PURIFICATION OF THE SELF

An introductory reader to the *Science of Purification of the Self*

by

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Introduction

1. What is Ṣaʿādah (Happiness)?

When asked about the goal of life, who would not exclaim: happiness and contentment!

But what is happiness?  Ibn Khaldūn (Allāh’s ₦ mercy be upon him) writes:

السعادة هي حصول النعيم واللذة باستيفاء كل غريزة ما يشتاق إليه مقتضى طبيعتها.

_Happiness is the attainment of pleasure and delight by the acquisition of that which every gharīzah (natural inclination) longs for and desires in accord with its own nature._

Each _gharīzah_ possesses certain needs. When it achieves those needs, it experiences or attains pleasure. And this is its happiness. The ‘stomach,’ the vessel for the _gharīzah_ of eating, for example, attains its delight by eating and drinking; the olfactory senses by smelling beautiful scents; and the ear by listening to pleasurable sounds. Overall happiness is the sum total of the delights experienced by every _gharīzah_.

Happiness varies in quality, duration and intensity. The most noble happiness, however, can only be experienced by the _qalb_ قلب (heart). The _qalb_ is not a physical entity. It is a creation of _Allāh_ ₪ from the world of the unseen. It is connected in an unknown and imperceptible way to the physical heart – akin, for example, to the relationship between the brain and the mind. The _qalb_ is an organ of cognition; it was created to know and to love. Various forms of knowledge infuse the _qalb_ with varying forms of delight. Some _qulūb_ (plural of _qalb_) find delight in prose and poetry, others in math and natural sciences, yet others in the culinary arts, and so forth. Different ‘knowables’ confer qualitatively different pleasures. Some knowables confer more pleasure than others – the degree of delight based on the subject of knowledge that is being sought.
And what is the greatest object of knowledge, the end beyond which there is no end to be known? It is surely Allāh ﷺ, the Creator of knowledge itself, the Creator and the Source of happiness, the Creator and Source of peace, the Creator and Source of love, the Creator and Source of all that is. Every perfection besides Him is imperfection. The qulūb of the inhabitants of jannah attain perfect happiness and peace when allowed to be in His presence and know Him. The scribe of this ummah, Ibn ‘Abbās (Allāh ﷺ be pleased with him), once noted that to show ‘ubūdiyyah (servitude to Allāh ﷺ) is to know Him ﷺ. Knowledge and ‘ubūdiyyah are inseparable. ‘Ilm (knowledge) that enables us to know Allāh ﷺ is the most valuable and the most noble of all knowledge. The serene overwhelming quality of happiness it engenders is irreplaceable. Every delight in its absence is pain. The happiness of the qalb, however, does not offer itself without pursuit, just as the eyes and ears that are not clean and healthy will not be able to enjoy the delights of sights and sounds. The qalb needs to be alive and healthy in order to attain its own happiness. The qalb needs to be cleansed and purified.

2. Purification (Tazkiyah) and Happiness

Happiness is defined, sought and experienced by people according to the state of their nafs (lower selves). True happiness is the happiness of the righteous, those who are correct in their beliefs and conduct, and, with Allāh’s ﷺ permission, are able to correct and rectify others. We must learn about and aspire to experience the unsurpassable happiness of the righteous. One ṣāliḥ of the early salaf stated: “If the kings or sons of kings knew the joy that we rejoiced in, they would fight us for it with their swords.” Yet another said: “My heart experiences such moments of serene delight that if the people in paradise are experiencing it, they surely are living in great happiness.” The scholar Ibn Taymiyah (Allāh’s ﷺ mercy be upon him), characterized the delight of this
happiness as follows:

في الدنيا جنة، من لم يدخلها لم يدخل جنة الآخرة.

There is a paradise in this lower world; whoever does not enter it will not enter the paradise in the Hereafter.

The happiness of the righteous in this world results from feeling ‘uns (solace, intimacy and connectedness) with Allāh ﷻ. In one verse, Allāh ﷻ promises:

\[\text{﴾ … طَيِّبَةٌ حِيَّةٌ فَلَنْحَيْنِهَا ﻣُؤْمِنٌ ﻭَﻫُوَ ﻭَأَﻧْثِيَ ﻭَأَذْكُﺭُ ﻣُنَّ صَﻼَﺣٍ ﻋَمْلٍ ﴾} \]

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward ...

