

Appendices from the book entitled "***Purification of the Heart: Signs, Symptoms and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart***" - [Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson](#)'s translation and commentary of Imam Muḥammad Mawlūd's didactic poem "Matharat al-Qulub" (purification of the heart).

The Imam was a 19th century Mauritanian scholar.

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Appendix: Words of advice from Aḥmad Zarrūq

Sidi Ahmad al-Zarruq was a great scholar from Morocco who died in 1492. One of the seminal things he said was that the fragrance of his teaching would disseminate in the world long after his bones were laid to rest. It is one of his *karamāt*, or saintly miracles, that his teachings are still alive and still enlighten many people around the world. May God be pleased with him. He offered the following:

May God give you and us success and rectify our worldly and other-worldly lives and grant us adherence to the way of the truth in our journeys and in our sojourns. Know that repentance is a key, *taqwā* (God-consciousness) is vast, and uprightness is the source of rectification. A servant is never free of either blunders or shortcomings or lassitude. Therefore, never be neglectful of repentance, and never turn away from the act of returning to God the Exalted, and never neglect acts that bring you closer to God the Exalted. Indeed, whenever one of these three occurs, then repent and return to God in penitence.

Every time that you make a mistake, listen and obey. Anytime you display shortcomings or show lack of enthusiasm, do not desist in your efforts. Let your main concern be to remove from your outer state anything that is displeasing, then maintain this state through continual counsel. Persist in doing this until you find that your fleeing from anything outwardly displeasing is second nature and that your avoidance of the boundaries of prohibited things becomes a protective mesh that is placed before you. At this point, it is time to turn inward toward your heart's presence and to its reality, by way of reflection and remembrance.

Do not hasten the end result before you have completed the beginning. But likewise, do not begin without looking toward the end result. This is because the one who seeks the outset at the end loses providential care, and the one who seeks the end at the outset loses providential guidance.

Act in accordance with principles and the appropriate legal rulings, and not in accordance with stories and fantasies. Do not even consider stories of how things went with others except as a tonic to strengthen your resolve. Indeed, do not take them as a reference based upon their outward forms or what they seem to be telling us.

In all of this, depend upon a clear path you can refer to and a foundation that you can rely on in all of your states. The best of these is the path of Ibn ‘Aṭā’allāh, given that it is a clear direction to God.

Do not take from the words of others unless it is in accordance with your own path, but submit to their implications if you desire realization. Avoid all forms of vain and foul speech to your absolute utmost. Put aside anything whose benefit you cannot discern immediately.

Beware of being extremely hard on your soul before you have obtained mastery over it. But also beware of being too lax with it in anything that concerns sacred rulings. This is because [the soul] constantly flees from moderation in everything, and it inclines towards extremism in matters of both deviance and guidance.

Seek out a companion to help you in your affairs, and take his counsel concerning matters that occur from both your inward states and outward affairs. If you do indeed take his companionship, then treat him in a manner commensurate with his state and give him of your counsel based upon his inabilities and abilities, for the perfect friend is no longer to be found.

Indeed, in these times, even a suitable companion who is agreeable rarely lasts. And beware of the majority of people in matters that concern your religious and worldly states unless you have ascertained a person has some sound relationship with his Lord based upon a knowledge free of his caprice or love of leadership and based upon a sound intellect free of the pitfalls of hidden agendas.

Do not be heedless of the machinations of others or their hidden states. Consider these two from both their origins and their actions.

A person of character and family distinction rarely affects you with other than good. And yet a person of low origins usually disregards you when times become difficult. Be extremely vigilant of the dominant qualities of a given people in any given land and do not be heedless in the divine wisdom in creation, and notice gatheredness and separation. Some of this we have already covered in our book *al-Qawā‘id*, so take a look at it there.

Organize your time in a manner appropriate to the time’s specific needs using gentleness and toleration and be very weary of either harshness or laxity. This is because too much laxity concerning permissible matters pulls the heart backward in its journey until even a man of resolve ends up looking

like a foolish boy.

Work for this world as if you will live forever, but work for the next life as if you will die tomorrow. Thus do not neglect the externals of your worldly needs. In the meantime, do not be heedless of your destiny and final resting place.

Be extremely vigilant about avoiding positions of leadership, but should you be tried with such matters at least know your own limitations.

Be absolutely sincere with God with the sincerity of one who knows full well who is placing demands upon him. Surrender completely to His decree with the submission of one who knows he can never overcome Him.

Have a firm foundation for all of your affairs, and you will be safe from their pitfalls.

Organize your devotional practices and you will find your time is extended due to the *barakah* (blessings) in it. Never be fanatical about anything, whether it regards the truth or falsehood; this way your heart will remain in a state of soundness towards others.

Never claim anything you are entitled to, let alone what you are not entitled to. This way you will be safe from tricks and treachery. This is because anyone who claims some rank above his own will fall in humiliation, whereas those who claim a rank they warrant will have it stripped from them. But those who claim a station less than their true rank will be elevated to higher levels than they actually deserve.

Never give your companion anything of your state other than what his own state warrants. This is because if you descend to his level, he will show you contempt, whereas if you attempt to raise him up to your level, he will abandon you. Never demand a right from anyone, whether one is an intimate or a stranger.

The reason for this is a stranger in reality owes you nothing, and someone close to you is too precious for you to censure.

Never assume that anyone in this world can really understand your circumstances other than from the perspective of his own circumstances. This is because in reality people see things in accordance with their frames of references and their personal paths. However, when aims,

purpose, and aspirations are similar, people tend to work together toward a common goal.

Never belittle any talk that involves absent people even if there is no harm in it due to the possibility of harm entering into it.

Guard your secrets even if you feel safe with someone because the one you divulge your secret to is not a safer place than your own heart from where it emanated.

Never leave an atom's weight of your regular devotional practice. Never be lenient with yourself in either lax times or times of high resolve. Indeed, should you miss some practice at a given time, redress *it* in another time. If you are not able to do your usual practice, at least occupy yourself with something else similar.

Never obey your ego even for a moment. Never believe any of its claims no matter what it tells you.


