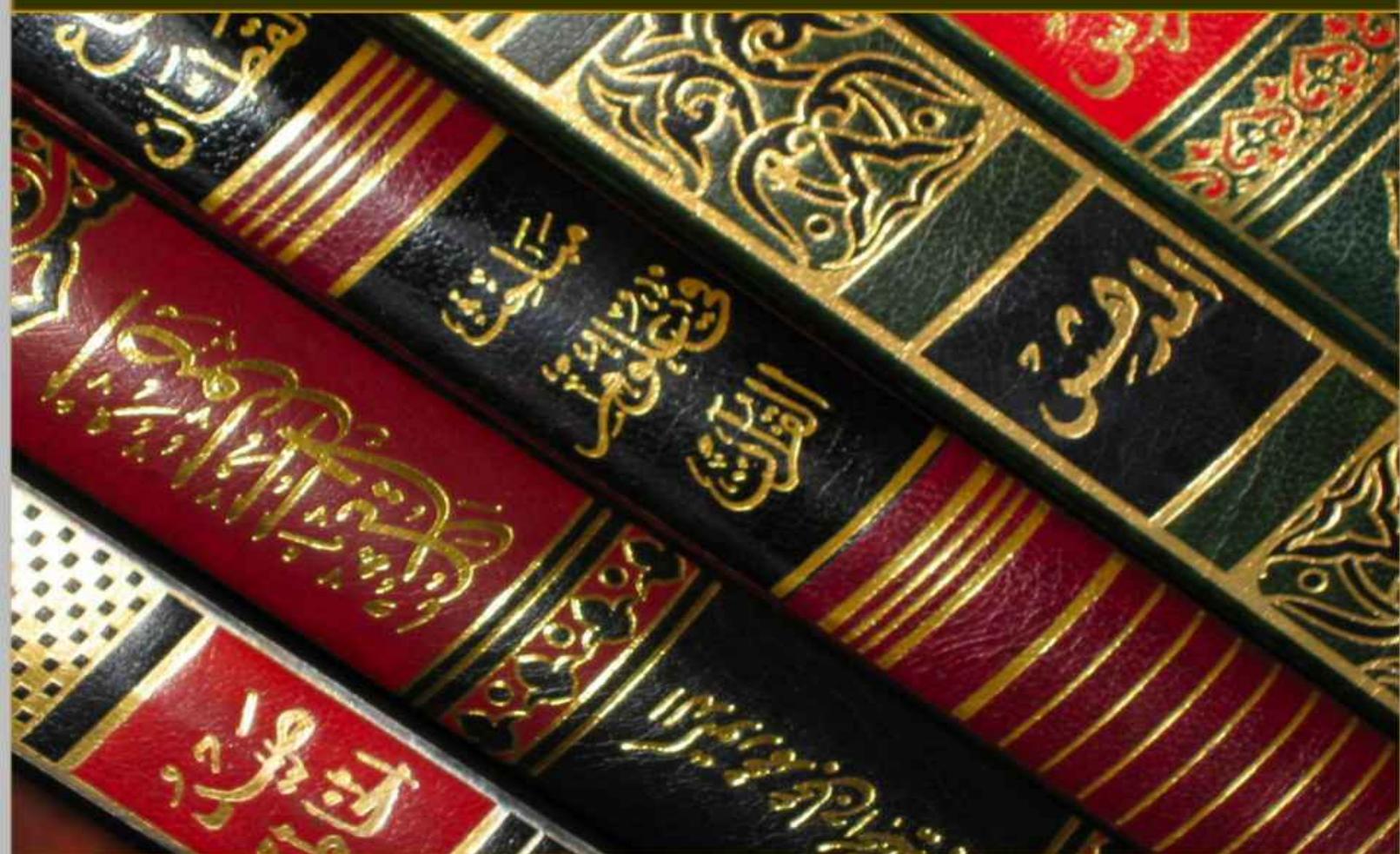


AL- GHAZĀLĪ



LETTER TO A DISCIPLE

An easy to read translation of
Ayyuha'l-Walad

Letter to a Disciple

An easy to read translation of Ayyuha'l-Walad

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-
Ghazālī

Nuh Smith

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Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Al-Ghazaali's Response](#)

[Knowledge and Action](#)

[Seeking Paradise](#)

[The Late Hours of the Night](#)

[Worship and Obedience](#)

[Understanding Haal \(Theopathy\)](#)

[Obligations Upon the Seeker](#)

[The Chosen Hadith](#)

[Benefits of having Sacred Knowledge](#)

[Requirements for Treading the Spiritual Path](#)

[Points of Advice](#)

[Du'aas to Recite](#)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praises are due unto Allah, the Rabb of the universe. The ultimate success is for the god-fearing. Salutations and Peace be upon our Nabi, Muhammad and upon all his followers.