(16:97)

What is purer and more fulfilling than intimate moments of solace with Allāh ﷻ, with the qalb enveloped in the delight of His remembrance? Which of two hearts is more desirable: one at peace – like a serene, still pond constantly fed with the purest water from deep springs within it – or one agitated, scattered in multiple directions, unable to find rest, unable to catch even a glimpse of its true nature and happiness?

The world, and everything in it, was created both to reveal and to veil Allāh ﷻ. Everything in this world – a rose, a still pond, a swaying leaf, the smile of a newborn – possesses this dual ability. Either Allāh ﷻ, His Majesty and attributes, are manifested or they are foreclosed from us depending on the perception and purity of our hearts. The happiness of seeking solace with Allāh ﷻ is, by nature, fleeting. It escapes us because of our human imperative. Were the world only to reveal Allāh ﷻ, we would never be able to stand His Majesty (Jalāl). Life, in its human mode, and our experience of existence, would be impossible. Our awe would overwhelm us. It is precisely the nature of life and its veiling dimension that tests and tries us.

*Tazkiyyah* means cleansing, purifying and growing. Specifically, it refers to the process
of cleansing and purifying the qalb. The aim of this dunyā should be the nurturing of a qalb that is healthy and sound, or salīm. A sound qalb lives in a persistent state of health and soundness. This and only this state of health brings salvation in the Hereafter. Ibrahim (Allāh’s ﷲ peace be upon him) prayed:

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\text{و لا تخزني يوم يبعثون, يوم لا ينفع مال ولا بنون, إلا من أتى الله بقلب سليم.}
\]

And do not disgrace me on the Day they are [all] resurrected - the Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children. But only one who comes to Allāh with a sound heart. (26:87-89)

A contaminated qalb is obscured and thus prevented from experiencing its own happiness (saʿādah), for the qalb that is veiled is unable to perceive the knowables as they actually are. And, the most noble of all to be known is Allāh ﷲ. The world, in a veiled qalb, cannot be seen with clarity. Rather, it is seen through the mistand haze of such characteristics as vanity, arrogance, greed and misplaced love and fear. Indeed, the world becomes merely a reflection of the diseased qalb. And our wrongful external conduct contributes to the worsening of the illness of the qalb.

The qalb is stained and darkened by the presence of sins (dhunūb – plural of dhanb). Dhunūb generate an imperceptible veil over the qalb, and disconnects the qalb from its very source of life and happiness – Allāh ﷲ. Dhunūb thwart us in our effort to take the journey back to Allāh ﷲ – a journey we were born to undertake not with any physical means but with the wings of our qulūb (hearts). The qalb is the greatest prize in the universe and our sight through this world into the next; losing it means losing everything.

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\text{و من كان في هذه أعمى فهو في الآخرة أعمى و أضل سبيلاً}
\]

And whoever is blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter and more astray in way. (17:72)
... For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts. (22:46)

If our qalb is lost to us, we will never experience the delight of knowing Allāh ﷺ. The most refined spirituality, the aim of the wise among the seekers, is to be filled with the delight of knowing Allāh in this life. And how many are they who have taken this path before us? How many are they who are far ahead in this procession, this caravan that has been journeying to Allāh ﷺ since the start of creation? Such a wondrous chain of travelers: the Anbiyā’ (Allāh’s ﷺ peace be upon them), the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. What glorious companionship! But where am I? Have I even begun?
THE CYCLE OF TAZKIYAH
Overview

After an introductory understanding of Purification of the Self or *tazkiyah* and its relationship to happiness, we need to examine the core theoretical and practical components of *tazkiyah* and how they relate to one another.