Be vigilant about your resolve in all of your affairs to your utmost. In fact, should you resolve to do something, then do it immediately before the resolve wanes. Examine your soul constantly in matters that you are obliged to do or are in need to be done.

Anything that you are in no need of doing leave it, even if it is something that is recommended. That means not involving yourself in anything other than absolutely necessary things and real discernible needs.

Treat others just as you would want to be treated, and fulfill that which is due to them. All of this is really epitomized in the words of the poet when he said, "If you desire to live such that your religion is safe and your portion is full and your honor is sound, guard your tongue and never mention another's faults remembering that you yourself have faults and others have tongues."

Watch your eye. Should it ever reveal to you the faults of others, say to it, "Oh my eye, other people have eyes too." Live treating others well and avoid aggression, and should others aggress against you, leave them but in the best way. The source of these words is in fact none other than the traditions of the Prophet ﷺ when he said, "Be vigilant of God wherever you are, and follow a misdeed with a good deed and it will remove it; and treat

others with the most excellent of character.”

In another tradition the Prophet , said, “Every child of Adam errs and the best of those who err are those who seek to redress them.”

Again the holy spirit inspired my heart’s core that no soul will die until it fulfills its decreed portion of this world and its appointed time here.

So be conscious of God and make your request with dignity.

In summation, repentance, awareness of God, and uprightness are the foundations of all that is beneficial. The truth is clear and its details are weighty and significant. The affair belongs only to God. Success is in His hands.

Appendix: Remembrance

Taken from the *Wird* of Imām ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥaddād

Imam ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥaddād was a Yemeni scholar and a man of great spiritual insight. I am grateful that his descendant was my teacher. I learned from him that it is excellent to begin one’s *dhikr* with the *basmala* (*Bismillahi-rahmani-rahim* or “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving”). The Prophet ﷺ said that any act that does not begin in the name of God is severed from goodness. The Imam then would recite Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ three times. The Prophet ﷺ said that this sūrah is equivalent to reciting one-third of the Qur’an. The sūrah should be read preferably after every prayer and in the morning and evening. Next, the concluding two sūrahs of the Qur’an should be read, Sūrat al-Falaq (113) and Sūrat al-Nās (114), which give protection, by God’s leave. They should also be recited everyday. There is a hadith that says they should be recited before going to sleep.

The Prophet ﷺ often prayed for protection from Satan and his evil promptings: “O God, I seek refuge in You from Satan the accursed, from his promptings, inspirations.” Also, Say, “*My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the urgings of the devils*” (QUR’AN , 23:97). *Urgings* here is *hamazāt*, which means to goad someone to do something that he or she shouldn’t do. One of the signs of the end of time is that the minds of people will become full of whisperings. People today are constantly fed messages that ask them to do something, whether to buy a product or revel in the beat of a song or agree to its message. Music, television, internet, cellular phones (with internet access), and films are so ubiquitous, one has to forcibly alienate himself from popular culture to find solace.

Evil whisperings and suggestions can come in a variety of forms, visual and audible. They go to the heart, especially when people are not circumspect as to what they permit into their souls. Over time suggestions build up to the point one can no longer discern what is real or a fraud, what is beneficial or ruinous. Hearts are destroyed

this way. Seemingly innocent facets of our lives can exhaust a person's time with trivial matters. The whole culture of sports enthusiasm can lead to an incredible loss of time passively watching the competition. When one wastes time, the heart becomes complacent and lazy.

Once we realize that we are accountable for our entire life, then every minute becomes vital. Time is the gift God has given us. And what we do with it is the most important challenge that faces us. This is not to suggest that recreation is at odds with *imān*. People who fail to take some form of recreation will impair both their physical and mental health. But the warning here is about something different: it is about the way things are today, in which millions of people *live* to be entertained, as if this is the purpose of their lives. It addresses the cultural war cry, "Work for the weekend," as if the purpose of the weekdays is merely to bankroll the entertainment of the weekends. People who are serious about spiritual health (about being a successful human being) need to wean themselves from the *culture of fun*.

Do you think that We created you in vain and that you will never return to Us? Exalted is God, the King, the Truth. There is no God but Him, Lord of the Noble Throne (QUR'AN , 23:115-16). The Prophet ﷺ often recited these verses. He would also recite, Lord, forgive and have mercy, You are the best of those who show mercy (QUR'AN, 23:118); Glory be to God in your evenings and in your mornings. All praise is His in the heavens and the earth and at the setting of the sun and at noonday (QUR'AN , 30:17-18).

God says, *Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God (QUR'AN, 59:21).* The word *khashyah* is *fear* that emanates from knowledge, not of the unknown. The implication of the Qur'an being revealed is in itself awesome enough to reduce a mountain to dust. It is the last of God's revelations, the final heavenly message, thus fulfilling God's covenant to guide humanity. The content of the Book reveals so much about God, the reality of existence, the purpose of life, and the Hereafter, no one can ever claim ignorance.

Obviously, *dhikr* should include reflective recitation of the Qur'an, a practice that leads to awe, fear, reverence, and humility—

lights of character for the human soul. God the Exalted says, *And We set forth these examples for people so that they may reflect* (QUR'AN, 59:21). God offered the trust of faith and accountability to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused because of the enormity of the responsibility.

The most excellent names of God (*asmā'allāh al-ḥusnā*) are a wellspring of spiritual enlightenment. Scholars have encouraged reflection on the names of God as a priceless form of *dhikr*. The traditional count of God's names is ninety-nine, all of which are in the Qur'an.

He is God, there is no God but Him, Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving. He is God, besides whom there is no God, the King, the Holy, the Complete, the Source of Security, the Guardian, the Overpowering, the August, the Proud. Transcendent is God over what they associate [with Him]. He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. His are the most excellent names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. And He is the Overpowering, the All-Wise (QUR'AN, 59:22-24).

