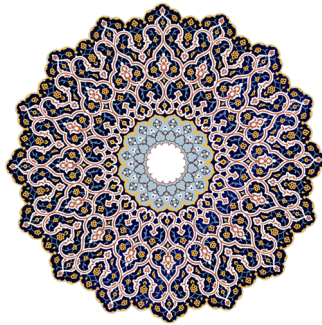


Purification

Revival of the religious sciences



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In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful.
May Allah bless Muhammad and his family and
companions and grant them perfect peace.

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BOOK 21 The Wonders of the Heart

21.1 Prologue: The Status of the Heart

Man's eminence and virtue—with which he surpasses many other creatures—lie in his disposition to know Allah, glory be to Him. This disposition is his beauty, perfection and pride in this world and will be, in the afterlife, his provender and supply. However, man's disposition for gnosis is through his heart rather than through any other organ. It is the heart that knows Allah and draws close to Him, and it is the heart that works and endeavours towards Allah. The other limbs and organs are merely followers and servants which the heart uses: it uses them like a master uses his slave, or a ruler his subjects.

It is the heart that is accepted by Allah when it is secure from other than Him; and it is the heart that is veiled from Allah when it is immersed in other than Him. And in reality, it is the heart that obeys Allah, exalted is He, for the acts of worship which are disseminated on the limbs are nothing but its lights; it is also the heart that disobeys and rebels against Allah, exalted is He, for the iniquities that flow through the members are nothing but its traces. The good and the bad outward character traits appear because of the heart's opacity or illumination, since each vessel effuses only what it contains.

When man knows his heart, he knows his own self, and when he fails to know it, he simply fails to know his self. Moreover, whoever ignores his heart is even more ignorant of others, since most people are ignorant of their hearts and selves. The knowledge of the heart and the reality of its traits is one of the bases of the religion and also the foundation of the path of the spiritual travellers.

Now that we have finished the first part of the book—investigating the acts of worship and the norms of daily life that the limbs perform, namely, the outward knowledge, and because we have promised to expound, in the second half, the destructive and salvational traits of the heart, namely, the inward knowledge—we must precede the latter with two books: one expounding the wonders of the heart's traits and proprieties, and another about how to discipline the soul and refine its character traits. Once done, we shall proceed to deal with the destructive and salvational traits in detail. Let us now turn to the exposition of the wonders of the heart, making this accessible by means of illustrative examples, for if we were to openly divulge these wonders, it would be beyond the perception of most people.

21.2 The Meanings of Soul, 'Spirit', 'Heart' and 'Intellect'

Know that these four names are profusely used in the following sections of the book. But few among the most learned scholars perceive these names, the difference in their meanings, their definitions and designations. Most of the mistakes, though, are due to the meanings of these names and their association with other, different names. In the following, we shall explain the meaning of these names only in so far as it serves our purpose.

21.2.1 The Heart : By ‘heart’ is meant two different things:

The first is the pine-shaped piece of flesh which is lodged in the left-side of the chest. Such a heart is also possessed by beasts and even the dead. When we use the term ‘heart’ in this book, we do not mean this, for it is a worthless piece of flesh.

The second is a lordly, spiritual subtlety which is attached to the physical heart. This subtlety is man’s essence, and it is the part of man that perceives, knows and cognizes, just as it is the part of him that is addressed by legal responsibility, and is punished, blamed and ordained.

When we use the term ‘heart’ in this book, it is to this subtlety that we allude. Our purpose here is to mention its traits and states rather than its essence as such. The science of the norms of daily life requires the knowledge of its traits and states, not its essence.

21.2.2 The Spirit : This term also refers to two different meanings:

The first is a subtle entity whose source is the cavity of the physical heart, from which it spreads, through the veins, to all parts of the body. Its running through the entire body and the effusion of the lights of life (sensation, sight, hearing and smell) from it to the organs is similar to the effusion of the light of a lamp that is taken from one corner of the house to another: every corner it reaches becomes illumined. Life is likened to the light that is reflected off the walls, while the spirit is likened to the lamp, and the inward flow and movement of the spirit is like the movement of the lamp in the different corners of the house through the action of its mover.

The second is the knowing, perceiving subtlety in man, and is the second meaning of the word ‘heart’ that we have given above. It is to this meaning that Allah, exalted is He, alludes when He says: {Say: ‘The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord.’}. This subtlety is an extraordinary, lordly matter whose reality is beyond the understanding and minds of most people.

21.2.3 The Soul

This term refers to many things, but only two designations are related to our subject: The first meaning refers to that which combines the irascible and appetitive powers in man. This designation is the one predominantly used by the Sufis, for by ‘Soul’ they mean the collecting-point of all blameworthy traits.

And this explains their use of such expressions as: ‘One must strive against the soul and break it: The second is the aforementioned subtlety which is the reality of man: man’s very self and essence. However, this subtlety is described in different ways according to the differences in its state. When it subsides to one’s control and is free of restlessness (which is due to the opposition of desires), it is called ‘the tranquil soul’. Allah, exalted is He, says: {O soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing!}. It is inconceivable that the soul in its first designation could return to Allah, exalted is He, for it is banished from Him and belongs to Satan’s party. When the soul does not subside but nevertheless resists and opposes the appetitive soul, it is called ‘the reproaching soul’, for it reproaches the person for his neglect in worshipping his Lord. Allah, exalted is he, says: {No! I swear by the reproachful soul . . . }

When the soul abandons protestation, submits to and obeys the requirements of desires and Satan's motives, it is called 'the soul which constantly incites to evil'. Allah, exalted is He, says, informing about the Prophet Yusuf and the wife of `Aziz: {Yet I claim not that my soul was innocent—surely the soul incites to evil—except inasmuch as my Lord had mercy}. It is also feasible to say that what is meant by 'the soul that constantly incites to evil' is the soul in the first meaning mentioned above.

Therefore, the soul in its first designation is extremely blameworthy, whereas it is praiseworthy in the second for in this latter meaning it is identical with man, namely, it is his self and essence that knows Allah, exalted is He.

21.2.4 The Intellect

This term is also used to denote different things, but only two of its meanings are of relevance to our subject:

The first is that it is sometimes used to denote knowledge of things as they are, and in this sense it is the attribute of knowledge whose locus is the heart.

The second of its meanings is that which perceives different types of knowledge, that is the heart, by which I mean that subtlety. Thus, we have explained to you that the meanings of these terms exist, and they are: the corporeal heart, the corporeal spirit, the appetitive soul and the intellect that perceives different types of knowledge. These are the four meanings that denote the four above-mentioned terms. There is also a fifth meaning which is the knowing, percipient subtlety in man. In sum, the four terms are used to designate any of these meanings. We have five meanings and four terms, and each term can be used to denote two different designations.

Most scholars are confused about the difference in the meanings of these terms and about the use of each term to designate different things. You hear them talk about thoughts. for instance, and say: 'This is the thought of the intellect,' 'This is the thought the heart,' and 'This is the thought of the soul,' but one who looks into these terms does not know the difference in their meanings. We have started with the explanation of these terms in order to clarify the issue.

Furthermore, whenever the term 'heart' is mentioned in the Qur'an or in the Prophetic Practice, it invariably denotes that entity in man which understands and knows things as they are. The corporeal heart is sometimes used metonymically to denote this heart.

21.3 The Soldiers of the Heart

The heart possesses two types of soldiers: soldiers that are seen with eyesight and soldiers that are seen only by spiritual insight. The heart is compared to a king, and the soldiers to servants and aides. This is what is meant by soldiers.

The soldiers that are seen with the eyesight are the hands, the feet, the eyes, the ears, the tongue, as well as all the internal and external organs: they all serve the heart and are subservient to it. These soldiers were created with a propensity to obey the heart and can never

disobey it. When it commands the eye to open, it opens; and when it commands the foot to move, it moves.