The core components of *tazkiyah*, taken from the primary texts of Islam, the Qur’an and the Sunnah, and agreed-upon by the masters in the field, are three:

1. ʿIlm or Knowledge;
2. *Tawbah* or Repentence; and
3. *Mujāhadah* or Struggle

These essential components necessary for the purification of the self are inter-related. Knowledge or ʿilm, leads to repentence or *tawbah*, which leads to struggle against the self or *mujāhadah* against the *nafs* in its various forms. Each station is intrinsically linked to the next and is a necessary stepping-stone to the one that follows.

With every completion of the cycle, there is, by Allāh’s ℏ grace, purification of the self.

The cycle continues as *tazkiyah* is our lifetime journey towards Allāh ℏ.

The remaining chapters of this work will examine each station in turn as well as three of the most important elements of *mujāhadah* – *dhikr* or remembrance, *khalwah* or retreat, and *ṣam̃t* or quietness.

The components of *tazkiyah* can be illustrated as a cycle, as follows:
Ilm

Tawbah

Mujāhadah

Silence & Quietness

Solitude & Retreat

Less Sleeping

Less Eating

Remembrance

Less

Eating

Less

Sleeping

Less
العلم والتوبة والمجاهدة

KNOWLEDGE, REPENTANCE AND STRUGGLE
1. Introduction

'Ilm is the fundamental and leading element in our quest for nearness to Allāh ﷺ. We were born to die. Our life is a journey back to Him. This world is dark. And 'ilm is light.

The first sparks in our heart are questions regarding our existence and purpose: Why do I exist? Why does the world exist? Why must I die? And if we, even occasionally, insulate ourselves from noise of modern life, we gradually become aware of the perfection and beauty that exists around us. We suddenly recognize that we are not the cause of our being. We are therefore not creators. Consequently, there is a Creator ﷺ. Perhaps we realize that creation veiled us; that we experienced the world with prejudiced sight; that we gazed only at the world; and that we should have looked through it. As more beauty becomes unveiled, as we appreciate the intricate and orderly design of all things, we desire and long to know this Creator ﷺ. Knowledge turns into gratitude, gratitude into intense yearning, intense yearning into love, and, finally, love turns into worship (‘ibādah).

'Ilm provides the answers we seek. 'Ilm engenders an awareness, first, of our purpose in this life as an 'abd ﷺ (slave) of Allāh ﷺ and, second, that being an 'abd necessitates we undertake a conscious journey back to our Lord ﷺ. Indeed, we begin to realize that there is no succour – no peace, nor happiness – except through this journey. And slowly, our hearts become cognizant of the most important statement of aim and purpose in the Qur’an:
And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. (51:56)

Allāh, in His infinite mercy, spares us the pain of rational speculation in searching for our purpose and our meaning. He clearly reveals that the reason for our existence is to show ‘ubūdiyyah to Him. ‘Ubūdiyyah, imperfectly translated as ‘worship’, is fulfilled anytime our intent and objective, and consequently our conduct, are in conformity with the intent and objective of Allāh ﷺ. ‘Ibādah is an all-encompassing term of all that is pleasing and beloved to Allāh ﷺ of words and actions, be they of the qalb or of the external senses. This, then, is the first piercing light. And this must become the singular, most important core of our remembrance: we were born to die and take the journey back home. To lose sight of this, even for an instant, is to lose our sight. And blind of this reality, our actions are dry, ineffective, without a core: a shell, perhaps beautiful and enticing, but fragile to the slightest pressure.

2. Ilm and ‘Ubūdiyyah

It is well established that ‘ubūdiyyah necessitates ‘ilm. Allāh ﷺ is not loved nor served through ignorance. He cannot be feared or loved without knowledge. Islam, our dīn, is antithetical to ignorance. And indeed the worst form of ignorance is the ignorance of tawḥīd, the affirmation of the absolute irreducible oneness and uniqueness of Allāh ﷺ.

It is ultimately tawḥīd that all ‘ilm elucidates.

First, we become cognizant of the distinction between the Creator and the created. Allāh is al-Khāliq الخالق (the Creator). We are only creatures. This is tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah توحيد الربوبية (the Tawḥīd of Lordship).
Secondly, ʿilm engenders a consciousness of the distinction between the worshipper and the Worshipped. We are the ʿibād (slaves). ʿAllāh is the object of all worship. This is tawḥīd al-ʿubūdiyyah or ʿulūhiyyah (the Tawḥīd of Worship or Godship).