This passage is celebrated for the names it reveals of God. He is the *Knower of the unseen and the seen*. The Arabic word for *seen* here is *shahādah*, which literally means *testimony*, for every *seen* thing testifies to God's oneness. A poet once said, "How wondrous that man can deny God, while in every movement and stillness there is a witness and everything in creation testifies that God is one." When one says, *Subḥān Allāh (Transcendent is God)*, it is an affirmation that there is nothing comparable to God, who is completely free of any imperfection and is wholly transcendent, exalted beyond what mortals attribute to Him and beyond what even the learned know of Him. God determines that He will bring a human being into existence. This is God as *alKhāliq (Creator)*. It is His profound wisdom that the union of the male and female gametes in the womb of the woman be the way in which this creation takes place. This is God as *al-Bārī' (Maker)*. Those cells that result from this union differentiate and form the various parts of the body. The central nervous system becomes distinguished from the respiratory organs. Mounds of somites on the flanks of the fetus differentiate and form the hundreds of separate muscles in the body, as nerves

and blood vessels follow them. The clumps at the end of the arms endure a specific and detailed pattern of cell death, and behold fingers appear. Further, each fingerprint, each DNA, each human face is different from others. This is God as *al-Muṣawwir* (*Fashioner*).

All the separate names of God do not suggest that there is a linearity to God the Exalted. It is for human benefit that God's attributes are set in identifiable words that we may understand. Imam al-Ghazālī says that because human beings can only look at things from one aspect at a time, we require such revelations from the unseen. God is one in essence and attribute, and eternally so.

We live in the age of Noah in the sense that a flood of distraction accosts us. It is a slow and subtle drowning. For those who notice it, they engage in the remembrance of God. The rites of worship and devotion to God's remembrance (*dhikr*) are planks of the ark. When Noah started to build his ark, his people mocked him and considered him a fool. But he kept building. He knew what was coming. And we know too.

There is a growing denial of the Hereafter. Even among those who, when asked, declare their belief in the Hereafter, their deeds say something else. The essence of *dhikr*, then, is to remember that we're on a ride that has a definite destination.

There are important supplications that one should say everyday. One of my teachers said that if you are not in the habit of making supplication, then at least say the following everyday: "I seek refuge in the perfect words of God from the evil in what He created." According to a hadith, if one says this in the morning and the evening, three times each, there will be protection from harm or evil that day. There is the famous story of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd telling a group of Christians that nothing can harm a person when someone invokes the name of God properly and sincerely. The Christians challenged him to drink poison. Khālīd took the poison, as he made the supplication, and no harm came to him.

The next supplication is, "O God, I come to this morning with blessings and wellbeing and shelter from You, so complete your grace upon me, and [grant me] wellbeing and shelter in this world and the Hereafter." The Prophet ﷺ said that whoever says this

every morning three times has fulfilled his obligation of gratitude for that day.

Next the Prophet ﷺ said that whoever recites the following four times, it is as if he or she has freed a human being from bondage: “O God, I come into the morning bearing witness before You—and before the Carriers of Your Throne, all Your angels, and all of creation—that You are God; there is no God but You alone, without partner, and that Muhammad is Your servant and messenger.”

The Prophet ﷺ repeated a supplication that removes any semblance of hidden idolatry in one’s soul: “I believe in God the Magnificent, and I reject any sorcery and idolatry, and I hold fast to the firmest handle which never breaks, and God is all knowing, all wise.” It is said that this *firm handle* is the Qur’an and the model (or *sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ.

Next, the Prophet ﷺ said whoever says the following three times will gain the pleasure of God the Exalted: “I am content with God as the Lord and with Islam as the religion, and with Muhammad ﷺ as the Prophet and the Messenger.”

The Prophet ﷺ said we should say seven times in the morning and the evening: “God suffices me. There is no God but Him; on Him do I rely, and He is the magnificent Lord of the throne.”

As mentioned previously, asking God to bless the Prophet ﷺ (known as “prayers on the Prophet”) is a very beloved act of devotion. We know from a hadith that the Angel Gabriel gave glad tidings to the Prophet ﷺ: whoever says prayers on the Prophet ﷺ, God will requite the worshipper with a similar prayer from Himself, which is a great *rahmah* (mercy). God the Exalted bestows ten measures of His divine mercy when one says a prayer on the Prophet ﷺ. If one says prayers on the Prophet ﷺ ten times, God the Exalted will bestow 100 measures of His mercy. It is preferable to say this 100 times in the morning and 100 times in the evening. ‘Uthmān was known to repeat it 5,000 times a day.

The Prophet ﷺ also prayed, “O God, I ask You for good surprises, and I seek refuge in You from bad surprises.”

The Prophet ﷺ said that the best way to seek forgiveness is to say: “O God, You are my Lord; there is no God but You. You created me and I am Your servant. And Your covenant and promise I

uphold to the best of my ability. And I seek refuge in You from the evil of whatever I have done. I acknowledge that all my blessings are from You. And to You I bring my sins, so forgive me because no one can forgive sins but You.”

When one faces a calamity or affliction, he or she should say, “What God wills comes to pass, and what He does not will, does not. There is no might or power except with God.” And then, “I know that God is powerful over all things, and that God encompasses all things in knowledge.” And, “O God, I seek refuge in You from the evil of my soul and the evil of every creature whose forelock You take hold of. My Lord is on the straight path.”

These supplications are affirmations of God’s oneness and our dependency upon Him and no one else. We call on Him with His excellent names: “O Ever-Living, Sustainer, I seek succor through Your mercy, and I seek safety from Your punishment. Rectify all of my affairs and do not leave me to my own self or to anyone from Your creation even for a blink of an eye.”

These supplications affirm our need for safety, mercy, deliverance, and wellbeing—all of which come from God. A believer strives to affirm these realities through the medium of verbal declarations that, when spoken, connect with unseen dimensions of existence, reaching ultimately to God the Exalted. It is an immensely wise part of the belief system of Islam that we repeat our beliefs so that they never diminish in our hearts nor wane in their meanings.