All these different soldiers can be grouped in three types:

The first type includes the soldiers that motivate and urge either to acquire beneficial, such as appetite, or ward off that which is harmful and incongruous, such as anger. This motivation can be referred to as ‘the will’.

The second type includes the soldiers that move the limbs to obtain what is required, and this is referred to as ‘power’. They are soldiers disseminated in all the organs of the body and especially in the muscles and sinews.

The third type includes the soldiers that perceive and recognise things, like spies do. This includes the power of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. These are disseminated in certain organs, and they are referred to as ‘knowledge’ and ‘perception’.

Out of these three types it is the third category that perceives, for if a man sees something and then closes his eyes, he would still perceive the form of that thing in himself, and this is called ‘imagination’. That form would then remain with him because of something that preserves it; that is the soldier of memory. This man can then think about the things he memorised and combine some with others to remember what he had forgotten and refer back to them, and then collect the meanings of all the sensory things in his imagination by means of the ‘communal sense’ that exists between all these sensory things.

The internal senses include: communal sense, imagination, thought, remembrance and memory. Had Allah not created the powers of memory, thought, remembrance and imagination, the brain would have been without them, just as the hand or foot are. Such powers are also internal soldiers and their locations are internal too.

These are, then, the categories of the soldiers of the heart. It would take too long to explain this point by giving illustrations in such a way as to make it accessible to the weak of understanding, this book being geared towards the benefit of competent, serious scholars. However, we will do our best to make the weak understand by giving examples that will make it easy for them to do so.

21.3.1 Examples of the Heart and its Internal Soldiers

Know that the soldiers of anger and appetite can yield completely to the heart and thus help it to tread the path it is taking and provide it with good company on its journey. But they can also be outrageously and rebelliously refractory, to the extent that they overmaster and enslave it and thus drive it to destruction and hinder it from its wayfaring through which it can obtain eternal felicity.

The heart has other soldiers, which are knowledge, wisdom and thought. What the heart should do is seek help from these soldiers—for they are the party of Allah, exalted is He—in order to defeat the other two soldiers which might join Satan’s party.

If it does not gain help, and lets the soldiers of anger and appetite loose on its self, it will certainly perish and suffer a great loss, as is the lot of most people. The intellects of most people have become subservient to their desire in inventing ways to fulfil their appetite, whereas it is their appetite that should have been subservient to their intellects in that which the intellect lacks. We shall make this easy for you to understand by means of two examples:

The first example: know that the body is like a city and the intellect—I mean the percipient intellect—in relation to man is like a king who rules it; the percipient power of the internal and external faculties are like his aides, the organs like his subjects, and the ‘soul that incites to evil’—i.e. appetite and anger—like an enemy contending with him over his rule and trying to destroy his subjects. Man’s body has therefore become like a garrison and his soul like someone who is staying or stationed there. If he fights against his enemy, defeats him and forces him to submit to what he wants, he shall be highly spoken of. If, on the other hand, he loses his garrison and neglects his subjects, he shall be cursed. And revenge will be taken against him by Allah, exalted is He.

The second example: the intellect is like a horseman on a hunt; his appetite is his horse and his anger his dog. When the horseman is skilled, his horse well-trained and his dog disciplined, he is fit to be successful in his hunt. But if the horseman is himself unskilled, the horse uncontrollable and the dog voracious, he is more liable to get hurt rather than to obtain what he seeks—with a horse that is not easily guided and a dog that does not respond to his directive.

The inexpertness of the horseman is compared to man’s ignorance, lack of wisdom and weakness of insight, while the horse’s recalcitrance is compared to the dominance of appetite, especially the desire for food and sex, and the voracious dog is compared to the dominance and overmastery of anger.

21.4 The Special Property of Man’s Heart

Know that Allah has bestowed the totality of what we have mentioned above on all animals, for an animal possesses appetite and anger, as well as internal and external faculties, so much so that when a sheep sees a wolf, it realises its enmity with its heart and flees from it. This is what is called intuitive perception. Let us now mention the special property that man’s heart possesses, in view of which his eminence is tremendous and because of which he deserved proximity to Allah, exalted is He. This returns to knowledge and the will.

The knowledge that we are referring to is that of the matters of this world and the next as well as of intelligible realities, for the latter are beyond sensory perception and thus not common to animals. In fact, necessary universal knowledges are the property of the intellect which rules that the same person cannot possibly be conceived as being in two different places at the same time. Such a ruling from the intellect applies to any person, even though it is known that it has perceived sensibly only few persons. The application of its ruling on all persons is something in surplus to what it had perceived by the senses. Now, if you have understood this in relation to necessary, outward knowledge, you will find that it is even more obvious in theoretical knowledges.

As for the will, once one realises by means of the intellect the consequence of the matter and the way of righteousness, a longing will emanate from one’s being towards that which is beneficial and, as a result, undertake its means and will it.

This will differs from the will for appetite or the will of animals, for this will goes against one's appetite.

One's appetite is repelled, for example, by bloodletting and cupping, whereas the intellect wants and seeks it, and pays money for it. One's appetite is also inclined towards delicious foods when one is ill, but the intelligent person finds a deterrent in himself against eating them, and this deterrent does not stem from appetite. Had Allah Exalted is He, created the intellect which informs us of the consequence of things, but not included this motivating factor which moves the limbs in accordance with intellect's ruling, such a ruling would certainly be wasted.

Man's heart stands out due to possessing knowledge and a will, both of which are lacking in all other animals. In fact, these are lacking even in the youth at the stage of primordial nature, and are only acquired in puberty. Appetite, anger, as well the internal and external senses, however, exist even in youth.

21.4.1 The Overall Qualities of the Heart, with Examples

Know that man carries in his physical nature and constitution four flaws, and this is the reason why he also possesses four qualities: predatory, bestial, demonic and lordly. Inasmuch as one is overpowered by anger, one engages in the actions of predatory animals, viz. enmity, rancour and attacking people physically as well as verbally. And inasmuch as one is overmastered by appetite, one indulges in the actions of beasts as such gluttony, avidity, prevalence, and so on. And inasmuch as one is, in oneself, a lordly bidding as Allah, most high, says: {Say: 'The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord . . .'}, one claims lordship for oneself and likes predominance, supremacy, authority, arbitrariness in all matters, and exclusive leadership; one also claims for oneself knowledge and gnosis. Understanding things as they are in themselves and coercive predominance over all created beings are also lordly attributes and man is avid to possess them. And inasmuch as man is distinct from the beasts by discriminating between good and evil while sharing with them the qualities of appetite and anger, he acquired demonic attributes. He thus became evil, using this discrimination to infer evil ways and to obtain his motives through guile, tricks, deception and showing evil in the guise of good. All these are traits of the devils.

Every man possesses traces of these four principal attributes—lordly, demonic, predatory and bestial—and all of them are gathered in the heart.

The heart is like a mirror. Praiseworthy impressions add to the clarity, radiance, light and luminosity of the mirror of the heart until the Real's theophany shines upon it, and the reality of that which is required in the religion unveils to it. It is in such a heart that divine remembrance settles. Allah, exalted is He, says: 'Their heart being at rest in God's remembrance'.

Blameworthy impressions on the other hand, are like black smoke which rises up to the mirror of the heart. It keeps accumulating until the heart is black, darkened and completely veiled from Allah exalted is He. This is what is described as 'the sealing' and 'the rust'. Allah, exalted is He, says: {No indeed; but that they were earning has rusted upon their hearts}, and He, glorious and majestic is He, also says: {Did We will, We would smite them because of their sins, sealing their hearts so they do not hear}, making thus a connection between the inability to hear and the sealing of hearts due to sins. Whenever sins accumulate on the heart, they become sealed and consequently blinded. They do not perceive the truth, or the benefit, of the religion; the afterlife becomes disparaged and this world aggrandised.