Introduction

Many centuries ago there was a student who spent undivided time in the company of Hujjatul Islam (proof of Islam), Abu Haamid Bin Muhammad Al-Ghazaali (may Allah have mercy on him) and who engrossed himself in studying and acquiring Ilm (knowledge) until he qualified in intricate branches of knowledge and became competent in the sphere of spiritual-upliftment (i.e. self-reformation). One day, in a moment of introspection he thought to himself:

“I have studied many branches of knowledge, spending the prime of my life learning and retaining these academic sciences. Now the time has dawned for me to understand what will be of benefit to me the morrow and keep me company in the qabr (grave), and what knowledge will not benefit me, so that I may discard it, just as Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: ‘O Allah! I seek your protection from such knowledge which is of no benefit.’ ”

The thought persisted in his mind inducing him to write to Shaykh Muhammad Al-Ghazaali (may Allah have mercy on him) a request, asking certain questions and seeking advice and du’aa. He thus wrote: “Although Shaykh’s compilations, like Al-Ihya, etc., contain answers to my questions, however, my desire is for Shaykh to respond to my need in a few pages which I may keep for my entire life and practise accordingly as long as I live.”

Al-Ghazaali's Response

Shaykh (Imaam Al-Ghazaali) thus wrote in response the following treatise, and Allah knows best:

Firstly, understand my Son and Dear Friend – may Allah keep you perpetually in His obedience and on the Path of His Loved Ones – that if you have already received the advice encapsulated in this document then there is no need for my advice And if you have hitherto not gained such advice then tell me what have you studied all these years? Son! Among the words of advice which Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) imparted to his Ummah is the following statement:

“The sign of Allah Ta’ala turning away from an abd (servant) is the abd indulging in futile activities. Even if a little time of a person’s life was passed in activities for which he was not created, then verily, it is only befitting that he be afflicted with persistent remorse. And, whoever passes the age of forty whilst his good is not above his evil, he should prepare for the Fire of Hell.”

This advice is sufficient for those with knowlege.

Knowledge and Action

Son! Offering advice is simple; the problem is its acceptance, for it is bitter in the palates of those who follow their vain desires. This is so because forbidden acts are captivating to hearts. Accepting advice is particularly difficult on a student going through the motions in his course whilst being lost in vanity and the wonders of the world. He labours under the impression that the abstract knowledge he possesses will be his redemption and salvation, and that he is not in need of action. This is the belief of the philosophers. Subhaanallahil Atheem (Allaah is free from imperfection, The Greatest)! This person, trapped in delusion, is unaware that studying knowledge without putting it into action makes the case against him stronger. Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

“On the Day of Qiyaamah the Aalim who did not act on his knowledge will be punished the severest.”

It is reported that Junaid Baghdaadi (may Allah sanctify his secret) was seen in a dream after his death. He was asked:

“What news do you have, O Abul Qaasim?”

Junaid replied:

“Those words (of knowledge) have vanished, those subtle points have perished, and only the two dear Raka’ats which we would offer in the middle of the night were of benefit to us.”

Son! Do not be bankrupt in deeds and empty of its seeds – spiritual excellences. Rest assured that abstract knowledge cannot be held with the hand. For example, a man is in the wilderness. He has ten lethal swords together with other weapons and he is brave and bellicose. A huge and ferocious lion attacks him. Now what is your opinion? Do you think that his weapons will ward off the danger without him using them and putting them into action? Off course the weapons cannot ward off the danger without being wielded and put into motion. Similarly, if a person reads and learns a hundred masaa’il but does not practically apply them the masaa’il will not benefit him. Their benefit is in applying them practically.

If you study for a hundred years and collect a thousand kitaabs, still you will not be qualified for the mercy of Allah unless you practise.

“Verily for those who have Imaan and practised righteous deeds is the Garden of Firdaus wherein they will dwell for ever. They will not desire to move from there.” (Surah Kahf, 107/8)

“They were followed by such errant ones who ruined the institution of Salah and pursued their sensual desires. Soon they will taste the disastrous consequences, besides those who repented and carried out good deeds, for they will enter Paradise and they will not be oppressed in the least.” (Surah Maryam, Aayats 56/60)

Furthermore, what do you say about this Hadith:

“Islam has been built on five pillars: testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is the Messenger of Allah, establishing Salah, giving Zakaat, fasting in Ramadhaan and performing of Hajj for one who has the means to reach the Baitullah”?

Imaan is to declare with the tongue, believe in the heart and practise with the physical body. Proof for (the imperative nature of) A'maal is innumerable. Although the abd reaches Paradise through the Fadhl and Karam (Graciousness and Munificence) of Allah Ta'ala, but, after qualifying with worship and Obedience, for indeed the Rahmah of Allah is with the Muhsineen (those who do good).

Seeking Paradise

If someone avers that a person can also reach Paradise through Imaan alone, our response is: Yes, but after what? How many minefields will he have to cross before he comes to Paradise? The first minefield is that of Imaan; and is he safe from his Imaan being snatched away or not? Assuming that he reaches; will he be in misery and bankrupt? Hasan Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Allah Ta’ala will say to his servants on the Day of Qiyaamah: ‘O My Servants! Enter Paradise with My Rahmah (mercy) and share it (My Rahmah) by virtue of your deeds.’”

Son! As long as you do not carry out any action you shall not be rewarded. It is narrated that a man from the Bani Isra’eel worshipped Allah Ta’ala for sixty years. Allah Ta’ala then wished to display him to the Malaa’ikah (angels). Allah Ta’ala sent an Angel to tell him that in spite of his worship he is not fit to enter Paradise. The message was delivered. The Aabid replied:

“We have been created for worship. It only behoves us, therefore, to make worship.”

The Angel returned and said:

“O Allah” You know best what he said.”

Allah Ta’ala replied:

“Since he did not turn away from Our worship, by virtue of Our Munificence We will not turn away from him. Bear witness My Malaa’ikah, I have forgiven him.”

Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

“Take an account from yourself before an account will be demanded from you and weigh your deeds before you will be compelled to weigh them.”

Ali (radhiyallahu anhu) said:

“One who thinks that he can reach (Paradise) without effort is a dreamer.”

Hasan Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Seeking Paradise without action is counted as a sin.”

He furthermore said:

“The sign of being on the Right Path is to forget about your actions, not to discard actions.”

Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

“A clever person is one who is the master of his nafs (carnal desires) and who carries out actions for the life after death, whilst a fool is one who follows his carnal passions and entertains all types of (unwarranted) hopes in Allah Ta’ala.”

Son! How often you stayed awake at night revising your knowledge, studying the kutub and depriving yourself of sleep! I don't know what constrained you to do that. If it was for accumulating the dunya, hauling the flotsam and jetsam of this world, gaining worldly positions and vying with contemporaries and peers then you are doomed, indeed you are doomed.

And if your intention was to revive the Shariah of Nabi (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), to reform your character and break the nafs-e-ammaarah bis-soo' (the nafs which over and over again commands evil) then congratulations to you, and again congratulations to you.

Son! Live as long as you wish, but one day you will die. Love whatever you wish, one day you will have to part with it. And do whatever you want to do, you are going to receive what is due to you.

Son! Knowledge without practical application is madness, and practical application without knowledge is ridiculous. Remember that knowledge which does not distance you today from sins and does not place you on the Path of Obedience, will never distance you tomorrow from the Fire of Jahannam.

If you do not practise on your knowledge today and make amends for past lapses, tomorrow on the Day of Qiyaamah you will say:

“Return us (to the world), we will do good deeds.”

But the response will be:

“Fool! How can you return from here!”

Son! Instil courage in your Rooh (soul), the attitude of defeat in your nafs and the frame of death in your body, for your destination is the grave. The inmates of the Qabrstaan are waiting every moment for your arrival. Beware; just beware of getting there without provisions.

Abu Bakr Siddeeq (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

“These bodies (of ours) are birds’ cages or animals’ stables. Reflect over which of the two species are you from. If you are from the high-flying birds then when you hear the sound of: “Return to your Rabb,” you will fly high until you perch on the lofty towers of Paradise. This is just as Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: ‘The Arsh of Rahman shook at the death of Saa’d bin Mu’aaz.’ And Allah forbid, if you are among the animals like Allah Ta’ala states: ‘These people are like animals, in fact even more astray,’ then don’t think that you are safe from moving from the corner of your home to the bottomless pit of the Fire.”

It is reported that Hasan Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) was given a drink of cold water. He took the cup but fell unconscious. The cup fell from his hand. When he regained consciousness he was asked:

“What is wrong, O Abu Sa’eed?”

He replied:

“The thought of what the denizens of Hellfire will say to the dwellers of Paradise occurred to me; ‘Pass on to us some water or some food which Allah has given you.’ ”

The Late Hours of the Night

Son! If mere knowledge was sufficient for you without the need for practical implementation then the Call of: “Is there anyone who is asking? Is there anyone seeking forgiveness? Is there anyone repentant?” would be futile. (This Call is sounded from the heavens during the late part of the night and on certain nights such as Lailatul Qadr, the whole night.)

It is reported that a group of Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) spoke of Abdullah Bin Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) to Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Rasulullah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

“Abdullah is a good person; if only he offers Salah during the night.”

Son! “And for a portion of the night offer Tahajjud Salaah” is an Amr (command of the Qur’aan), “During the pre-dawn moments they supplicate for forgiveness” is Shukr (gratitude) and “Those who engage in istighfaar (seek forgiveness from Allah) pre-dawn” is Thikr. (In other words, you are required to engage in Salah, Thikr and Shukr during the dark hours of the night.)

Nabi (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

“Allah Ta’ala loves three sounds; the cock’s crow, the sound of the Qur’aan being recited and the sound of those engaged in istighfaar during the hours preceding dawn.”

Sufyaan Thauri (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Allah Tabaaraka wa Ta’ala has created a breeze which blows before dawn and which carries istighfaar and athkaar to Al-Malikul Jabbaar (the Mighty King – Allah Ta’ala).”

He also said:

“At the onset of the night a Caller calls out from beneath the Arsh: ‘Listen! Let the Aabidoon (Worshippers of Allah) stand in prayers. ‘Thus they stand and offer Salah as much as Allah Ta’ala wills. Then a Caller calls out in the middle of the night: ‘Listen! Let the obedient stand in prayers. Thus they stand up and offer Salah till the time before dawn. When the time preceding dawn (sahar) sets in the Caller calls out: ‘Listen! Let the Mustaghfiroon (those seeking forgiveness) stand.’ Thus they wake up and engage in istighfaar. When Fajr time sets in the

Caller calls out: 'Let the ghaafiloon (dreamy/forgetful ones) stand.' Thus they get up from their beds like dead people being resurrected from their graves."

Son! It is reported in the wasaaya (legacy) of Luqmaan the Wise that he said to his son: "O My Beloved Son! Let not the cock be cleverer than you. It calls out before dawn whilst you are sleeping."

