the ones crying the hardest when they leave the planet.

In solitude and silence, we can begin to investigate what triggers us when we are around others. Why is our attention toward others and not toward Source? Why are we focused on objects rather than the Subject? These answers come to us when we are silent. When we step away from our busy lives and social encounters, we begin to understand the core of our being beneath the labels and thoughts, beyond who we perceive ourselves to be.

As we awaken, we find solitude appealing. Yet, it is essential that our intention to be alone stems from a calling to awaken. On the spiritual journey, as Ibn Arabi informs us, seclusion is established for noble reasons:

“The people of seclusion have three motives: a) the fear of the evil of other people affecting oneself; b) the fear of one’s own evil affecting others – this is the higher [perception] than the first, as in the first case one thinks badly of others, while in the second one thinks badly of oneself, and thinking badly of oneself is better since you are more knowledgeable of yourself; c) the preference for the company of the Master of the Sublime Assembly – the most elevated of men is the one who parts from himself out of preference for the company of his Lord.”³¹

Seclusion is essential on the path toward God. It helps us detach from our obsessions toward other people and keeps us centered on our Creator. This does not mean we neglect our duties to our families and communities; it simply means we carve out time to spend alone with the One. Then, we remain in that sacred space wherever we go, wherever we are, secluded or not.

The Surrender of “I”

In the Bhagavad Gita, we are told that “by performing action without attachment man reaches the Supreme.”³²

And attachment comes when we cling to the notion of I: *I am good; I am successful; I, I, I.*

Let us seek refuge in God from the word ‘I’, from our attachment to ‘I’ and from all aspects of our ego that refer to itself as I.

Stage Two: Pause and Ponder

Here are some questions for the second stage of our spiritual awakening. In this stage, let us retrieve the answers within ourselves. Let us observe which voice arises.

Which voice is more powerful: the voice of the lower self or the self-incriminating ego?

Why is it difficult to awaken?

Is prayer burdensome or joyful?

When was the last time that we gave to charity or assisted someone financially?

Are we doing enough to bring the community closer together?

Do we have spiritual pride in us?

Are we possessive of our spouse, friends, family members, or ideas?

Do we feel a sense of entitlement or privilege?

How often do we speak of our good deeds to others? And why?

In every moment, we invite God to guide us toward the answers to our questions and toward God-realization and the realization of the self.

Divine Supplications of the Heart for Stage Two

Ya Fattah (Oh Opener*), may You open our hearts and our minds to the truth.

Ya Mutakabbir (Oh Supreme), may Your love reign supreme in our core. May we recognize Your sovereignty above all, and may we fulfill our covenant to You.

Ya Mughni (Oh Enricher*), may You enrich our hearts with love for You so that we can enrich our communities and the world without any desire for praise or recognition.

Ya Haqq (Oh Truth*), may You reveal to us Your Truth and make us ever aware of Your Reality.

Ya Baseer (Oh All-Seeing*), may You give us the sight and insight to live through Your vision of paradise and peace.

Stage Three: The Stage of *Al Nafs Al Mutma'inna* (The Self Which Is At Peace)

“O our Lord, in You we have placed our trust and to You we turn in repentance and to You is the final return.”

(Quran 60:4).

The Garden of God

The final stage of the self is the one we aspire to most: the stage of *al nafs al mutma'inna*: the self which is at peace, the self that is content, the self that returns to our Lord. In the previous stages, we were able to interchange the word “self” with the word “ego,” but in this stage, the term “ego” no longer applies. The ego has dissolved.

Upon attainment of this lofty station, God Himself addresses the awakened self, saying:

“O [self] at peace:
return to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing.
Join My [worshippers].
Enter My Paradise.”

(Quran 89:27-30)

This stage does not just entail being at peace with what we perceive as ‘good’ but to be at peace with everything. In Arabic, there is a saying: *God: no objections*. And so, we welcome everything from our Creator and are content with our lot, be it wealth or poverty, sickness or health, rejection or acceptance, peace or war. In this stage, even as the world crumbles around us, we are stable, unfazed, and secure.

In the Tao Te Ching, we are told that “to know extreme contentment is simply to be content.”³³ And *al nafs al mutma'inna* is the self that is content, simply content.

To reach this stage is to say yes to the sacred and blessed guidance of *Al Wadood* (The Loving One) and to be at peace with the divine decree.

And so, let us say it together: Yes, *Ya Wadood (Oh Loving One)*. Yes.