All of one's concerns would thus be directed to this lower world, and when one hears about the afterlife and the dangers thereof, this does not settle in the heart but rather enters in one ear and exits from the other, and one is not moved to repent and make up for what has passed. Those who are like this are described by Allah, exalted is He, as: {..have despaired of the world to come, even as the unbelievers have despaired of the inhabitants of the tombs}. This is what the darkening of the heart means, as it is stated by the Qur'an and the Prophetic practice.

21.4.2 The State of the Heart in Relation to the Categories of Knowledge

Know that the heart is capable, through its innate disposition, of receiving the realities of sensory data. However, the knowledges that it receives are divided into two categories: intellectual and religious. The former is divided into necessary and acquired, and the latter is, in turn, subdivided into worldly and otherworldly.

We mean by intellectual knowledges everything that the intellect's innate disposition requisites. This is not established through imitation or hearsay. The intellectual knowledges are subdivided into two categories: necessary and acquired. By 'necessary' we mean those knowledges that one does not know whence or how they were obtained. This is like man's knowledge that the same person cannot be in two different places at the same time, and like his knowledge that the same thing cannot be both contingent and pre-eternal, existent and non-existent. One finds oneself, from youth, predisposed to such knowledge without knowing when or how it was acquired. What I mean is that one is not aware of an immediate cause for it, for it is not lost to one that it is Allah who has created and guided one. Acquired knowledges are those that are obtained through instruction and proofs. Both categories of knowledge can be referred to as 'intellectual'. Religious knowledges are acquired through imitation of the prophets, blessings and peace be upon them. They are obtained by learning the Book of Allah, exalted is He, and the practice of His Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, as well as by understanding their meanings after receiving them as they were transmitted. It is through this that the quality of the heart reaches perfection and gains safety from illnesses and diseases.

Even though needed, intellectual knowledges are therefore insufficient for the safety of the heart, just as the intellect is insufficient in prolonging the causes of the body's well-being, since one needs to know the properties of medicines and drugs by learning them from physicians—pure intellect being incapable of discovering these properties—while one cannot understand these properties after hearing them explained, except by the intellect.

The intellect, therefore, cannot do without transmitted knowledge, just as transmitted knowledge cannot do without the intellect. Hence, he is an ignorant person who calls for pure imitation and complete suspension of the intellect; and he is conceited who finds sufficiency in pure intellect without the lights of the Qur'an and the Prophetic practice. Beware of belonging to either group: rather combine both principles. Some have thought that intellectual and religious knowledges are incompatible and contradictory, but such judgement is due to nothing but blindness in spiritual insight: we seek refuge in Allah from it.

Intellectual knowledges are divided into two categories: worldly and otherworldly.

The former includes medicine, algebra, geometry and the remaining crafts and occupations. The latter includes the knowledge of the states of the heart, the defects of spiritual works, and the knowledge of Allah and His attributes. These two categories of knowledge preclude one another.

I mean if one devotes one's full attention to one category and gains mastery in it, it is more likely that one's knowledge of the other category will be less. For this reason, `Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be well pleased be with him, describing the similitude between this world and the afterlife, said: 'They are like the two scales of a balance'. And he also said: 'They are like co-wives: if you please one, you displease the other'.

21.4.3 The Difference between Inspiration and Learning

Know that the knowledges that are not necessary, but which appear in the heart in certain conditions, differ in the way they appear. Sometimes they invade the heart as if deposited there from whence it does not know; sometimes they are acquired by means of proof and learning. That which takes place by means of other than acquisition and demonstration is called 'inspiration', whereas that which is obtained by proof is called 'reflection' and 'discernment'. Again, that which appears in the heart of the servant without his choice, learning or effort is divided into two categories: that which the servant does not know how or whence it happened; and that knowledge whose cause he knows, namely, the witnessing of the angel who casts this knowledge into the heart. The former knowledge is called 'inspiration' and 'pronouncement in the heart', and this is specific to the friends of God, and the latter knowledge is called 'revelation', and is restricted to the prophets. And the knowledge that is acquired by means of proof is characteristic of the savants.

The Difference between the Method of the Sufis and that of the Theologians

If you have understood the above, then you should know that the folk of Sufism are inclined towards inspirational knowledges above acquired knowledges. This is the reason why they were never keen to learn outward knowledge, study books or investigate the different opinions and arguments of scholars. They have always maintained that their method requires giving precedence to spiritual struggle, erasing blameworthy character traits, cutting off all attachments and betaking oneself, with great resolution, to Allah, exalted is He.

The theologians and the people of reflection do not deny this method or its possibility, or that it leads to such a result, albeit rarely. However, they deem it arduous, slow in yielding fruits and they doubt, moreover, whether its conditions could ever be fulfilled. They claim that complete erasure of all attachments is impossible, and even if it were possible under certain conditions, it is impossible for these conditions to last, for the slightest misgiving or thought disturbs the heart. Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'The heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the All-merciful . . .'; And in the midst of spiritual struggle, the temperament may become corrupted, the intellect muddled and the body sick. Now if this is not preceded with the discipline and refinement of the soul by means of the realities of knowledges, ill-founded imaginings will appear in the heart. The soul will find comfort in the latter for a long time before they disappear, and one life would then have then elapsed before encountering any success. Many a Sufi has trodden this path and then remained trapped in one imagining for twenty years. But had this Sufi mastered the outward knowledge beforehand, he would have immediately discovered the falsehood such an imagining. Devoting oneself to the method of learning is more reliable and closer to chieving one's goal.

They also maintain that the claim of the Sufis is similar to a man's abstention from learning Islamic jurisprudence under the pretension that the Prophet, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, did not learn it, and yet he became a jurisprudent by means of revelation and inspiration without revising or taking notes, so haply, through spiritual discipline and perseverance the same thing can happen to him. Whosoever thinks this has wronged himself and shall waste his life. In fact, such a person can be compared to someone who abstains from earning a living in the hope of coming across some treasure. The latter is quite possible, but remotely so, and the same can be said regarding the claim of the Sufis.

They also maintain that it is necessary first to acquire what the men of outward knowledge have acquired and understand it. When this is achieved, it is fine to hope for that which has not been unveiled to the scholars, for it could happen by means of spiritual striving.

21.4.4 Satan's Hold on the Heart through Insinuations

Know that the heart is like a building that has many entrances through which spiritual states enter all of them. It is also like a target towards which arrows are directed from all asides; or like a pool containing waters of different rivers flowing in to it. The permanent channels of these renewed impressions on the heart are: the five senses, externally; and internally: imagination, appetite, anger and composite character traits in man's temperament.

When a man perceives something with the senses, an impression of that thing appears on the heart; and when appetite erupts—due, for instance, to excessive food — an impression also appears on the heart. We mean that the heart is constantly changing and affected owing to these causes, and the most characteristic of the impressions that appear on the heart are involuntary thoughts. The latter include reflection and recollection, namely, one's perception either by way of renewed ideas or by way of recollection. Both are called involuntary thoughts in that they occur when the heart is oblivious of them.

It is the thought that moves the will, for the intention, resolution and will inevitably take place only after the occurrence in the mind of that which is intended. Thoughts are the origin of actions, then the thought moves the desire and the latter moves resolution, which moves the intention, which in turn, moves the organs (of the body).

The thoughts which stir desire are divided into two categories: those that incite to nil, by which I mean that which is harmful in the afterlife, and those which prompt to good, by which I mean that which is beneficial in the next life. These are two completely different thoughts, and this is why they have two different names. The thought that is praiseworthy is called 'inspiration'; and the thought that is blameworthy—i.e. incites to evil is called 'insinuation'.