Worship and Obedience

Son! The Essence of knowledge is to know what Taa'at (Obedience) and worship are. Understand well that Taa'at and worship mean to follow by word and to practise the commandments and prohibitions of the Shariah. In other words, everything you say, do and forsake has to be in keeping with the Shariah. For example, if you fast on the Day of Eid and the Days of Tashreeq (11th, 12th and 13th of Zil Hijjah) you will be a sinner. Similarly, if you offer Salah with clothes which you took wrongfully from someone you will be sinning, notwithstanding the outer façade of worship.

Son! Your actions and statements should be in conformity to the Shariah, for knowledge and action without following the Shariah is dhalaalah (deviation). And do not be deluded by the bizarre utterances and extraordinary displays of the Sufiyah, because walking this path (Sulook) is by virtue of Mujaahadah (striving to fulfil the Commandments of Allah Ta'ala), severing the desires of the nafs and killing its passions with the sword of spiritual exercises, not through mystical utterances and paranormal acts.

Remember that a loose tongue and a fossilized heart which is erumpent with negligence and carnal passion are signs of ill-fortune. Thus, if you do not kill your nafs with true Mujaahadah your heart will never come alive with Marifat.

Understanding Haal (Theopathy)

Take note that the answers to some of the questions you posed cannot be properly conveyed in writing or verbally. Only when you attain that condition you will understand its nature. Abstract knowledge of it is not possible for it belongs to the stratum of sensual perception. And anything belonging to this stratum cannot be adequately described with words, like sweetness and bitterness cannot be understood without tasting. It is narrated that an inneen (sexually-impotent man) wrote to his friend to explain the pleasure of coition to him. The friend wrote in response:

“Friend! I was under the impression you were only an inneen. Now I understand that you are an inneen as well as an ahmaq (fool). The pleasure in this is sensual. If you derive that pleasure you will understand, otherwise its description cannot be conveyed verbally and in writing.”

Son! That is the nature of some masaa'il, whilst those which can be properly responded to we have mentioned in Ihya-ul Uloom, etc. Here we will refer to a selected portion of it.

Obligations Upon the Seeker

Four things are obligatory upon the Saalik (person walking the path of Sufism):

Firstly, correct Aqaaid (Beliefs) unblemished by bid'ah (concocted belief). Secondly, sincere taubah, whereby one does fall into error again. Thirdly, placating one's plaintiff until no one can claim from you anything. Fourthly, acquiring that amount of knowledge of the Shariah whereby one can discharge the Commandments of Allah Ta'ala, and then other sciences which can serve as salvation.

The Chosen Hadith

It is narrated that Shibli (may Allah have mercy upon him) served four hundred Ustaads (teachers). He says:

“I learnt four hundred Ahaadith. Then I selected from the four hundred one Hadith and put it into practice because I reflected over it and found my redemption and salvation in it. The knowledge of every person of the former and later times is embedded in it and hence I made do with it. Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to one of his companions: ‘In proportion to your period of stay here tend to your worldly needs and in proportion to you remaining in the hereafter prepare for it. In proportion to your need for Allah practise for His sake and in proportion to your fortitude over Hellfire commit those actions which will land you in it.’ ”

Son! Knowledge of this Hadith obviates the need for plenty of knowledge. Now ponder over some other anecdotes.

Benefits of having Sacred Knowledge

Haatim Asam was an associate of Shaqeeq Balkhi (may Allah have mercy on him). Shaqeeq asked him one day:

“You have been with me for thirty years. What have you gained over these years?”

Haatim (may Allah have mercy on him) replied:

“I have gained eight benefits of (possesing) knowledge which are adequate for me; hopefully my redemption and salvation are in these benefits.”

Shaqeeq asked:

“And what are they?”

Haatim Asam replied:

One: “I looked at creation and saw that everyone showed affection and love to someone dear and beloved. Some loved ones stayed with the lover till his death-bed and some till the pit of the grave. Then the loved one goes away and leaves the lover all alone and lonely. None of them stays with him in the qabr. I reflected and came to the conclusion that the best beloved to a man is one who enters the grave with him and keeps him company there. This I did not find in anything but A'maale-Saalihah (virtuous deeds). I thus took that as my beloved to be a lamp for me in my qabr and to keep me company there for that will not leave me alone.”

Two: “I saw creation following its vain desires and hastening to fulfil its ambitions, so I reflected over Allah Ta'ala's declaration: ‘Whosoever fears the appearance before his Rabb and keeps his nafs' desires in check then verily Paradise is the Abode (for him/her)’ [An-Naazi'aat, 41/41]. I was convinced that the Qur'aan is True and the Truth. I therefore hastened to oppose my nafs and I rolled my sleeves up to wage jihaad against it and stop it from its vain desires until it became trained to worship and be obedient to Allah Subhaanahu wa Ta'ala.”

Three: “I saw every person striving to gather the flotsam and jetsam of this world, then grasping firmly onto it with their hands. I thus pondered over Allah Ta'ala's statement: ‘Whatever you

have will perish and whatever Allah has is everlasting.’ [An-Nahl, 96]. I thus expended my capital of this world for the pleasure of Allah Ta’ala disbursing it to the masaakeen (poor) as my investment by Allah Ta’ala.”