Ja’far al-Şādiq said once to a devout atheist, “Have you ever been on the sea?” The atheist told him of one time when he was on a ship during a storm that tore apart his ship and drowned the sailors on board. “I was left clinging to a board. Then the ocean took the board from my hands, and I was left with nothing. An ocean wave then carried me to the shore, and I survived.” Ja’far said, “When you first boarded the ship, did you place trust in that ship? Didn’t the sailors also? Then God took those away from you; then you put your trust in that plank. And when you lost that plank, where did you place your trust? Did you hope that you would survive?” The man told him, “Yes, I did have hope.” Ja’far al-Şādiq said, “There must be an object of hope. Who did you hope for?” The man didn’t know how to

answer. So Ja‘far told him, “The one who took away all your means and saved you despite them—that was God.”

Even believers become complacent about where they place their trust. We often trust the material things around us, the shelter, the stream of paychecks, cupboards full of food, and so on. We can forget that all of this can be swept away, leaving us with the realization of our only true dependency. How many times have we seen storms take away everything from people: their homes, cars, clothing, and savings?

There is an overriding religious ethic in Islam whose truth is self-evident. If people are serious about living the covenant with God—a more solemn activity does not exist—then there is no choice but to keep our trust in God alive and to affirm our faith and belief in Him. This is not an activity for one day of the week or special sacraments performed a few times a year. This is not the way humans were made. We require a constant and conscious connection with God the Exalted. Supplication is an excellent way to enliven our spiritual growth. When we ask of God, we should do so with trust and certainty that God will answer it. Never should we supplicate with a lazy mind, distracted heart, ceremonial speech, or tone of sanctimony. Heartfelt supplication is far more efficacious. These formulas of *dhikr* and supplication have impact. The authentic testimonies of people receiving blessings from God in the wake of making these heartfelt prayers are numerous.

One should also say, “O God, I seek refuge in You from worry [*hamm*] and grief [*hazan*], and I seek Your protection from infirmity and sloth. And I seek refuge in You from cowardice and miserliness, and I seek refuge in You from the stress of debt and from being tyrannized by men.” *Hamm* is worry for what may come in the future, while *hazan* is grief over what has transpired in the past. This supplication, then, is seeking God’s protection from the past and from the future, which to God the Exalted are the same, since He is not limited by time or our perceptions of linear time. Infirmity (*‘ajz*) is not having the ability or power to do something because of some disability. Sloth (*kasl*), however, is having the ability but not the desire, the will, or the drive. Cowardice (*jubn*) is lacking the courage to be firm when firmness is needed, while miserliness

(*bukhl*) is cowardice with regard to money. The miser hoards his money out of fear and greed. *Cowardice* and *miserliness* are paired here because each refers to a lack of resolve to strive with the body and wealth. *Debt* and *tyranny* are put together because having debt makes a person beholden to the lender; he or she is enslaved if the lender is unprincipled. On a global level, international debt is a means by which powerful nations keep weaker ones bonded. Economic bondage is a world weapon. There is great wisdom in seeking refuge from debt and being weak before people, for the two go together.

Next there are many supplications of the Prophet ﷺ that ask for wellbeing (*'afiyah*). Scholars have said that after asking for guidance to Islam, one should ask for wellbeing in spiritual, physical, economic, and social affairs. "O God, I ask You for pardon, wellbeing, and constant safety in my religion, worldly affairs, family, and possessions."

Next is the supplication, "O God, cover my nakedness [or shame] and assuage my fears." All of us have aspects about ourselves (or of our past) that we regret and hope never bring us shame. Here we ask God, the Knower of the seen and the unseen, to cover our shame and not to humiliate us. Also, none of us is without some kind of fear. Fear has a way of making people vulnerable to acting irrationally and making terrible mistakes. What we ask for here is that God give us calm in times of fear.

"O God, protect me from before me and from behind me and from my right and from my left and from above me. And I seek refuge in Your greatness from unexpected harm from below me [that undermines me]." This comprehensive prayer seeks protection from all directions, literally and metaphorically. This prayer includes seeking protection from the cunning of Satan and his minions. We know from the Qur'an that Satan vowed to accost the Children of Adam from all sides. *Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them thankful* (QUR'AN , 7:17).

"O God, You have created me, and You have guided me, and You provide me with food and You provide me with drink. And You shall cause me to die and You cause me to live."

“We have risen this morning on the original pattern of Islam, on the word of sincerity, on the religion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and on the creed of our father Abraham, who was upright, a Muslim, and not an idolater.”

“O God, by Your leave we have come to this morning and by Your leave we have come to the evening, and by Your will we live and by Your will we die. And to You is the ultimate gathering.”

“We have come to this morning and the entire dominion has come to this morning belonging to God. And all praise is for God, Lord of all the worlds.”

“O God, no blessing has come to me this morning or to anyone else in Your creation but that it is from You alone. You have no partner. All praise and gratitude is due to You for that.”

There are additional supplications that one could say, including testimonies of God’s glorification and praise, if one has the time. The above supplications should be said everyday. At first it may take time, but once they are memorized they can be said quickly. They are shields of protection—great words associated with blessings.

When these supplications are said each day, you will see the difference in your life. If you skip a day, you will feel a subtle sense that something is missing or incomplete, as if you left home without clothing. First and foremost we should form this habit for the sake of God, for He commanded us to remember Him—the benefit of which is entirely ours. Sīdī Aḥmad Zarrūq said that engaging in regular remembrance is expressing gratitude to God.

It has been a long-standing tradition of the Muslim world that people have some kind of daily devotions beyond the obligatory rites. Obviously, there has been a decline in this. We have lost our remembrance of God. People are deemed “good” Muslims today only because they perform the daily prayers (which is, of course, necessary). But there was a time when neglecting prayer was nearly impossible. There were strong, positive social pressures to perform the prayers.

In Islam, the morning is a time of *sakīnah* (calm and tranquility). Our current culture of “rush” harms our sense of “day” and causes us to miss opportunities of spiritual growth. Speed has become the

chief premium: fast food, fast cars, fast rails, fast jets, fast entertainment, and the like. So much speed, but where is it all leading? People have little time to even stop and ask that question. Haste, it is said, is Satan's work. So take time with God, be with Him, in the morning and evening. No one is suggesting the life of a hermit. But do take time to purify the soul and protect it from the mirages and delusory things of modern living.