The lights and darkness of the heart are due to two different causes. The cause of the thought prompting to good is called 'an angel', and the cause of the thought prompting to evil is called 'Satan'. Moreover, the grace through which the heart is ready to receive the inspiration of good is called 'success', and the motive through which the heart is ready to receive Satan's insinuation is called 'allurement and God's desertion'.

An angel is a being that Allah, exalted is He, has created, and whose mission is to emanate good, communicate knowledge, unveil the truth, promise goodness and enjoin that which is right. Allah, exalted is He, created this being and made this his job. Satan is, on the other hand, a created being whose mission is completely the opposite; namely, he promises evil, enjoins indecency, scares people with poverty when they are about to spend of their wealth [and so forth].

Insinuation is therefore the parallel of inspiration, Satan the parallel of the angel and success the parallel of God's desertion.

It is to this that Allah, exalted is He, points when He says: {And of everything created We two kinds}. The heart is pulled between Satan and the angel. Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'Satan touches the son of Adam just as the angel touches him. Satan's touch is evil promise and denial of the truth, whereas the angel's touch is a goodly promise and confirmation of the truth. Whosoever experiences the latter must know it is from Allah and should thank Him; and whosoever experiences the former should seek refuge from Satan.' Then he read Allah's saying: {Satan promises poverty, and bids you unto indecency}.

When man follows the requirement of appetite, Satan's hold becomes manifest. When, on the other hand, he resists desires and abstains from exposing himself to them, his heart becomes the dwelling of the angels. But since no heart is free of appetite, anger, avidity and greed, it is also certain that no heart is free of Satan insinuations. It is for this reason that Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'There is not a single person amongst you except that he has a demon.' 'And even you, O Messenger of Allah?' he was asked. 'And even I, except that Allah has assisted me to overcome him and made him Muslim, and so he bids only that which is good.' This is the case because Satan does not act except through the intermediary of appetite. Whomsoever Allah helps to overcome his appetite so that it is aroused only where it ought to be, and to the extent required, will not be called to evil, for the devil who is equipped with it will call only to good. When the remembrance of this world overcomes the heart with the requirements of caprice, Satan will find a way to whisper. But when the heart turns to the remembrance of Allah, exalted is He, Satan flees, his room for manoeuvre narrows and the angel comes along. Jabir ibn 'Ubayda al-'Adawi said: 'I complained to al-'Ala' ibn Ziyad about the insinuations that harbour in my chest, so he said: "The example of these insinuations is like a house into which thieves break. If they find something in it they take it, otherwise they leave it," meaning that Satan does not enter the heart which is free of caprice. This is why Allah, exalted is He, says: {... over My servants thou shalt have no authority}. Hence anyone who follows caprice becomes the slave of caprice rather than Allah's, and this is the reason why Satan is unleashed on him.

Allah, exalted is He, also says: {Hast thou seen him who has taken his caprice to be his god}, meaning caprice is his deity and object of worship. He is the slave of caprice rather than being God's slave.

Everything is countered by its opposite, and the opposite of all Satan's insinuations is remembrance by means of seeking refuge in Him and absolving oneself from power and might. This is the meaning of 'I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan,

there is no motion nor power except through Allah, the Exalted, the Might'. However, no one is capable of this except the God-fearing who are overwhelmed by the remembrance of Allah, exalted is He. Satan visits the latter only furtively in times of lapses. Allah, exalted is He, says: {The God-fearing, when a visitation of Satan troubles them, remember, and then see clearly}.

And Allah, exalted is He, says regarding their opponents: {Satan has gained the mastery over them, and caused them to forget God's remembrance}.

Just as desires are admixed in the flesh and blood of the son of Adam, so too does Satan's hold flow through his flesh and blood and surround the heart on all sides. Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'Satan runs in the son of Adam like blood does in him.'

With this consideration, the meanings of insinuation, inspiration, Satan, the angel, success and God's desertion have become clear. It befits every servant to stop at each thought that occurs to him in order to know whether he is touched by an angel or by Satan. He should scrutinise each thought with spiritual insight rather than with the whim of his nature, and he will not distinguish between his thoughts except through the lights of God-fearingness, spiritual insight and abundant knowledge. As Allah, exalted is He, says: {The God-fearing, when a visitation of Satan troubles them, remember [i.e. are made to return to the light of knowledge], and then see clearly}; namely, their equivocation becomes clear to them.

21.4.5 A Detailed Exposition of Satan's Entrances into the Heart

Know that the heart is like a fortress and Satan an enemy who wants to storm and capture it. Nonetheless, this fortress cannot be protected from the enemy except by watching its gates, entrances and breaches, and in order to watch these gates one needs to be aware of them first. Hence defending the heart from Satan's insinuations is incumbent; it is an individual obligation upon every servant who is legally responsible. Moreover, that without which an obligation cannot be fulfilled is itself an obligation; and Satan cannot be driven away except by means of knowing his entrances and, hence, knowing his entrances is obligatory.

Satan's entrances and doors are the servants' traits and these traits are many. However, we shall indicate here the greatest of these doors, which are considered like pathways vast enough to contain Satan's soldiers despite their abundance.

One of the principal doors is anger and appetite. When a person becomes angry, Satan plays with him like a child does with a ball. Another of the principal doors is resentful envy and avidity. When a person is avid for everything, his avidity renders him blind and deaf. Yet another of these doors is sating one's belly with food, even if it be lawful. Satiety strengthens appetites and the latter are Satan's weapons. And another of these principal doors is love of self-adornment, whether this relates to one's furniture, clothes or house. When Satan sees that love of self-adornment overwhelms someone's heart, he settles and gains ground therein. He would keep tempting him to refurbish his house, adorn its ceilings and walls and subject him to this for his entire life until he dies, all the while thriving for the sake of Satan and following caprice.

One of these principal doors also is coveting what people possess. This is because when covetousness gains the upper hand in someone's heart, Satan will keep endearing to him affectation and pretence vis-à-vis the person who is the target of his greed, through different types of showing off and deception, until this person becomes almost like his object of worship. He will think of all kinds of tricks to display his friendliness towards him and embark upon any way to achieve this.

Another of these principal doors also is hastiness and lack of ascertainment in things. Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'Hastiness is from Satan, and deliberateness is from Allah.'

Allah, exalted is He, says: {Man was created of haste}, this is because works ought to be carried out after discernment and knowledge, and discernment requires thoughtfulness and wilfulness, whereas hastiness does not allow for that. In haste, Satan propagates his evil to man from whence he does not know.

Another of these principal doors is [the love of] silver and gold and all other types of wealth, and the desire to have increase of the same. Yet another of the principal doors is miserliness and fear of poverty, for the latter is what prevents expending one's wealth and giving to charity. This is what tempts people to saving, hoarding and being exposed to a painful chastisement, something which the rich have been promised as is pronounced by the glorious Qur'an.

Another of these doors is displaying fanaticism for schools of thoughts and sects having rancour for their opponents and showing contempt and scorn towards them. Such things destroy both the devotees and the corrupt, for slandering people and busying oneself with the mention of their shortcomings is a trait in-built in one's nature.

Another of these doors is driving the common people—who have not properly sought knowledge—into meditating upon the entity and attributes of Allah, exalted is He, and upon matters that their intellects cannot grasp, and which makes them harbour doubt about the principle of religion itself.

Another principal door is having a bad opinion about Muslims. Whoever makes an evil judgement about someone else out of conjecture, Satan will entice him to backbite him and, consequently, perish; or he may fall short of fulfilling his rights, hesitate to honour him, display contempt towards him, or see himself better than him, all of which are among the destructive traits.

These are some of Satan's entrances to the heart. I would not have been able to be exhaustive, even if I tried. This much, nonetheless, gives an indication of other entrances.