Four: “Indeed I have seen some people labouring under the impression that their honour and dignity are with the crowds and a huge family. They are deceived by their numbers. Others again think that their honour and pride are in being very rich and having many offspring. Then there are those who assume their honour and glory to be in robbing people of their wealth, oppressing them and murdering them. Some people again believe that throwing away money, spending freely and wasting bring honour. I reflected over the proclamation of Allah Ta’ala: ‘Verily, your most honourable by Allah is the most Allah-fearing among you.’ [Al-Hujuraat, 13] I, therefore, adopted Taqwa and I resigned myself to the belief that the Qur’aan is True and the Truth whilst their opinion and perception are baatil and zaail (corrupt and fleeting) in entirety.”

Five: “I saw people reproaching each other and speaking ill of each other. I found that to be the product of jealousy over others’ wealth, position and knowledge. I then pondered over Allah Ta’ala’s proclamation: ‘We have allotted their (man’s) livelihood to them in this earthly life.’ [Az-Zukhruf, 32] I thus realised that this allocation from Allah Ta’ala is since eternity. I, therefore, do not harbour jealousy towards anyone and I am contented with Allah Ta’ala’s allocation.”

Six: “I saw that people are enemies with each other for base motives. I contemplated over Allah Ta’ala’s statement: ‘Verily, Shaitaan is your enemy and therefore take him to be your enemy.’ [Faatir, 6] I thus came to the conclusion that it is not permissible to be enemies with anyone besides Shaitaan. (How does one take Shaitaan to be one’s enemy? Shaitaan’s mission is to deflect, stop and mislead the creation of Allah Ta’ala from Allah Ta’ala’s obedience and Siraatul Mustaqeem. Shaitaan

promotes and peddles wrongdoing, evil and haraam. Taking Shaitaan as an enemy means: to regard these actions which are classified as disobedience unto Allah Ta'ala and straying from Siraatul Mustaqeem as acts to incumbently abstain from and stay far away from.)”

Seven: “I have seen everyone striving with vigour and labouring arduously in search of food and livelihood with wanton disregard for doubtful (mushtabah) and haraam. In the process they disgrace themselves and spoil their reputation. Then I reflected over Allah Ta'ala's declaration: ‘There is no creature on earth but it is the prerogative of only Allah to sustain it.’ [Hood, 6] I thus realised that my sustenance is the responsibility of Allah Ta'ala. He has assured it. I, therefore, turned my attention to His worship and severed my avarice from everything besides Him. ”

Eight: I saw everything relying on some created entity or the other; some on money, some on capital and authority, some on their profession and jobs and some on like-creation. I then contemplated the statement of Allah Ta'ala: ‘Whoever reposes his trust in Allah, Allah is sufficient for him. Verily, Allah completes His work. Indeed Allah has determined for everything a quantity.’ [At-Talaaq, 3] I thus reposed my trust in Allah, so He is sufficient for me and He is a wonderful advocate.”

Shaqqeeq (may Allah have mercy on him) replied:

“May Allah Ta'ala grant you taufeeq! The Torah, the Injeel, the Zaboor and the Furqaan (the Qur'aan) centre on these Eight Treasures. So whoever practices on these eight treasures is practising on these Four Scriptures.”

Son! From these two anecdotes you will have realized that you are not in need of expanding on your knowledge. (The multitude of technicalities and complexities plaguing those who hanker after the dunya and who are concerned with their worldly pleasures and investments do not affect one who considers himself to be just a traveller in this world. Thus, the wonderful and crisp advice imparted

by Haatim Asam is ample provision to cross this ephemeral world safely into the eternal world.

Requirements for Treading the Spiritual Path

Now I will explain to you what is waajib (compulsory) on the Saalik who follows the Path of Haqq (truth).

1. A Qualified Guide

Understand that the Saalik should have a Shaykh who is a spiritual guide and trainer so that he (the Saalik) removes evil character from himself with the spiritual training (Tarbiyat) of the Shaykh and in place of evil character he inculcates good character.

The gist of Tarbiyat resembles the work of the farmer who removes thorns and weeds from in between the crops in order that his crop grows well and he gains a thorough yield.

It is imperative for the Saalik to have a Shaykh who disciplines him and guides him to the Path of Allah. Verily Allah Ta'ala sent for the benefit of creation a Rasool to guide them to the Path of Allah. When the Rasool (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) passed away he left his Khulafa in his place to guide to the Path of Allah Ta'ala.

The condition for the Shaykh to be qualified as a Naaib (deputy) of Rasulullah (salawaatullahi wa salaamuhu alaih) is that he should be an Aalim. However, not just any Aalim is qualified for Khilaafat (the Office of Spiritual Mentorship). I will explain to you some signs of such a Shaykh, briefly, so that not just any person lays claim to being a spiritual guide (Murshid).

The Shaykh who is a qualified Murshid and Murabbi is he who is averse to love for this world and love for fame. He is one who followed a person of insight and this chain of following should be continuous right to Sayyidul Mursaleen (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). He adopts exemplary selfdiscipline through eating, speaking and sleeping less and offering additional Salah, Saum and Sadaqah.

By virtue of his obedience to that discerning Shaykh he has made the following virtuous attributes his way of life: perseverance, Salah, gratefulness, trust, conviction, contentment, peace of mind, forbearance, humility, knowledge, honesty, modesty, faithfulness, dignity, tranquillity, deliberateness, etc.

Since he (the Shaykh) is illuminated with the spiritual effulgence of Nabi (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) he is qualified to be followed. However, the existence of someone like this is rarer than red sulphur.