Third, we become aware of the distinction between ʿAllāh’s .userdetails(0x2642) perfection and our deficiencies. And this is tawḥīd al-ʿismāʾ wa ʿṣifāt (the Tawḥīd of ʿAllāh’s Names and Attributes). Through an internalization of these distinctions, our hearts beat in longing to be closer to the Source of perfection.

Imam al-Shāfiʿī (ʿAllāh’s .userdetails(0x2642) mercy be upon him) was reported to have said:

كلما إزدادت علمًا، إزدادت علمًا بجهلي.

The more I increase in knowledge, the more I increase in knowledge of my own ignorance.

The consequence of ignorance is misery. One of the early salaf stated:

يفعل الجاهل في نفسه (أو في أخيه) ما يفعل العدو في عدوه.

The ignorant one harms himself (or his brother) as the hurt someone inflicts on an avowed enemy.

And a poet, contemplating the sometimes painful realizations of knowledge, wrote:

ذو العلم يشقي في النعيم بعلمه،
و أخو الجهالة في الشقاوة بنعم.

The person of knowledge suffers in delight, due to his knowledge;

While the brother of ignorance, in misery, delights!

Knowledge makes us sensitive to the nature of this world – its pain, its turbulence, its
uncertainty – and, greater still, to the consequence of not knowing. As the meter of our consciousness becomes more refined, our hearts awaken to the reality of this world and the next. The world becomes more transparent; our selves are revealed to us for what they are. Deep reflection follows. The lower, the less refined our gauge is, the more we are deluded into thinking that we are ‘happy’, or that we have indeed tasted happiness.

3. Salāmah (Health) of the Qalb ﺳﻼﻤﺔ ﺑﻠﻎ

Ibn al-Qayyim (Allāh’s ﷺ mercy be upon him) speaks of the health, or salāmah, of the qalb. al-Qalb al-salīm is a heart liberated from veiling qualities which block access to Allāh ﷺ. The indicators of salāmah are five. Their opposites likewise denote a heart that is veiled in proportion to the presence and intensity of the veiling factors. The indicators and their opposites are as follows: tawḥīd – its opposite, shirk ﹼشرك; sunnah – its opposite, bidʿah ﹼبداعة; following the command of Allāh ﷺ – its opposite, following shahwah ﹼشهرة; dhikr – its opposite, ghaflah ﹼغفلة; and ikhlāṣ (sincerity) – its opposite, hawā ﹼهوى.

Shirk is the admission of any association with Allāh ﷺ in His rubūbiyyah, ‘ulūhiyyah or asmā’ and ṣifāt. In brief, tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah denotes Allāh ﷺ as being the Creator, Sustainer and Sovereign Ruler of all creation. Nothing happens outside His knowledge and His will. Tawḥīd al-‘ulūhiyyah (‘ubūdiyyah) requires the ‘ibādah of Allāh ﷺ and Allāh ﷺ alone. Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa ṣifāt involves preserving Allāh’s ﷺ uniqueness and His irreducible unity in His names and attributes. Tawḥīd is the first normative science of ‘ilm. All illumination in the qalb is the barakah of tawḥīd. Without tawḥīd, mujāhadah only brings shayṭānī manifestations. Mujāhadah without the lense of tawḥīd is mere fatigue, for the knowables will merely be translated by the inclinations of the qalb; and the worst and most dangerous inclination is shirk. Knowledge of the
principles of belief, ‘aqīdah ﻋﻗﻳﺪﺓ, is therefore fundamental to tazkiyah. The ‘abd must know the essentials of ‘aqīdah, internalize them deep within his qalb and tie himself firmly to them.