There is a difference of opinion about making supplications and *dhikr* in groups. Imām Mālik considered it to be reprehensible, though not forbidden outright. He maintained that there was no precedent of this in the actions of the Prophet ﷺ or his Companions. Imam al-Shāfi'ī deemed it to be permissible based on a weak hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ came across a group engaged in congregational *dhikr* but did not stop them. There is also the sound hadith in which angels travel the earth seeking out circles of believers engaged in the remembrance of God. Some scholars believe that it is permissible to have group *dhikr*, but not in unison, that is, not all speaking in one voice. Others say there is no prohibition in speaking with one voice.

The point is: remember God. The Prophet ﷺ told his Companions that the remembrance of God is the best of deeds, greater than *jihad*. Obviously, if one must defend himself, then this *jihad* becomes necessary. But *jihad* is a means, not the end. We were created to remember God.

Appendix: Ramadan and Purification

The month of Ramadan is a special time for purifying oneself, the greatest opportunity to implement the discussions and cures with regard to the heart. In fact, this is the purpose, blessing, and secret of the month. It is a remarkable event when the new moon of Ramadan is sighted, when eyes aim toward the horizon shortly after sunset and wait until suddenly a small sliver appears. Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al‘Arabī said in his commentary that the secret of Muslims following a lunar calendar as opposed to a solar calendar is that the sun is used for worldly benefits while the moon is used for *other-worldly* benefits. Witnessing the new moon is seeing *emergence*, as it is known in philosophy. The crescent suddenly emerges in the sky seemingly out of nothing. The reason the moon is not visible at first is because the sunlight is too strong. But as sunset progresses, the light diminishes on the horizon and the sunlight against the crescent itself becomes distinguished from the surrounding crimson sky. So what we actually see of the moon is the sun’s light reflected against the lunar sliver. In fact, anything that we see in creation is due to reflected light. And all light comes from God. Witnessing the birth of the new moon is pregnant with metaphor. The word *hilāl* (crescent) is closely related to an Arabic word that refers to birth (*istihlāl*). So what we see is actually the birth of reflected light. Witnessing the emergence of the new moon is a movement from *‘ilm al-yaqīn* (sure knowledge) to *‘ayn alyaqīn* (direct sure knowledge). The former corresponds to *bearing* a report from another, instead of witnessing the event in person. Imām alGhazālī gives the example of a trustworthy person reporting that there is a fire in the forest. This is different from seeing the fire itself, which is *‘ayn alyaqīn*, a higher sense of awareness, a direct witnessing that requires no report. But to actually touch the fire, thus affirming its reality and precluding visual illusion, this augments one’s level of cognisance. This is known as *ḥaqq alyaqīn* (true sure knowledge). It is related by Imām al-Ḥakīm that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The best of God’s servants are those who are

vigilant about the new moon and shadows to determine the prayer times, as a way of remembering God.”

In his poem, Imām Mawlūd went through many of the diseases of the heart. He spoke first about miserliness (*bukhl*). And what better time than Ramadan to shed this malady! It is well known that the Prophet ﷺ was the most generous of people, and in Ramadan he was even more generous. His Companions described him as a wind that bears gifts. Then there is *baṭar*, being gleeful and overjoyed with the fleeting things of this world. The person who fasts during Ramadan experiences an ever greater joy, one related to this world (the happiness of breaking the fast at dusk) and one related to the Hereafter (the ultimate joy of meeting God and receiving lasting bliss of Paradise). We know from sound tradition that God keeps secret the great reward that awaits those who dutifully fast and do so with excellence. There is great disparity between joy in material things and joy in the everlasting acts that survive one’s death and accompany them in the next life.

Bughḍ (dislike or hatred) is something more easily eliminated in Ramadan than at other times. The Prophet ﷺ said that the best charity in Ramadan is setting things right between people who are in conflict, even those who harbor hatred for each other. Oppressing or wronging others (*baghḍ*) is anathema to the ethic and spirit of this great month. Ramadan is about gaining position and status with God the Exalted. Moreover, fasting is an act of worship that outwardly cannot be seen in a person.

Love of the world is a disease that we wean ourselves of during Ramadan, for we voluntarily deprive ourselves of the pleasures of food, drink, and sexual intimacy. Love of praise is likewise struck down because Ramadan is a time in which we examine our shortcomings and build resolve and momentum to rectify them. For example, if we are remiss with regard to certain rites of worship, like the Night Prayer vigil (*Qiyām al-Layl*), we ride the momentum of the devotional prayers of *Tarawīḥ* and convert them to *Qiyām* after Ramadan passes. The same applies with paying charity, which is especially meritorious during Ramadan.

It is difficult to have ostentation (*riyāʾ*) in Ramadan for a number of good reasons. Ritual prayer is a conspicuous act, as is the

Pilgrimage and even paying Charity (*Zakāt*). Fasting, however, because it involves abstinence, is invisible. One can stare a person in the face and not know whether or not he or she is fasting, which makes fasting an impossible act to flaunt before others. Also, because many people attend the mosque in Ramadan to perform extra devotional prayers, a person prone to ostentation no longer feels so significant. You are one face among hundreds of faces. Ramadan is a time to break habits, which we do when it comes to breaking from consuming food and drink.

Being displeased with the *qadr* (divine decree) of God is a disease fueled by a lack of *imān*, that is, trust and faith in God. Ramadan is a time in which one grows his or her *imān* through the power of voluntary deprivation and patience. When one's *imān* grows, so too does one's understanding and acceptance of what God has decreed.

Rapidly, months pass before our eyes until again Ramadan is upon us. The first days may seem stretched, but thereafter they dash by. Having realization of the movement of time is part of the Ramadan project. To believe that one has a lot of time left in life is what Imām Mawlūd (and many before him, most notably Imām al- Ghazālī) refers to as *long hopes*, foolishly investing all of one's hopes for salvation for some distant date, as if we are guaranteed to live that long.

Bad omens and superstitions can be found in all societies and cultures. It is amazing how millions of people throughout the world make decisions based on what they perceive to be bad omens. Imām Mawlūd mentioned that the cure for this is simply to ignore these superstitions and, in fact, confront them without giving any thought about their ascribed powers. Hunger has a way of dropping the veils on a lot of things, including superstitions. When one experiences hunger, he realizes his utter dependency on God the Exalted and that only He provides and withholds; nothing can bring harm or benefit except by His leave.