One who has been aided with the good fortune of finding a Shaykh as described and the Shaykh has accepted him in his circle then it devolves upon him (the Mureed/Saalik) to honour the Shaykh outwardly and inwardly. Outward Honour is to refrain from arguing with him and proving one's point in every mas-alah even though one is aware that the Shaykh is in error. Do not engage in excessive Nawaafil in his presence. Carry out the A'maal which the Shaykh commands according to your capacity and strength.

Inward Honour is that when hearing something from the Shaykh and accepting it outwardly, one does not reject it in the heart and in his absence act or say something to the contrary. Otherwise, one will be guilty of nifaaq (hypocrisy). If one is unable to do this then refrain from the company of that Shaykh until such a time that one's inner condition conforms to one's outward action.

2. Abstention from Evil Company

Abstain from the company of an evil person so that the influence of devils in jinn and human form on one's heart is reduced and the heart is purified from the contamination of Satanism.

3. Two Features of Tasawwuf

Then take note that there are two features of Tasawwuf:

- to be constant with Allah Ta'ala
- to be calm with creation

Thus, a person who is steadfast with Allah Azza Wajall, who adopts beautiful character with people and deals with them with tolerance is a Sufi.

Steadfastness is to relinquish the pleasure of the nafs at the altar of the Command of Allah Ta'ala. Good Character with mankind is that one does not impose upon others one's self-desire but rather one imposes upon oneself the desire of others as long as these do not defy the Shariah.

4. Servitude

You asked me about Servitude. It is ternary consisting of:

1. Guarding the Commandments of the Shariah
2. Contentment over Fate, Predestination and the Distribution of Allah Ta'ala
3. Forsaking the pleasure of the nafs in search of the Pleasure of Allah Ta'ala

5. Trust in Allah

You asked me about Tawakkul (Trust in Allah). Tawakkul is to reinforce your belief in the Promise of Allah Ta'ala. In other words, for you to believe that whatever has been foreordained for you will surely reach you regardless of everyone in this world striving to deflect it from you, and, whatever has not been written for you will never reach you even though the entire world assists you.

6. Sincerity

You asked me about Ikhlaas (sincerity). Ikhlaas is for all your actions to be for the sake of Allah Ta'ala, your heart not becoming elated at the praises of people and nor do you care of their criticism.

Know that riya (ostentation) is generated from honourable treatment by creation. The remedy for it is to consider the creation to be under the control of Divine Power and to think of the creation to be like lifeless objects that do not have the power to give comfort or cause difficulty. In this way you will extricate yourself from showing off to the creation. As long as you think of the creation to have power and determination, riya (ostentation) will shadow you.

Points of Advice

Son! I offer the following eight points of advice to you. Accept them from me and let not your knowledge prosecute you on the Day of Qiyaamah. Act on four of them and shun four.

Four Acts to Shun:

1. Debating

Do not debate with anyone any mas'alah as far as possible, for the calamities in this are numerous. "Its sin is greater than its benefits." It (debating) is the fountain of every despicable trait such as showing off, jealousy, pride, malice, enmity, boasting, etc. Yes, if some mas'alah arises between you and someone else or some group and your intention is to reveal the Haqq and safeguard it from being suppressed then it will be permissible to discuss the issue. But, such an intention has two signs:

- You do not discriminate between the Haqq being revealed from your tongue or from your adversary's tongue.
- Discussion in privacy is dearer to you than discussion in public.

Listen! I will proffer something of benefit to you. You should understand that posing a question is akin to presenting an internal sickness to a physician. The response to that is to treat the sickness.

Now, take note that the ignorant are internally sick and the Ulama are the physicians. An incompetent Aalim cannot provide good treatment whilst a competent Aalim does not treat just anyone. He, in fact, treats those from whom recovery is anticipated and who will respond favourably to the treatment. If, however, the sickness is terminal or incurable then the expertise of the physician constrains him to say that this person's sickness is incurable and treating him is futile.

The Four Types of Sicknesses Affecting the Ignorant one

Once you have understood this, you should take note that the sickness of the jaahil (ignorant one) is of four types. One is curable whilst the others are incurable.

The first of the incurable is the sickness of one whose question and objection stem from jealousy and enmity. The more you respond to him beautifully, eloquently and with clarity the more intense hatred, enmity and jealousy he develops for you. Thus, one should not occupy oneself by responding to him. This is the approach that should be resorted to here. It has been said:

There is hope for removing all types of enmity

Save the enmity of one who hates you out of jealousy

One should, therefore, turn away from such a person and leave him to his sickness. Allah Ta'ala states:

“So turn away from one who turns his back to Our Remembrance and he intends nothing but this worldly life.” –

Surah Najm, 29

The one who is jealous of everything you say and everything you do ignites a fire in the field of his deeds. Nabi (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: *“Jealousy devours good deeds just as fire burns dry wood.”*

The second type is the sickness stemming from foolishness. Such a person, too, is incurable, as Isaa (alaihiss salaam) said: *“I never failed in bringing the dead to life, but I failed to cure a fool.”* And that is a person who occupies himself with studying rational and Shar'i Uloom (Sciences) for a short period. He then questions and flings objections at a senior Aalim who has devoted his life to Uloom of the Shariah and rational sciences. This fool thinks that what is problematic to him is also problematic to the senior Aalim. If he cannot even comprehend this, then his questioning is a folly. It is necessary to disengage with him also.