Bid‘ah is the opposite of sunnah. It is innovating a way or matter in the dīn that has no evidence, explicitly or implicitly, with the intent of achieving nearness to Allāh ﷻ. Rasūlullāh ﷺ warned on many occasions in public speeches, that “every newly invented matter is a deviation and every deviation will be in the fire of hell.” On another occasion, he ﷺ stated: “Whoever innovates anything in our dīn will have it rejected.” Bid‘ah is a way of ‘ibādah that is antithetical to the way demonstrated by Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

Bid‘ah is a ḥijāb of the qalb created when the nafs is imbalanced by zaygh or mayl, inclinations. A qalb with these inherent tilts or propensities is unable to reflect reality truly. It seeks satisfaction in following its own inclinations or sometimes arriving at conclusions by disengaging texts from other texts that clarify their intent. The mubtadi’ (the person who invents a bid‘ah), pressed by the impulses of his nafs, typically uses pseudo-scholarly analysis to justify conclusions that have little probability, or to interpret texts without subjecting them to the universal objectives of the shari‘ah. True scholars do not commit bid‘ah, for they do not have zaygh in their qulūb; rather, such a‘ālim commits an error out of ijtihād.

The veiling dimensions of bid‘ah even blind the ‘abd from the logical implications of creating bid‘ah. For the innovator is effectively stating that Allāh’s ﷻ decreed way of life is imperfect – like the metaphor of a painting, an ancient masterpiece, that a later artist wishes only to make more pleasing and so adds a brush stroke here and another there, the result being the loss of authenticity and value in the original masterpiece. So it is
with bid‘ah. It has the effect of challenging Allāh’s will with a ‘but’ and ‘however’. The core of bid‘ah is an assault on Allāh’s rubūbiyyah. For everything in the sharī‘ah is created for the benefit of the ‘abd in this world and the next. Nothing is superfluous or frivolous. The sharī‘ah subsumes every possible benefit, either explicitly or implicitly. And likewise for harm.

Indulging in shahwah is the opposite of fulfilling Allāh’s commands. It occurs when the ‘abd is aware that Allāh commanded or prohibited a matter, yet desists from fulfilling that command because of the strength of his desire. This is an indication that the qalb is veiled and sick for it seeks pleasure inside its own selfishness and not within the commands of Allāh.

Ghaflah is the opposite of dhikr. It occurs whenever the qalb does not have Allāh as its focus. Like shahwah, the extent of ghaflah is indicative of how enamoured the nafs is with its own ṣifāt (attributes) and those of created things and not with Allāh.

Hawā is the essence of ishrāk, or associating partners with Allāh, which is the opposite of ikhlāṣ. Its root denotes a freefall, a lack of anchorage. Ibn al-Qayyim (Allāh’s mercy be upon him) states that it occurs when one follows other than the will of Allāh as exemplified in the sharī‘ah.

The absence of most of the aforementioned elements indicates a somewhat healthy state of the qalb. The further removed these elements are from the qalb, the more it lives in salāmah.
4. *Ilm of the Nafs*

4.1. Types of Nafs

Allāh ﷺ created the nafs with differing tendencies or instincts that are meant to be fulfilled in the proper balance. These instincts define the nafs. Knowledge of them is essential in the journey of tazkiyah.

4.1.1. *al-Nafs al-Bahīmīyyah* (Cattle-like Nafs)

The bahīmī nafs, or cattle-like nafs, delights and finds pleasure in fulfilling the base desires of eating, drinking, sleeping and copulating. It searches for new and novel ways to satisfy these desires. Life becomes centered around these satisfactions. And the bahīmī nafs can never truly satiate itself, for modern life provides a myriad of sophisticated channels for indulgence. Moreover, bahīmī tendencies become institutionalized with whole societies adopting a way of life, a world-view, of the bahīmī self. The desire to acquire more, consequently creates in the nafs tendencies of violence and aggression.

4.1.2. *al-Nafs al-Sabuʿīyyah* (Predatory Nafs)

The sabuʿī nafs builds on the bahīmī nafs and includes its fixation on the base-desires. As the ethos of the bahīmī nafs becomes entrenched, the sabuʿī nafs develops. This type of nafs is not interested in living in symbiosis with others. The sabuʿī nafs becomes focused on, and finds satisfaction and delight in, aggression, domination and usurpation. It becomes predatory, like a wild dog or hyena. And even this is not enough. The sabuʿī nafs then seeks ways of owning the hearts and minds of others.