21.4.6 Thoughts for which Man is taken to Task

Know that this is an ambiguous matter, about which there exist conflicting Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions, and reconciling these can prove difficult except for the savants of the Sacred Law. It is reported that the Prophet, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'The members of my Community are excused for the things they talk to themselves about, as long as they do not say them or act upon them. Abu Hurayra reported that Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: Allah, exalted is He, says to the guardian angels: "If My slave is on the point of committing a sin, but does not commit it, do not register it; if he commits it, register it as one sin. And if My slave is on the point of doing a good deed, but does, not do it, record it as a good deed; if he does it, record it for him as ten good deeds" This hadith was narrated by Bukhari and Muslim in their respective collections of rigorously authenticated Prophetic traditions, and it proves that the work of the heart and its consideration of sinning are excused.

As for that which proves that one is taken to task for these, Allah, exalted is He, says: {Whether you publish what is in your hearts or hide it, God shall make reckoning with you for it. He will forgive whom He will, and chastise whom He will}, and He, exalted is he, also says: {And pursue not that thou hast no knowledge of; the hearing, the sight, the heart—all of those shall be questioned of}. This proves that the work of the heart is considered like the works of hearing and sight. They are, therefore, not excused.

In our opinion, the truth of the matter regarding this question cannot be discovered unless one circumscribes the works of the heart in detail, from their origin until the act appears through the limbs. In this respect we say: the first thing that comes to the heart is the thought, the thought of a woman for instance, and she is on the street walking behind one, and if one were to look one would see her. We call this 'the discourse of the soul'. The second is the arousal of the desire to look, which is the movement of lust inherent in one's nature, and this arises from the first thought. We call this 'the inclination of nature'. The third is the judgement of the heart that this act should be executed, namely, one should look at this woman. This is because when one's nature is inclined towards something, one's resolve and intention will not be aroused unless all inhibitions are removed, for one can abstain from looking at the woman out of modesty or fear. This is called a 'conviction' and it follows the thought and inclination. The fourth is the resolve and firm intention to look behind one. We call this 'consideration to act', 'intention' and 'resolve'. Such a consideration can have a weak origin, but if the heart listens to the first thought, such that its enticement of the soul is prolonged, it is confirmed and becomes a categorical will. When the will is positive, one may regret it and abstain from action. One may also be distracted from it by an impediment and therefore abstain from acting upon or turning to it; just as one may be hindered by an obstacle which prevents him from acting.

There are here four states of the heart prior to acting with the limbs: the thought, which is the discourse of the soul, then the inclination, the conviction and then the consideration to act.

We say: one is not taken to task for thought because it is not subject to one's choice, nor is one taken to task for inclination and arousal of one's lust, for they too are beyond one's choice. This is what is meant by the saying of Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him: The members of my Community are excused for the things they talk to themselves about ...'. The discourse of the soul is nothing more than the thoughts that occur all of a sudden and which are not followed by a resolve to act upon them. The consideration and resolve to act upon these thoughts are not called a discourse of the soul.

As for the third state, conviction, and the judgement of the heart that the act should be performed, this is considered a middle position between compulsion and choice. Circumstances here differ; that which is done voluntarily one is taken to task for, and that which is not, one is excused for.

The fourth state, which is the consideration to act, is the state one is taken to task for. However, if one does not act upon one's thought and conviction out of fear of Allah, exalted is He, and out of regret for considering it, this shall be written as one good deed; because one's consideration to sin is a sin, but one's abstention and resistance of one's ego is a good deed. If, on the other hand, one fails to act due to a hindrance or another pretext, not out of fear of Allah, exalted is He, this shall be recorded as a bad deed, for one's consideration to act is a voluntary act of the heart.

The proof for this detailed explanation is the rigorously authenticated Prophetic tradition whereby Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'The angels said: "O Lord! That servant wants to commit a sin"—and He is indeed more aware of him than they are—Allah says: "Watch him, if he commits it, write it down for him as one sin, and if he abstains from committing it, write it down for him as one good deed, for it is for My sake that he abstained from it! Now, if one decides to commit a sin but could not due to a hindrance, how can it be written down for him as a good deed?

Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'People will be assembled on the Day of Judgement according to their intentions,' and we know that if someone intends one night to kill a Muslim the following day, but dies that same night, then this person would die as someone who is intent on sinning, and will be assembled according to his intention.

The most categorical proof, though, is the tradition that is reported from the Prophet, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, in which he said: 'If two Muslims attack one another with their swords, then both the killer and the person killed are in hell-fire.' Someone said: 'O Messenger of Allah! We understand that the killer should go to hell, but what about the one killed?' He said: 'He intended to kill his fellow.' This is textual evidence that shows that this person became one of the dwellers of hellfire because of his will, even though he was wrongly killed. So how can anyone think that Allah does not take people to task for their intentions and consideration to act? In fact, the servant is taken to task for any voluntary consideration to act, unless he expiates it with a good deed, for cancelling one's resolve to act with regret is considered a good deed and this is why it is written down a good deed. But if a person fails to act upon his resolve due to a hindrance, this shall not be written down for him as a good deed.

As for thoughts, the discourse of the soul and the arousal of lust, all of these are not subject to one's choice.

This is how the ambiguity of this question is resolved. He is bound to fall into error he who thinks that whatever runs in the heart is a discourse of the soul, and does not differentiate between these three categories. How is it possible that one should not be taken to task for the works of the heart, such as haughtiness, conceitedness, showing off, hypocrisy and resentful envy, when all evil acts are of the works of the heart? In fact, the hearing, the sight, the heart, all of these shall be questioned; in other words, anything which falls under one's choice.

21.4.7 The Swift Changing of the Heart

Know that the heart, as stated before, is surrounded with the aforementioned traits and states, and that impressions pour into it from the entrances we have described. It is like a target which is constantly under fire from all directions. Sometimes it is pulled between two angels, sometimes between two devils, and sometimes between an angel and a devil: the heart is never unattended. It is to this that Allah, exalted is He, points when He says: {We shall turn about their hearts and their eyes}. And because Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, was aware of Allah's remarkable creation regarding the wonders of the heart and its changes, he used to swear by it and say: 'No, by Him who changes hearts!' as he used often to say: 'O You who changes hearts, ground my heart on Your religion.' When he was asked: 'Do you fear, O Messenger of Allah?' he replied: 'How can I guarantee to be safe when the heart is between the All-Merciful's two fingers; He changes it as He wills.'

There are three kinds of hearts with respect to stability on good, evil or wavering between the two.

The first heart is one which is filled with God-fearingness, purified with spiritual discipline and cleansed of evil character traits. Goodly thoughts strike such a heart from the treasury of the unseen. And it is to such a heart that Allah, exalted is He, points when He says: {As for him who gives and is God-fearing and confirms the reward most fair We shall surely ease him to the Easing}. After cleansing such a heart of the destructive traits, it becomes, in its proximity, filled with salvational traits such as gratitude, forbearance, fear and so on.

This is the tranquil heart that is meant by the saying of Allah, exalted is He: {... in God's remembrance are at rest the hearts those who believe}.

The second heart is one that is God-forsaken, filled with caprice, and soiled with vices and blameworthy traits. Satan's entrances are open unto such a heart while those of the angels are closed. Evil originates in such a heart when it is struck by a thought of caprice and then it ruminates on it. And because the intellect is accustomed to serving caprice, Satan's power grows stronger. He begins to entice such a heart with the embellishment of this caprice, as well as with conceitedness and false hopes; and with this he will reveal to it tawdry speech as a delusion. As a consequence, the power of faith in God's reward and punishment weakens and the light of certainty dies out. It is to such a heart that Allah, exalted is He, alludes when He says: {Hast thou seen him who has taken his caprice to be his god? Wilt thou be a guardian over them? Or deemest thou that most of them hear or understand? They are but as the cattle; nay, they are further astray from the way}.