The third is of a person who seeks guidance, he attributes whatever he cannot comprehend of the statements of the Akaabir to his deficiency in understanding and his questions are for gaining benefit. However, he is naturally dunce. He cannot perceive realities. It is not appropriate to engross oneself with explaining him, as well, for Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: *“We, the Brotherhood of Ambiya, have been instructed to speak to people according to the level of their intelligence.”*

Yes, the sickness that can be cured is that of an intelligent and understanding person who seeks guidance. He is not given to

jealousy, anger and love for carnal pleasures, fame and money. He seeks the Straight Road. His question and objection is not the product of jealousy, obstinacy or subjecting the one questioned to a test. Such a person can be cured and thus it is permissible to devote time to respond to his question. In fact, it is waajib upon you to respond to him.

2. Public-Speaking

The second act to shun is becoming a public-speaker and bayaan-giver. The calamities in this are plentiful, unless you practise on what you preach firstly, and then you admonish people accordingly. Reflect over what was said to Isaa (alaihis salaam): *“O Ibn Maryam! Admonish yourself. If you heed the admonition then admonish mankind. And if not, then have some shame for your Rabb.”*

Two Traits to Beware of When Speaking to Audiences

If you are put to trial in this work (public-speaking) then beware of two traits.

One is to labour to embellish one’s speech with flowery language and poetry. Verily Allah Ta’ala hates those who put up artificial performances. The one who is pretentious and transgressing of the limits displays his rotten baatin (soul) and the fantasy of his heart.

Tathkeer (to admonish) means: to remind the *abd* of the Fire of the Netherworld, of his complacency in the service of his Rabb; to exhort him (the *abd*) to reflect how he has used up his life of the past in acts of futility, to reflect over the perils that lay ahead of him – the lack of safety of Imaan at the time of life’s expiry, his condition when Malakul Maut (the Angel of Death) removes his Rooh, will he be able to respond to Munkar and Nakeer; for him to be concerned about his condition in Qiyaamat and the stages there, will he pass over Siraat (the Bridge over Jahannam) safely or will he fall into the Pits of Hellfire?

These scenarios should constantly be impressed on his mind until the vision of these terrors disturbs him from his blissful negligence. Setting the heart ablaze with these turbulent spectacles and making it wail over these calamities constitute *Tathkeer*. It is to inform and make creation aware of these things, to draw people’s attention to their deficiencies and excesses and to make them see their faults. The heat of these fiery and fearsome spectacles should be spread

over the gathering and those calamities should jolt them into making amends for their past life according to their strength and for them to regret at the loss of Taa'at (Obedience) to Allah Ta'ala in yesteryear. All this as described is Wa'z (lecture/bayaan).

This is just as you see a flood heading for a person's home whilst the owner and his family are inside. You will say: "Watch Out! Watch Out! Run from the flood!" Will your heart desire at this critical time to inform the occupant of the house with artificial speech, flowery language and symbolic expressions? Never will you desire so. The condition of the waa'iz should be the same. Thus, you should abstain from all those fancy speech.

The second trait to beware of is that you should not endeavour to make people raucous in your gathering or them becoming ecstatic and emotional and saying thereafter: "What a gathering that was!" All this is inclination to the dunya. It is the product of ghaflat (indifference to the Hereafter). Instead, you should resolve and endeavour to call people from the dunya to the Aakhirah, from ma'siyat (sin) to Taa'at (obedience to Allah), from greed to abstinence, from niggardliness to generosity, from doubt to conviction, from indifference to alertness and from haughtiness to piety. You should instil love of the Aakhirah in their hearts and make the dunya detestable to them. You should teach them how to offer worship and the principles of zuhd (abstinence).

Do not deceive them about the Karam (Munificence) of Allah Ta'ala and His Rahmah (Mercy), because their dispositions are overwhelmingly refracted from the Road of the Shariah, involved in pursuits which are displeasing to Allah Ta'ala and engaged in despicable character. Therefore, instil awe in their hearts, frighten them and warn them of the dreadful scenarios they are going to face. Perhaps then their internal attributes transform and their external approach changes and they covet and show inclination towards Taa'at (Obedience) and volte-face from ma'siyat.

This is the way to give wa'z and advice (lecture/ bayaan/ talk/ admonish). Any wa'z which is of any other kind is a calamity on the speaker and the listener. In fact, it has been said that such a speaker is a ghoul and a shaitaan abducting creation from the Straight Path and destroying them. It is therefore incumbent on them to flee from

such a person because the damage caused by this speaker to their Deen is something not even Shaitaan can achieve. And it devolves upon those who have the authority and power to bring down such a person from the pulpits of wa'z and ban him from his actions. This is part of Amr bil Ma'roof and Nahi anil Munkar (Commanding virtuous deeds and Prohibiting evil deeds).

3. Association with the Leaders and Kings

The third act to shun is association with the leaders and kings. One should not even look at them. Looking at them, associating with them and hobnobbing with them are disastrous. If you are trapped in these then abstain from praising and adulating them for verily Allah Ta'ala becomes angry when a faasiq (irreligious person) and zaalim (tyrant) are praised. One who prays for their long life has indeed taken pleasure at Allah Ta'ala being disobeyed on His earth.