4.1.3. *al-Nafs al-Shayṭānīyyah* (Satanic Nafs)

After usurping and subduing wealth, the nafs turns to the object of owning the hearts
and minds of others. The shayṭānī nafs finds pleasure in deceiving, conspiring and manipulating. According to some scholars, this nafs desires to challenge Allāh ⚋ as the Source of law and legislation. It harbors ambitions of rubūbiyyah (lordship). The shayṭānī nafs thus seeks qualities that belong to Allāh ⚋ exclusively, be they within the realm of rubūbiyyah or ‘ulūhiyyah. Consequently, this nafs finds delight in shirk or associating partners with Allāh ⚋ and kibr (pride).

4.1.4. al-Nafs al-Malā‘ikīyyah (Angelic Nafs)

The malā‘ikī nafs is related to the rūḥ, the supra-dimensional component of our being that originated in heaven. This nafs comes from the world of the spirit. Its origin is heavenly, not earthly. It is nourished by divine values and finds its happiness in the knowledge and contemplation of the Hereafter and in delighting in the Divine presence. It acquires its knowledge not by intellectual processes only but by absorbing ‘ilm directly from Allāh ⚋, or ilhām.

Without knowledge of our purpose and the different permutations of the nafs, we cannot begin the process of tazkiyah. The first step is to analyze our nafs and its tendencies. How much of the three negative anfus (plural of nafs) do I possess? Am I particularly plagued by one or another, or a combination of them? For if we don’t begin this process of introspection, we may die in a state where our nafs is not in balance. The nafs in balance, or in ṭuma ‘nīnah, is content in both this world and the next, for its coefficients are perfectly harmonized – like a still pond of water in which the slightest ripple can be detected. This nafs does not tilt away from its equilibrium, in either the presence or absence of a worldly desirable. Indeed, this nafs is the prize sought by every seeker in the journey of tazkiyah.
The human identity is comprised of both an earthly and heavenly element. The heavenly element is satisfied by being directly connected to its own world. Deprived of this connection, it suffocates in unhappiness. Imagine, if you will, a stranger living in a strange land. Everything is foreign to him — the language, the culture, the social symbols. He is completely displaced. Imagine now that the foreign ways are forced on him. So it is with the heavenly element of the human being. When we deprive it of being connected to its own world and subject it to earthly ways, it suffers in misery.

Our heavenly constituent attains its ʿilm not by earthly processes only, but by direct infusion of ʿilm in the qalb by Allāh ﷻ. The heart is supra-dimensional; it does not obtain knowledge the way the senses do. The qalb is the mirror through which the ʿilm of the rūḥānī روحاني world (the world of the spirit), is reflected. For the reflection to be true, the mirror, or qalb, must be immaculately clean — free from breaks, dirt, concavities, convexities, protrusions, and the like. If the mirror is not cleansed, only a distorted image will be attained. The knowables will never be reflected with clarity. Rather, they will merely reflect the inadequacies of the mirror itself — our own subjective perceptions. As Allāh ﷻ created the physical laws of the universe in parallel to those of the spiritual realm, a useful analogy is the transmission of a signal in physics. The proper reproduction of a signal depends on the medium, which in turn determines whether the signal is clear or whether there is noise or static. The medium of our mirror must be polished enough not to affect the transmission of even one wavelength from the rūḥānī world.

5. ʿIlm of the Nafs, Rūḥ, Qalb and ʿAql

Sometimes the words nafs, rūḥ روح (soul), qalb and ʿaql عقل (intellect) are used interchangeably to describe the heavenly element of the human personality — the subtle
entity created by Allāh �hänge that has an imperceptible connection to the physical heart. However, there are important distinctions and inter-relations between the four concepts as discussed by scholars.

The qalb is sovereign over the body. It is connected, imperceptibly, to the physical heart, similar perhaps, to the relationship of the mind to the brain. The qalb commands the ‘aql which then controls the jawāriḥ (limbs). One side of the qalb “looks” into the rūḥ, the other into the nafs.