The third heart is one in which thoughts of caprice appear and call it to evil, but the thought of faith follows and calls it to goodness. The soul, with its appetites, is then dispatched to aid the thought of evil: this makes desire grow stronger, and enjoyment and carefree life look good. However, the intellect is then dispatched to the thought of goodness, resists this desire, degrades this act of the soul, imputes ignorance to it and likens it to a beast which jumps on evil without caring about the consequences. Upon this, the soul inclines to the counsel of the intellect.

This heart will waver between these two soldiers and be pulled by these two parties until it is dominated by that which befits it. If the overwhelming traits of the heart are satanic, then Satan will overcome and the heart will incline to its sort. But if the overwhelming traits of the heart are angelic, it will not yield to Satan's enticement and instigation. Rather, it will incline to the party of Allah, exalted is He, and the acts of obedience will appear in the [actions of the] limbs.

The heart of the believer is, therefore, between two fingers of the All-merciful—i.e. it is pulled by these two soldiers—and this is its prevalent position, namely, changing and shifting from one party to another. Perpetual stability with the party of the angels or with the party of Satan is rare on both sides.

22.1 Prologue: The Subject Matter of this Book

Good character was the attribute of the master of the messengers and is the best work of the true saints, just as it certainly is half of the religion, the fruit of the spiritual struggle of the God-fearing and self-discipline of the devotees. Bad character traits, on the other hand, are deadly poisons, unmistakable destructive qualities and vices that keep one far from the Lord of the Worlds. Vile character traits are sicknesses of the heart and diseases of the soul, each of which causes one to miss the everlasting life of the hereafter.

In this book, we shall mention a number of sicknesses of the heart and explain summarily how to remedy them, without providing any details, for the details shall be found in the remaining books of this quarter. Our goal here is to have an overall survey of the refinement of character and precede this with a method of how to achieve it.

22.2 The Merit of Good Character

Allah, exalted is He, says in praise of His Prophet and Beloved and showing His bounty upon him: {Surely, thou art upon a mighty morality}. Aisha, may Allah be well pleased with her, said: ‘The character of Allah’s Messenger, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, was the Qur’an.’ And the Prophet, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, said: ‘I was sent only to perfect good character traits.’ And on another occasion he said: ‘The heaviest of that which is placed on the Scale on the Day of Judgement is God-fearingness and good character.’ Allah’s Messenger, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, also said: ‘Fear Allah wherever you might be, and follow a bad deed with a good one, you will erase it, and treat people with good character.’ And of his supplications, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him: ‘O Allah! Guide me to the best of character traits for none guides to the best of them except You; and keep away from me the worst of them, for none will keep them away from me except You.’

22.3 The Reality of Goodness and Badness of Character

Know that people have spoken about good character, but they have dealt with its manifestations and not with its reality. Even then, they failed to encompass all of these manifestations, for each one mentioned the ones that occurred to his mind, or those he could remember. They did not direct their attention to defining or mentioning the reality encompassing all these manifestations in a detailed and exhaustive fashion. Showing the truth in this respect is more appropriate than quoting different opinions.

We say character (khuluq) and physical constitution (khalq) are two expressions which are conjointly used. It is said, for instance, that so-and-so is of good character and good physical constitution, meaning both his inward and outward are good. By ‘physical constitution’ is meant the outer form, and by ‘character’ is meant the inner form. This is because man is composed of a body that is perceived by eye-sight, and of a spirit and soul that is perceived by spiritual insight. Both of these have a demeanour and a form which are either ugly or beautiful. The soul, which is perceived with spiritual insight, is greater in standing than the body, which is perceived with physical eyesight. It is due to this that Allah magnifies its matter through ascribing it to Himself, for He, exalted is He, says: {See, I am creating a mortal of a clay. When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit in him, fall you down, bowing before him!}.

!}. Thus drawing attention to the fact that the body is ascribed to clay, whereas the spirit is related to the Lord of the Worlds. Spirit and soul being in this context one and the same.

Character is therefore a firmly rooted disposition in the soul from whence acts ensue with facility and ease without the need for thought or deliberation. If this disposition is such that the actions that ensue from it are beautiful and praiseworthy, both religiously and intellectually, then this disposition is called good character; and if what ensues from it are vile actions, it is called the source of bad character.

We have said that this disposition is firmly rooted because someone who expends his wealth in one rare occasion due to a contingent need cannot be said to be generous, unless this is firmly rooted in him. Facility and ease are necessary qualifications for the ensuing actions from such a soul, because the person who exerts effort or deliberation upon expending his wealth or upon remaining silent in anger cannot be described as generous or clement.

There exist here four things: the first is performing good or evil; the second is having the ability to perform them; the third is being aware that they are either good or evil; and the fourth is the disposition of the soul through which it inclines to either side, and by means of which either good or evil become easy for it to perform.

Character is neither of the first three things, for a miserly person can spend his wealth out of showing off. Character applies only to the fourth of the above-mentioned things, namely, the disposition with which the soul is ready to either give or withhold.

Character, therefore, is the disposition of the soul and its inward form. And just as the beauty of the outward form cannot be judged with just the beauty of the eyes, to the exclusion of that of the nose, mouth and cheeks (they have to be all beautiful so that the whole can be considered beautiful), so too the inward: there are four principal elements which must be good in order for character to be good. When these four elements are perfected, balanced and in proportion with one another, goodness of character ensues. These elements are: the power of knowledge, the power of anger, the power of appetite, and the power of balancing these three powers.

The goodness and advantage of the power of knowledge is that it becomes such that it is easy for it to grasp the difference between truthfulness and lying in speech, between truth and falsehood in tenets of faith, and also between good and evil acts. When this power takes place, it yields the fruit of wisdom. The goodness and advantage of the power of appetite is that it follows the indication of wisdom, by which I mean the intellect and the Sacred Law. And the goodness of the power of balancing is the regulation of appetite and anger in accordance with the indications of the intellect and of the Sacred Law.

The principal and chief character traits are four: wisdom, courage, continence and balance. The rest are their branches.

22.4 The Subjectability of Character Traits to Change through Discipline

Know that a person overwhelmed by idleness once expressed his annoyance vis-a-vis spiritual struggle, discipline, purification of the soul and refinement of character. He claimed that character traits cannot possibly be changed because temperaments are not susceptible to change. This person backed his claim with two arguments. The first is that character is the form of the inward, just as physical constitution is the form of the outward, and since one cannot change the outward form (the short cannot make himself tall), inward ugliness too cannot be changed.

The second is that people have claimed that goodness of character suppresses lust and anger, and he had tried it with long spiritual struggle but realised that this returns to the requisite of temper and disposition and the latter never leave man. Therefore, occupying oneself with it is a waste of time for no benefit in return.

We say in answer to this that had character traits not been subject to change there would have been no point in counsels, admonitions and disciplinary punishments. And how can this be denied in respect to man when changing the behaviour of beasts is possible? Indeed, a dog can be trained to desist from ravenousness and to behave in eating, as well as in withholding and emptying its bowels and bladder; and a recalcitrant horse can be broken. All this is a change of character.

In order to clarify this issue we say that existents are divided into two categories: The first category includes all that which is existing and perfect, its existence and perfection being already established. This includes the sky, the earth and the internal and external organs of the body. The second category includes all that which exists in an imperfect fashion, but which has the power to reach perfection when its condition is met, and this condition is connected to the choice of the servant.

A date-pit is neither an apple nor a palm tree. However, it is created in such a way that it is possible for it to become a palm tree if it is buried in the soil; but it can never become an apple tree even if it is tended. Now if a date-pit itself is influenced by choice in such a way that it accepts some conditions to the exclusion of others, so too are anger and appetite. If we try to completely suppress and dominate anger and appetite to the extent that no trace of them is left, we will definitely fail to do so. What we can do, though, is to subdue them and make them manageable by means of spiritual discipline and struggle. This we have been commanded to do, and it is through this that we gain salvation and arrive at Allah, exalted is He. It is true that temperaments are different, some being easily subject to change and some slow to accepting change. This is due either to the power of the temperament itself, or to the assertion of character through abundant action in accordance to it and by believing it to be good and acceptable.