4. Accepting the Hand Outs and Gifts of the Rulers

The fourth thing to shun is accepting the handouts and gifts of the rulers even though you know that these are from halaal sources. Abstaining from this is in view of craving for their wealth being destructive to one's Deen. This craving spawns selling out of the Deen, favouring the rulers' stance and acquiescing to their oppression. And all these are ruinous to one's Deen.

The minimum harm in these is that when you accept their hand outs and derive benefit from their dunya then you will take a liking to them. And one who takes a liking to another undoubtedly desires for his beloved long life and preservation. And love for the preservation of a zaalim is a desire for zulm among the servants of Allah Ta'ala and desire for the ruin of the world. What can be more destructive to one's Deen and Aaqibah (ending) than this?

And please beware, I repeat, beware of Shaitaan's temptation or some people's suggestion to you that it is more meritorious and better to take money from them and disburse same to the fuqara and masaakeen (poor and needy) because they (the kings and rulers) spend their wealth in fisq and ma'siyat (transgression and sin). Thus, your spending on the poor people is nobler than their spending. The Accursed (Shaitaan) has severed the necks of many with this hallucinated argument.

We have discussed this in *Ihya-ul Uloom*. Refer to the discussion there.

Four Things One Should Do

There are four things one should do. They are:

1. Your conduct with Allah Ta'ala should be such that if your slave conducts himself with you in that manner you will be pleased with him. You will not be anguished at his conduct and you will not become displeased with him. What you are not pleased with from your artificial slave, do not be pleased with it for Allah Ta'ala Who is your True Master.
2. Whenever you deal with people then treat them in such a manner that you are pleased with it for yourself had they did the same thing. Verily the Imaan of the *abd* is not complete until he loves for others what he loves for himself.
3. When you read something or study something your knowledge should reform your heart and purify your soul. For example, you come to know that only one week of your life remains. Obviously you will not preoccupy yourself in this case with academic sciences because you know that these sciences will not avail you. Rather, you will engross yourself in meditating on the condition of your heart, in introspection and in aversion from worldly ties. You will purify your nafs from reproachable qualities, engross yourself in Love for Allah and in His worship and you will inculcate beautiful character. And not a day or night passes by without the possibility of an *abd* dying.

Son! Listen to something else I have to say and reflect over it until you find your salvation. If you are to be informed that the king will visit you in a week's time then I am sure that during this period you will only concern yourself with correcting and improving what you perceive the king's gaze to fall upon; your clothes, your looks, your home, lounge, etc. Now reflect over what I have alluded to, for you are discerning, and a single statement is sufficient for an intelligent person.

Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "*Verily Allah Ta'ala does not look at your faces...What Allah Ta'ala looks at is your hearts and your intentions.*"

If you desire to know about the conditions of the heart then look at *Ihya* and my other compilations.

This Ilm (Knowledge of Self-Reformation) is *Fardh Ain* and other Uloom are *Fardh Kifaayah*, besides that amount which is required to fulfil the *Faraaidh* of Allah Ta'ala. He will enable you with His grace until you acquire this knowledge.

4. Do not accumulate of this dunya more than what is necessary for a year, just as Rasulullah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would make available to some of his wives. He said: "*O Allah! Make the sustenance of Muhammad's household nourishing and sufficient.*"

He would not provide this amount for all his wives; only for those among them regarding whom he knew that they were of weak temperaments. But he would make available only a day's provision or half a day's provision for those who were strong in conviction.

Son! I have written in this epistle what you have requested. It devolves upon you to carry it out now. Do not forget about me with this in your pious Du'aas.

Du'aas to Recite

The Du'aas you have requested from me should be searched for in the authentic Hadith Du'aas. Recite the following Du'aa all the time, especially after your Salaats:

"O Allah! I ask from you complete blessings, permanent protection, all-inclusive mercy, thorough wellbeing, a pleasant and comfortable livelihood, a fortunate life, absolute goodness, all-pervasive bounty, the sweetest grace, and the most beneficial benevolence.

O Allah! Be for us and not against us. O Allah! Seal our fates with good fortune, endorse our expectations with increased rewards, enshroud our mornings and evenings with safety and wellbeing, make our return and destination Your Rahmah, pour buckets of forgiveness over our sins, favour us with correction of our faults, make Taqwa our provision, your Deen our sphere of exertion, and upon You our trust and dependence.

O Allah! Keep us firm on the Road of Istiqaamat (steadfastness), save us from acts in this dunya which will cause us embarrassment in the Hereafter, lighten the load of our encumbrances, grant us the joyous life of the pious, take care of our worries of this world and the hereafter, repel from us the mischief of the mischief-makers and the conspiracies of the evil-doers and save our skins and the skins of our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters from Hellfire through Your Rahmah, O Almighty, O All-Forgiving, O Gracious One, O Concealer of sins and faults.

O Creator of night and day! Rescue us from worldly worries, from the athaab (punishment) of the qabr (grave) and the Fire.

O All-Knowing, O All-Conquering, Yaa Allah, Yaa Allah, Yaa Allah! Accept these supplications out of Your Mercy, Yaa Arhamar-Raahimen.

And O the First of the first, O the Last of the last, O One of invincible power, O the Merciful on the poor, O the Most Merciful of the merciful! There is no god but You. Glory be unto You. Verily I have been among the wrongdoers."

May the special blessings of Allah be upon our leader, Muhammad, his family and all his companions.

And, all praises are due unto Allah, the One Who created, sustains and nurtures the universe to perfection.