Harboring suspicion, rancor, or negative opinions about other people is especially noxious in Ramadan. The same goes for all forms of cheating, vanity, and irrational anger. Ramadan is a month of remembrance, for we stand long in prayer listening to the Qur'an. As such, heedlessness (*ghaflah*) has little refuge in one's

mind and heart, which are busy with the remembrance of God. Being mindful of God and His awareness of what moves in and out of one's thoughts and heart expunges negative feelings.

Boasting and arrogance are starved in this month. How can they survive, while we admit our abject need of God and His generous provision? Who can engage in self-aggrandizing when it becomes plain that all that we have is from God the Exalted and is not some mystic result of our own talents and privilege? Profound dislike of being blamed, the fear of death, and other vices spoken of by Imām Mawlūd rise to the surface during Ramadan so that they can be more easily skimmed off and discarded.

All of these blessings of Ramadan come with the obvious caveat: nothing is automatic. This is not the system that God set in place in our lives and the world in which we live. Without effort and sincere trust, Ramadan can easily be just another 30 days in a year, no special moment. Even for those who fast, who mechanically deprive themselves without striving to reach deep into their souls for spiritual lessons, replenishment, and climbing, the month comes and goes with only the sense of inconvenience and then a celebration at the end. Then life goes on as it did the months of the year before. One cannot help but notice a tragedy in this: God so generously opens portals in time, truly special opportunities for us to grow, learn, and build for our Hereafter, yet people turn away from it with casual notice and perfunctory interest.

Imām al-Ghazālī speaks much about fasting in *Iḥya' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, in the chapter “The Secrets of Fasting.” He says that one of the greatest blessings God has given humanity to protect itself from the plots and clever machination of Satan is the fortress of fasting. It is a believer's shield. We have been shown in many verses of the Qur'an and hadith of the Prophet ﷺ that Satan makes inroads into one's soul through hidden gates. There are two of them by which the human being may be destroyed: *shahawāt* and *shubuhāt*. The former is sensory, relating to excessive pleasure (the stomach, the genitals, and all the corollary things that go with that). *Shubuhāt* relates to the heart, which is where Satan works first to create doubt and skepticism about what God has revealed and, in fact, about God Himself. (Satan has far less concern for the deeds of

idolaters, those who believe in a multiplicity of gods, or taint their monotheism with attributes that are wholly unbecoming of God the Exalted.) To lure the believer into doubt is Satan's game. To protect oneself from this is a personal responsibility. We are explicitly told that Satan's guile is weak (QUR'AN, 4:76) and that he has no authority except over those who choose to make themselves vulnerable and who are deluded (QUR'AN, 15:22, 16:99). So to shield against Satan's whisperings, one must guard one's creed and sound belief, and shun shady devices. This entails conforming one's worship with the *sunnah* or established practice of the Prophet ﷺ. It requires deepening one's knowledge in Islam and its various sciences.

If Satan sees that he cannot assail one in matters of creed and belief, he then comes through the door of *shahawāt*, lust and desire. Our desires are integral parts of normal creation and function. But when they evolve into masters that we consciously or unconsciously serve, this is a problem that can become severe enough to drag us outside the fold of guidance. For Satan, this door can be lucrative, especially with consumers of media who receive a steady stream of messages that make licentiousness and excessiveness appear normal. The Prophet ﷺ, told his Companions to be wary of Satan and his designs, for he flows in man's veins. Just as alcohol flows in the blood delivering its debilitating effects to the brain, liver, and other organs, so too do Satan's machinations and enticements.

The Prophet ﷺ said that fasting is half of patience, and patience is a quality indispensable for a successful life and Afterlife. Satan traffics impatience and despair, while fasting exposes the folly of both. The scholars of spiritual purification advise this: be patient with regard to food, which is the primary urge, and with regard to sex, which is the secondary urge. Conquer these two, the rest becomes easy. There is another hadith stating that patience is half of *imān* (faith). So fasting is a quarter of *imān*. There is yet another hadith stating that God the Exalted multiplies the reward for a good action ten to 700 times, except for fasting, "Fasting is My own and I shall reward it," which indicates the enormity of the reward for proper fasting. God says, *Those who are patient shall be rewarded*

without measure (QUR'AN , 39:10). Fasting and patience are deeply related; patience too is an important key to the opening of favors from God.

The Messenger of God ﷺ swore that the breath of a fasting person is more pleasing to God than the fragrance of musk. This is enough to know the expanse of the treasure-house of fasting. It is said that the sleep of a fasting person is worship; this is because his fast continues whether he is awake or asleep. This, obviously, does not apply to any other act of worship. Also, when Ramadan comes, the gates of Paradise are open, the doors of Hell are closed, the devils are locked up, and a caller calls from the angelic realm, "O seeker of good, come in this month, and O seeker of evil, cease."

With regard to the verse, *Eat and drink [in Paradise] with full content for what you had done in the days gone by* (QUR'AN , 69:24), Imām alShafi'ī says that these bygone days refer to those spent fasting. This is, perhaps, the great lesson of Ramadan, training the soul to forsake temporary sacrifice for a reward that far exceeds the measure of what we do. The sign of sound rational strength is putting off short-term pleasure for a greater long-term pleasure.

It is important to realize also that taking control of our desires defeats Satan. More than a dozen times the Qur'an gives notice that Satan is an avowed and open enemy to humanity who seeks to divert people from God's path and send them spiraling down to debasement in this life and the next. One very important armament against Satan is fasting, which shuts a door through which Satan attacks men and women. And God says, *If you help God, He will help you and make your foothold firm* (QUR'AN , 47:7). Of course, God the Exalted is not in need of any help per se. What "help" here means is actually helping oneself through such immensely beneficial acts as fasting, which vanquish one's caprice and control one's desires. Fasting for religious purposes is becoming increasingly alien in "pleasure societies," where the pursuit of worldly pleasure is so inordinately emphasized.