About the Author

Nejoud Al-Yagout, a writer based in Kuwait, is the founder of The Interheart Initiative. She recognizes God's oneness in various scriptures and invites people of all sacred faiths to unite as divine ambassadors of peace and harmony. Though Nejoud walks the path of Islam, she waltzes with the wisdom of many paths. In terms of the walk with her own faith, she explains it in a poem:

*Not this way
Not that way
Neither that, nor this*

*But one who surrenders
to the Only Who Is*

*Al Ahad, Al Wahid,
The Only, the One*

*For the 'one' who surrenders
to the One becomes none*

You can learn more about The Interheart Initiative on the website:
<https://www.theinterheartinitiative.com>

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¹² *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, New Testament, Matthew 23:12, Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England. Published 1611, updated 2016, iBooks ed., 3837.

¹³ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Old Testament Genesis 49:24, Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England. Published 1611, updated 2016, 227, iBooks ed., 228.

¹⁴ A few scholars and translators argue that the Quran refers specifically to the early Nazarene sect of Christianity—hence the Arabic word *Nasara* in the Arabic text of the Quran, which they claim is derived from Nazarenes. The majority of scholars and translators, however, claim that the term *Nasara* in the Quran refers to Christians as a whole. There are scholars who look closely at the word *nasara* itself, which means ‘helpers’ in Arabic, and who have reached the conclusion that the word refers to the followers of Jesus who helped—and may encompass those who continue to help—him. Therefore, the translation to the word Christians serves as a broader term to encompass all followers of Jesus regardless of sects. As to the exact meaning in the Quran, God knows best.

¹⁵ Although the phrase *alatheena amanu* in the verse is usually translated in English to *those who believe*, and one might argue rightfully so, upon closer inspection, we find that *alatheena amanu* literally refers to those who have faith, *iman*, in God, or those who place their trust, *amana*, in God since the words *amanu* (*verb*), *iman* (*noun*), and *amana* (*noun*) all stem from the same root. These are semantic arguments, and if we equate faith with belief, then any translation suffices; but for those of us who find belief and faith to encompass two meanings, this point may come in handy.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Moses. *Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions*. Chapter 4: There is One God. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002). An imprint of The Random Publishing Group. Kobo ed., 1.

¹⁷ Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *Sublime Gems*, (Zahra Publications, 2005), iBooks, 32.

¹⁸ Translated by Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirstenstein. *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī The Seven Days of the Heart: Prayers for the Nights and Days of the Week*. (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2000), iBooks, 54.

¹⁹ This excerpt is from an as yet unpublished interview with Rabbi David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's International Director for Interreligious Affairs, for an upcoming book by The Interheart Initiative featuring a collection of interviews with interfaith activists and global spiritual leaders.

²⁰ Reverend Steven Greenebaum. *The Interfaith Alternative: Embracing Spiritual Diversity*. (New Society Publishers, 2012), iBooks, 58.

²¹ Dadi Janki. *Companion of God: Wisdom from one of the world's great spiritual leaders*. (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House 2010), 132.

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- ²² Rahim Snow, *Remember Who You Are: 28 Spiritual Verses from the Holy Quran* (Remembrance Studio, 2017), 199-200.
- ²³ Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *Sublime Gems*, (Zahra Publications, 2005), iBooks, 140.
- ²⁴ Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *Sublime Gems*, (Zahra Publications), iBooks, 2005, 141.
- ²⁵ Paramahansa Yogananda *Journey to Self-Realization: Collected Talks on Realizing God in Daily Life*, (Los Angeles, CA: Self-Realization Fellowship), 1997, iBooks, 133.
- ²⁶ Karen Armstrong. *The Spiral Staircase*. (New York: Knopf Double Day Publishing Group), iBooks, 2004, 409.
- ²⁷ Translated by Dwight Goddard. Section 81. *Tao Te Ching*. (Compromise Press Inc., 1919), iBooks, 147.
- ²⁸ Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *Sublime Gems*, (Zahra Publications), 2005. iBooks, 67.
- ²⁹ Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Al-Jilani, *Sublime Gems*, (Zahra Publications), 2005. iBooks, 319, 320.
- ³⁰ The Holy Bible, King James Version, New Testament, Luke 6:37, Public Domain. English translation authorized by the Church of England. Published 1611, updated 2016, iBooks ed., 3895.
- ³¹ Translated by Stephen Hirstenstein, *Mystical Treatises of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī*. Chapter: Seclusion. Four Pillars of Spiritual Transformation. (Oxford: Anqa Publishing in association with Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society), ebook, 2008, 8.
- ³² Swami Sivananda, *Bhagavad Gita*, 111:19, Public Domain, (Uttar Pradesh, India: Divine Life Society), <https://holybooks.com>, 33.
- ³³ Translated by Dwight Goddard. Section 46. *Tao Te Ching*. (Compromise Press Inc., 1919), iBooks, 85, 86.