As to the other illusion that they advanced as proof, and which consists of their claim that lust and anger never leave man as long as he is alive, this is an error on the part of a group of Sufis. The latter thought that the aim of spiritual struggle is complete suppression and erasure of these qualities. But how far from it! Appetite was created for a purpose and is necessary in one's innate nature. Man will die if his appetite for food ceases; and procreation will cease if his appetite for sex dies. And if anger were to disappear from man, he would not defend himself. Hence the goal is not to remove them completely, but rather to bring them to a balance which is a midway between immoderation and passivity. Anger, for instance, should be free of both recklessness and cowardice. In sum, one ought to be strong in oneself and besides this strength be compliant to the dictate of the intellect. It is for this reason that Allah, exalted is He, says: { . . . those who are with him are hard against the unbelievers, merciful one to another}. He describes them as 'hard' and hardness ensues from anger. If anger were redundant, fighting against the infidels itself would become void.

Besides, how can the aim be to completely uproot appetite and anger when the prophets, peace be upon them, were not free of the same? Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said: 'I am only human: I get angry just as humankind does.' And when words that he disliked were uttered in his presence he used to get angry so much so that his cheeks turned red, but this never prevented him from saying anything but what was right. His anger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, did not cause him to deviate from the truth.

Allah, exalted is he, says: {... who expend ... and restrain their rage, and pardon the offences of their fellow men}. Note that God does not say 'those who lack anger' thus referring anger and appetite to the point of balance, such that neither of them overmasters or dominates the intellect. Rather it is the intellect that ought to regulate them, and this is what is meant by the change of character. This is quite possible, for this is proven by both experience and observation.

22.5 Means of Acquiring Good Character

You now know that goodness of character is due to a balance in the power of the intellect, perfection of wisdom and balance of the powers of anger and appetite, and the fact that they are both compliant to the intellect and the Sacred Law. This balance takes effect in two respects: The first is by means of divine grace and innate perfection, so that a person is born with a perfect intellect, good character and becomes well instructed without an instructor. An example of such a person is Jesus son of Mary and all the other prophets.

The second is by means of acquiring these character traits through spiritual struggle and discipline, by which I mean forcing the soul to perform the works necessitated by the required character trait. Whoever wants, for instance, to possess the trait of magnanimity, needs to force himself to act like a magnanimous person by spending money. He should keep pushing his ego and force himself to continue spending, by engaging in spiritual struggle, until this becomes natural and easy for him. And with this he becomes a magnanimous person. Likewise the person who wants to become modest, being overwhelmed by haughtiness, needs to be diligent in doing the works of those who are modest over a long time. In doing so, he shall be struggling with his ego and forcing himself to accept this as a trait and second nature, until this becomes easy for him. All praiseworthy character traits appear in this fashion.

Pleasant character traits can be acquired by means of spiritual discipline; this requires initially a deliberate practising of the works that ensue from it, in order for it to ultimately become a second nature. This is indeed an amazing relationship between the heart and the organs. This can be illustrated with the following example. Whoso-ever wants excellent writing to become a personal quality—until he becomes a writer by nature—has no other way but to do with his hands what a skilled writer does with his, and persevere in this for a long time by copying good handwriting. He has to emulate affectedly the way of a writer until writing becomes in him a firm quality. Ultimately, he will be able to write well naturally, just as he was at first writing affectedly.

Thus you have learnt that good character traits happen sometimes by predisposition and innate nature, sometimes by being habituated to good works, and sometimes by observing those endowed with goodly works and keeping their company—they are fellows of goodness and brothers of righteousness—for natures steal away from other natures both good and evil.

Whoever combines these three sources of good character, so that he is a virtuous person by nature, habituation and instruction, has reached the epitome of virtue. And whoever is vile by nature, has bad friends from whom he learns evil, and the means of evil are readily available to him to the extent that he is used to them, this person is extremely remote from Allah, glorious and majestic is He.

Between these two positions there are those who have different shares in these three respects, and each one has a degree of closeness or remoteness in accordance with the requirement of his form and state. Allah, exalted is He, says: {... and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it}; {... and God wronged them not, but themselves they wronged}.

22.6 The Method Used in Refining Character Traits

You have learnt from the foregoing that balance in character traits is an indication of the soul's well-being, and deviation from this balance points to a sickness and disease in it, just as balance in the body's humour is an indication of its well-being, and lack of balance an indication of its sickness. Let us take the body as an example. The treatment of the soul by way of erasing its vile qualities and procuring for it virtues is like the treatment of the body through curing it from illness and restoring it to good health. Just as the predominant state of man's humour is balance (the harm that the stomach gets from food, climates and other circumstances being contingent), so too every new child is born with a balanced, sound innate nature, his parents being the ones who raise him to become a Jew, Christian or Muslim, namely, by habituation and instruction. And in the same way as the body is not initially created in a complete fashion, but becomes complete and strong through growth and nurturing with food, so too the soul is initially created incomplete but with an aptitude for perfection and the latter happens through discipline, refining its character traits and nurturing it with instruction.

And in the same way as the cause that changes the balance of the body and brings about sickness cannot be treated except by means of its opposite—if heat by cold, and if cold then by heat—then the same applies to any vile trait, which is the sickness the heart: its treatment is by means of its opposite. Thus the sickness of ignorance is treated with learning, the sickness of miserliness with generosity and the sickness of arrogance with humility. And just as in order to cure sick bodies the bitterness medicine must be borne and coveted things resisted, so is it necessary to endure the bitterness of spiritual struggle and to display forbearance vis-a-vis the treatment of the sickness of the heart.

In fact, the latter is more appropriate to endure and forbear, for the sickness of the body disappears with death, but the sickness of the heart—we seek refuge in Allah—remains after death, for eternity. And just as the dosage of medicine corresponds to the extent of the illness, the sheikh who treats the souls of disciples, too, should not overwhelm them with spiritual struggle for as long as he does not know their character traits and sicknesses.

. If a physician treated all his patients with the same medicine, he would kill most of them. The same also applies to the sheikh: were he to assign the same type of spiritual struggle to all his disciples, he would ruin them and deaden their hearts.

The above are examples which elucidate the method of treating hearts. Our aim here is not to mention the cure of each sickness, for this shall follow, but rather only to indicate, for the time being, that this method overall consists of treading the opposite path of everything that the soul likes and inclines to. Allah, exalted is He, recapitulates all this in His glorious Book in one sentence, when He says: {But as for him who feared the Station of his Lord and forbade the soul its caprice, surely paradise shall be the refuge}.

The most important element in spiritual struggle is being true to one's resolve. When one decides to leave a desire, this indicates that its means have become readily accessible, and this should be considered as a test and trial from Allah, exalted is He. Hence one ought to be patient and persevere, for if one gets the soul used to abandoning one's resolve, it becomes corrupt. However, if it does happen that one cancels out one's resolve, one should punish oneself for it.

22.7 Signs of the Sicknesses of the Heart

Know that every organ of the body is created to fulfil a specific job, its sickness being its inability to perform the job it was created to fulfil, so that it either cannot do this job at all, or only do it with some disorder. Thus the sickness of the hand is its inability to strike, and the sickness of the eye its inability to see. Likewise the inability of the heart is its inability to perform the job it was created to fulfil, which is knowledge, wisdom, gnosis and the love of Allah, exalted is He. He is sick of heart he who loves anything more than he loves Allah, exalted is He.