In a well-known hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said that during Ramadan devils are locked up. Why, then, do we still have bad thoughts? It is a common question. Scholars say that these thoughts originate from our own souls battered by satanic

whisperings and devices implanted in us. Another blessing of Ramadan now becomes apparent. It is a time to see what has happened to our soul, what condition it is in, and take notice of our shortcomings: jealousy, envy, overzealous competition, love of gossip, and the rest. During Ramadan, these traits become clear, and a clear enemy is easier to defeat than a slinking one.

Imām alGhazālī says that there is an outward and inward fasting. The outward pertains to making sure that the basics are observed, namely, abstaining from consuming anything or having sexual intimacy with one's spouse. The inward is about making sure that the fast is acceptable to God. The Prophet ﷺ, said that there are many people who fast but gain nothing from it except hunger and thirst. Outwardly, their fast seems fine, but inwardly they break their fast with such things as backbiting, lustful glances, lies, and other violations of the inward fast.

There are three types of fasting: the general fast, elect fasting, and fasting of the elect of the elect. The general fast involves preventing the stomach and genitals from fulfillment from dawn until dusk. This is something any Muslim can do. Fasting of the elect involves protecting the eyes, ears, tongue, hands, stomach, genitals, and feet against sin, small or large. Ibn al-Qayyim said that the body of the human being is like a country, whose capital is the heart and whose frontiers are the seven limbs. Satan reaches the heart through one or more of these appendages. Fasting guards the boundaries and trains its sentinels so the heart has a greater chance of drawing near to God.

The word *mu'min* (believer) comes from the same root as *amānah*, which signifies trustworthiness, in which one fulfills a trust he has been given. It is said that one has no *imān* (faith) if he has no *amānah*, that is, if he cannot keep trusts. God Himself, however, has given us trusts: our sight, hearing, and the heart itself, which generates the actions of the other limbs, are all trusts for which we are responsible (QUR'AN , 17:36). It has also been revealed that on the Day of Resurrection the only currency accepted will be a *sound heart*—not wealth or sons (QUR'AN , 26:89). A sound heart is one protected and nurtured. Likewise, *Whoever pollutes [the soul] has jailed* (QUR'AN, 91:10). We know that the soul and the heart are

trusts given to each human being. In fasting, God the Exalted is teaching us how to honor our trusts. Our tongues should be free of slander, lies, backbiting, abominations, and the like; our ears free of hearing the forbidden; our eyes free of lustful glances and other forbidden matters; our hands free of doing anything illicit, like stealing; our feet free from going anywhere prohibited; our genitals free from penetrating or receiving what is not permissible; and our stomachs free from imbibing or consuming forbidden and unwholesome food or drink or consuming in excess. These are trusts we must protect, and an indispensable method of protecting them is through fasting.

Imām al-Ghazālī says the higher form of fasting—the fasting of the elect of the elect—is the fasting of the heart from low aspirations or from worldly thoughts or gains. Ramadan is known as the month for spending for the sake of God—divesting oneself from material assets for the purpose of investing in the Hereafter. In the other months, we are busy acquiring wealth, while in Ramadan we are in the Hereafter-mode of thinking.

One of the scholars of Andalusia said the first degree of *wilayah* (saintliness) with God is to take one's thoughts into account, that *is*, to measure one's thoughts according to the scale of the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Sacred Law). Ramadan is the perfect time to take account of the lingering whisperings of the heart and mind. In Arabic, *‘āmiy* (pi. *‘awām*) refers to someone whose concern is in such things as the marketplace, which *is* a metaphor for worldly attachment. It is important to rise above that, to transcend. There are scholars who think that because they are learned, they are not among these *‘awām*. But this is not always true. There are street sweepers who know only the minimum of their religious obligations and only a few passages from the Qur'an, but their hearts are with God, while there are learned people who are worldly in their ambitions.

Imām al-Ghazālī said, “How many people are not fasting, but with God they are fasting? And how many people are fasting, but with God they are not fasting?” In other words, there are people who, throughout the year, guard their eyes, ears, tongues, genitals, feet, hands, and stomach from corruption. In reality, they are fulfilling the purpose of fasting. Yet there are people who fast

physically but with God they are not fasting in that they are not vigilant regarding the unseen aspects of their character and thoughts. When Imām alGhazālī speaks about the elect worshippers, he does not merely mean those who are known for their learnedness.

Imām Muḥammad ibn Saḥnūn conducted regular teaching sessions. One day a man came to one of his sessions, walked through the gathering, whispered in the Imām's ear, and then departed. He did this for many days straight, to the point that the Imām asked his students to leave a path for this man to make his way to him. One day the man stopped coming, and Imām Saḥnūn asked about his whereabouts. but the students had no idea why the man stopped coming and why he had been coming in the first place. The Imām then asked someone to find him. When he was brought to the Imām, he asked, "You stopped visiting me. Why?" The man said, "I am a poor man with daughters to marry. Some people who envy you offered me money if I would disturb you every day. And if I were able to make you angry and humiliate you in front of your students, they would reward me so that I can marry my daughters. But when I saw that I had no effect on you, I gave up." The Imām told him, "Why didn't you just ask me for some money?" This is the training of fasting, patience even in the face of insult.

The Companion Salmān al-Fārisī once was a Zoroastrian. He saw the elders of that faith lighting their sacred fire whenever it became extinguished. In fact, Salmān's father was one of the men in charge of keeping the flame. The elders would tell the flock that the flame miraculously kept ablaze no matter what. But Salmān knew of the canard. He went out searching for the truth and came upon a Christian monk with whom he spent some time. He saw him, however, stealing public money and burying it in his yard. So Salman left and came across another monk, who he found to be quite honest. The monk told Salman that the time had come for a prophet to appear in Yathrib and that he should migrate there. Salman was a seeker imbued with great patience, which is key to spiritual wayfaring.

The patience of the Prophet ﷺ was peerless, given all that he had gone through, all the tribulation that he faced. If we do not learn

patience from the act of fasting, then we have missed something about this great rite of worship.

Scholars throughout the ages recommended that in order to get the most from Ramadan one should not engage in excessive speech. This is an Islamic ethic that should be practiced in general. But in Ramadan, it is especially advised to be vigilant about what we say, since higher fasting involves guarding the tongue. Also, it is important to utilize our time well. This is a month that our righteous forebears would beg God to let them witness it six months before it came. And for six months after Ramadan, they would beseech God to accept the worship they performed during the month. This is how they viewed this great month. They wept when it passed, which is hardly the popular reaction of our current day. Ramadan is a merciful portal of time that opens and then closes. And none of us knows whether or not we will see another Ramadan. So seize the moment to gain God's mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. There *is* no capital more worthy of our concern and effort than this.

Imām alGhazālī said that the greatest proof of human deficiency is the fact that when a person does something, shortly thereafter he realizes he could have done better. The scholars say use the time, especially the night. Reserve a portion of it to read the Qur'an and stand in prayer. This is, of course, in addition to the *Tarawīh* Prayers. The Night Prayer vigil, even if short, is packed with goodness. If it is at the end of the night, then perhaps it is better to recite the shorter sūras, especially those that are associated with special benefits, like the closing verses of Sūrat al-Baqarah (sūrah 2), Sūrat al-Zalzalah (sūrah 99), and others. Also perform the Midmorning Prayer (*Ḍuḥā*), which is performed after the full rising of the sun and before the sun reaches its zenith. One may pray two, four, six, or eight *rak'ahs*. This is a prayer that the Prophet ﷺ did regularly. If one establishes these additional acts of worship during Ramadan, they may be carried over throughout the year, spreading the benefit of Ramadan through the other months.

Also, performing the prayers on time is considered a very important aspect in "establishing prayers" as the Qur'an reminds several times. We all know how tempting *it* is to delay the prayer to

its last possible moment. The obvious problem with this is that it can easily lead to neglecting the prayer altogether. Imām Mālik in his *Muwattaʿa* said, “The most important of all your affairs are your prayers. Whoever guards it and is vigilant about its times, he has guarded his religion. And whoever is negligent therein, he *is* negligent about all the other affairs in his life.” It is reported that near his death, the Prophet ﷺ said, “The prayer. The prayer.” So prayer is everything. There is no spiritual life without it.

Also know that the time between late afternoon and sunset is a special time for *dhikr* (remembrance of God). ‘Aṣr time (when the sun starts its decline) is the signaling of the end of yet another day we have been blessed to see. It is a time of contemplation of the metaphor it represents, the decline of our lives, with sunset signifying the end of a lifetime. So it is a time to remember God and reach out for His mercy. In this culture, however, people see the end of the day as an opportunity for entertainment. Taverns call it “happy hour,” when people go to drink and willfully become oblivious of life’s purpose.

As the Prophet ﷺ stated, there are two joys associated with fasting. One is the joy of breaking the fast, and the other is when one meets his Lord. Scholars make the analogy that breaking the fast is like meeting our Lord.

It is best to break one’s fast as soon as the sun sets. A date, milk, or sip of water would be sufficient. One should then pray the Sunset Prayer (*Maghrib*) before the meal. The time for *Maghrib* is short and goes by quickly. When sunset arrives, break the fast and make the special supplication: “O God, for You I have fasted, and in You have I placed my faith. And I break my fast on Your provision. So forgive me what I have advanced and what I have done, O Lord of the Worlds.” Also, “Gone is the thirst. Moist are the veins. And, God willing, the reward is assured.” If you eat at another person’s home, offer the following supplication: “May those fasting break their Fasts with you, and may the virtuous eat of your food, and may the angels pray for you.”

It is also meritorious to pray in the mosque and to observe the etiquette of being in a place dedicated to worship. One important etiquette is not to engage in idle talk that can deaden the heart.

Unfortunately, many people are afflicted with this and do not see their affliction. After the prayer, they linger around and take up senseless conversations. This is not to say that one should not speak at all. It is good to ask one another about health and other matters that show concern and keep love and brotherhood alive. But there should be something meaningful in the discourse.

If we are able to conquer afflictions, such as idle talk and other excesses, we should never belittle people who have yet to do so. We should not don the mantle of a judge and make sententious declarations about others. Instead, thank God for what He has given us. When the Prophet ﷺ saw an affliction in another person, he said quietly, "All praise is for God who granted me well being from what He has tested you with and has favored me above many in creation." It is not arrogance that one recognize a blessing that God has given him or her. Arrogance is when a person feels that he or she especially deserved this blessing. Know that God can take a blessing away and elevate others in rank and honor, even those toward whom people aim their condescension. Once a man falsely accused Mu'ādh ibn Jabal of wrongdoing. Mu'ādh made supplication against this man. When the man reached old age, he was seen doing unbecoming things himself and his eyebrows sagged over his eyes. That was a great trial God gave him in his old age for falsely condemning Mu'ādh without right.

As mentioned previously, recitation of the Qur'an during Ramadan is especially effective in reviving one's relationship with the Book of God. Imām Abū Ḥanīfah said that reading the Qur'an at least twice a year ensures that one is not estranged from the Qur'an or withdrawn from it. There is a verse in the Qur'an in which the Prophet ﷺ complained that the people have neglected the Qur'an (25:30), that is, they say what is untrue about it or dismiss it. Imām al-Qurtubī says with regard to this verse that on the Day of Resurrection the Qur'an will bear witness against those who neglect it, even those who have learned it but who stopped giving it proper attention. If one is unable to recite, then one should listen to a recording of the Qur'an. For those who are up to it, there is a seven-day litany of completing the Qur'an: the first day, one reads the first three sūrahs; the second day, the next five sūrahs; the third day, the

next seven sūrahs; the fourth day, the next nine sūrahs; the fifth day, the next eleven sūrahs; the sixth day, the next thirteen sūrahs; and the seventh day, the remaining sūrahs.

Throughout the centuries, scholars have written much about Ramadan. It truly is an exceptional opportunity to cleanse our hearts of the diseases presented in this volume. Of course, the remedies Imām Mawlūd speaks of can be applied anytime. But during the month of miracles—when the Qur’an itself was revealed—small good deeds are magnified and large deeds multiplied over and over again.