These are the signs of sickness, and thus one realises that all the hearts are sick except as Allah wills. Some of these sicknesses are unknown to the person who carries them, and the sickness of the heart is one of them. This is why a person who may be sick of heart can be oblivious of this sickness. And even if he was aware of it, it could prove difficult for him to endure the bitterness of its cure—its medicine being the opposition of desires, which is like snatching his life away. And even if he finds the strength to endure the bitterness of its cure, he may fail to find a skilled physician to treat him, for the physicians are none other than the men of knowledge and these are also overcome by sickness. A sick physician will seldom bother to treat him. This is why the disease has become incurable and the sickness chronic; this knowledge has vanished and the medicine of hearts has been completely denied and its sickness confuted.

The sign of regaining health after treatment should be sought in the disease that is being treated. If it is miserliness which is treated, then its treatment lies in giving and spending wealth; but one can spend to the point of becoming a spendthrift and, in consequence, spendthriftness becomes a disease. It is like treating cold with heat until heat predominates and becomes a disease itself. What is required is balance between heat and cold, just as it is required to have balance between spendthriftness and miserliness, so one is midway between the two and extremely far from either.

But since the real middle way is extremely obscure—this is the straight path in this world—it is incumbent on every servant to call upon Allah seventeen times a day by saying: {Guide us in the straight path} for it is obligatory to read the opening sura of the Qur'an in every unit of the prayer.

22.8 The Way through which the Defects of the Soul are Recognised

Know that when Allah, glorious and majestic is He, wishes good for a servant He makes him aware of the defects of his soul. He who possesses a sharp spiritual insight cannot fail to recognise his defects, and when he recognises them, he is in a position to treat them. However, most people are ignorant of the defects of their souls: one of them notices a mote in his brother's eye, but fails to notice a beam in his own eye. He who wishes to recognise the defects of his soul has four different ways.

The first is to sit with a sheikh who is an expert on the defects of the soul and is acquainted with hidden defects; submit himself to him and follow his instructions in the course of his spiritual struggle. This is the case of a novice with his sheikh, and a disciple with his master. Such a master would disclose to his disciple his defects and show him how to treat them. In these times, the likes of such are rare.

The second is that one seeks a truthful, insightful and religious friend and names him as a watchman over one's own self in order to observe one's states and actions and point out anything that he dislikes. This is what the intelligent and great amongst the masters of the religion used to do. 'Omar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be well pleased with him, used to say: 'May Allah's mercy be on a person who gifts me my defects: He also used to ask Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman and say: 'You are the privy of Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, about the hypocrites; do you see any trace of hypocrisy in me?' This is how, may Allah be well pleased with him, he used to reproach himself despite the sublimity of his rank and exalted nature of his position.

Anyone who is of greater intelligence and higher rank would be less conceited about his own self and more reproachful of it. This is also very rare; few among one's friends avoid flattery and inform one of one's own defects, or alternatively few of them avoid resentful envy and thus do not mention anything that exceeds the extent of that which ought to be mentioned. It is for this reason that Dawud al Tai deserted people. When he was asked why he did not mix with people he said: 'What do I have to do with people who hide my defects from me?' The early Muslims used to love being told about their faults, but it came to be that the most dreaded person in our eyes is he who counsels and informs us of our faults. If this shows anything, it almost shows weakness of faith.

The third way is to acquire the knowledge of one's defects from the tongues of one's enemies, for a discontent eye reveals shortcomings. And it may happen that a man may benefit from a hostile enemy who mentions his defects more than he would from a flattering friend who praises him while hiding his faults.

The fourth way is that one mixes with people and tasks oneself to task for every blameworthy trait that one sees in people and attributes it to oneself. One should see in other people's faults one's own faults, and should further know that temperaments are similar in following caprice. One should therefore inspect one's own soul and cleanse it of everything that one dispraises in other people. This should suffice as a method of discipline. If all people were to eschew that which they dislike in others, they would be in no need of an instructor.

22.9 The Signs of Good Character

Know that every man is initially ignorant of the defects of his soul, and when he fights his soul to some degree and succeeds in avoiding the enormous transgressions, he may think that he has refined his soul and beautified his character and that he can do without spiritual struggle. For this reason, it is necessary to clarify what goodness of character is, for goodness of character is tantamount to faith, and badness of character to hypocrisy.

Allah, exalted is He, mentions in His Book the attributes of the believers and the hypocrites and these attributes are, generally, the fruits of good and bad character. Let us mention some of these attributes so that one recognises the signs of good character. Allah, exalted is He, says: {Prosperous are the believers who in their prayers are humble and from idle talk turn away and at almsgiving are active and guard their private parts save from their wives and what their right hands own then being not blameworthy [but whosoever seeks after more than that, those are the transgressors] and who preserve their trusts and their covenant and who observe their prayers. Those are the inheritors who shall inherit paradise therein dwelling forever}. And He also says, glorified and majestic is He: {Those who repent, those who serve, those who pray, those who journey, those who bow, those who prostrate themselves, those who bid to honour and forbid dishonour, those who keep God's bounds—and give thou good tidings to the believers . . .}. And He also says, glorious and majestic is He: {Those only are believers who, when God is mentioned, their hearts quake, and when His signs are recited to them, it increases them in faith, and in their Lord they put their trust, those who perform the prayer, and expend of what We have provided them, those in truth are the believers}. And He also says, exalted is He: {The servants of the All-merciful are those who walk on the earth modestly and who, when the ignorant address them, say, Peace}, up to the end of the sura.

Whoever is unclear about his state, let him subject himself to these Quranic verses. To have all these attributes is a sign of good character and to lack all of them is a sign of bad character, while to have some and lack others indicates that one has a share in whatever he has. If this is the case, he should endeavour to acquire what he lacks and preserve what he has.

Moreover, Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, described the believer with abundant descriptions and in doing so he only pointed to good character traits. He said: 'The believer loves for his brother what he loves for himself,' 'Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him honour his guest,' 'Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him honour his neighbour,' 'Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him say something good, or else keep silent.' And he also said, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him: 'A believer is he whose good deeds please him and whose bad deeds displease him.'

The first thing with which good character is tested is forbearance of harm and endurance of estrangement. The fact that a person complains about other people's bad character is itself an indication that his character is bad, for goodness of character entails forbearance of harm.

It is related that Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, was one day walking along with Anas when a Bedouin came up suddenly and pulled him hard by his thickly outlined Najrani cloak. Anas said: 'I looked at the neck of Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, and saw that the outline of the cloak had left a mark because of pulling it hard.' The Bedouin said: 'O Muhammad! Give me of the wealth of Allah that you have.' Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, turned around, smiled and ordered that he be given [something].

It is also related that 'Ali, may Allah be well pleased with him, called a slave-boy but he did not answer him. He called him a second time and a third but he still did not answer. So he went up to him and found him lying down. 'Did you not hear me calling you?' he asked. 'I did,' answered the boy. 'Then why did you not answer me?' asked 'Ali. The boy said: 'I felt safe from your punishment, so I relaxed. 'Go! You are free,' said Ali.

A man insulted al-Ahnaf ibn Qays, but the latter did not retaliate. Even so the man kept following him about and insulting him. When al-Ahnaf came near his neighbourhood he stopped and said: 'If you still have something you would like to say, say it now lest some of the fools of this neighbourhood hear you and proceed to harm you.' A woman once said to Malik ibn Dinar, may Allah have mercy on his soul: 'You hypocrite!' so he answered: 'O woman! You have found my [real] name which the people of Basra have lost.'

Such souls were humbled with spiritual discipline and, consequently, their character traits grew strong and upright. They purified their inwards from cheating, malice and rancour and, as a result, yielded the fruit of contentment regarding all that is destined by Allah, exalted is He. And this is the epitome of goodness of character. Whoever does not find these signs in his own self ought not to be deluded and think that he possesses good character. He should rather occupy himself with spiritual discipline and struggle until he attains to the degree of good character.