The ‘aql is roughly conceptualized as the intellect. The ‘aql is subservient to the qalb
and its executive officer. It translates, rationalizes and institutionalizes the directive of the qalb. The ʿaql is the direct cause by which we are held accountable. It communicates directly with the jawāriḥ. The ʿaql functions depending on the extent of purity or disease of the qalb.

The jawāriḥ limbs or senses, are the subjects or servants of the ʿaql and therefore the qalb.

The essence or nature of the rūḥ is heavenly. It is from the command of Allāh ﷻ and from the domain of His ﷻ knowledge. The rūḥ draws inspiration from the heavenly world.

The nafs is our inner-self, oriented into the direction of this world. It assumes either one of the four states discussed earlier or a combination thereof.

As mentioned earlier, the qalb receives inspiration from the rūḥ as well as signals from the nafs. Whichever predominates, as between the state of the nafs and the rūḥ, so will the qalb’s orientation be. The state of the qalb, therefore, is determined by the state of the nafs.

6. Tawbah and ʿIlm of Dhunūb (Sins)

Perhaps the first frightening thing that the ʿabd learns in beginning his path back to Allāh ﷻ is that he has been doing and saying things that form part of the world that veils the qalb, and hence, his inner sight. For truly dhanb is a veil, a ḥijāb, between the seeker and his qalb. The intensity and density of dhunūb may preclude his rectification and, blind, his qalb can never traverse safely the journey to its Creator ﷻ. The impacts
of dhunūb on the qalb are many and insidious.

Dhunūb cause khasf (the lowliness and indignity of the qalb). It is said that qulūb are errant. Some journey around the 'arsh (throne) of Allāh ﷺ; others journey around the nests of the dunyā – satisfying themselves with the trivial, the base and the unworthy. Dhunūb also cause maskh (mutation of the qalb), whereby the qalb, in the spiritual dimension, is mutated to that of animals when it indulges in sins characteristic of them – so much so, perhaps, that recidivism draws in a hidden way from the animal’s physicality itself. Dhunūb further cause an ‘uqdah (knot) in the qalb, and the qalb is beset with anxiety, depression, pain and waḥšah (loneliness). Moreover, dhunūb cause naks (overturning) of the qalb, where reason becomes clouded and it is very difficult, if not at times impossible, to discern truth from falsehood. Truth is perceived as falsehood and falsehood is perceived as truth.

Dhunūb diffuse the light inside the qalb, weaken the resolve for doing good deeds and draw Allāh’s ﷺ punishment. Life becomes one of hardship and constriction, for dhunūb constrict and weigh heavy on the nafs. Allāh ﷺ alludes to this when He ﷺ promises:

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... ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ 
... ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ ﷺ 
And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life ... (20:124)

The narrowness referred to is a state of the qalb. For no matter the external, perceived bounties, the qalb of the individual feels suffocated and turbulent. And it is only the continued and excessive indulgence in the shahawāt (worldly appetites) that drown out its cries of desperation. Without the intoxicants of shahawāt, the pain would be intolerable. The life of a muʿmin, regardless of external circumstance, is wholesome and peaceful. Many verses indicate that for the ṣāliḥ life is good, here in this dunyā. Allāh
To those who do good, there is good in this world, and the Home of the Hereafter is even better ... (16:30)

Rasūlullāh ﷺ teaches that every time the ‘abd disobeys Allāh ﷺ, a black spot forms on the qalb. Each spot engenders the commission of more dhunūb until the qalb is covered over, completely obscured, without any inner sight. The Qur’an alludes to this supra-dimensional rust, calling it rān.

No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning. (83:14)

The cleansing of the heart from dhunūb is a fundamental concern of tazkiyah. For the seeker of a purified qalb, it is immaterial whether the dhunūb are major or minor in nature, for minor sins are only minor in relation to the major. When we consider against Whom we have sinned, the distinction dissipates. Consider the story of a friend who is gracious, generous and patient. The more you hurt him, the more he gives and reciprocates with good. He is the most beautiful, intelligent and kind friend that you have ever met in this world. Perhaps he is your only true friend. Now, imagine, through all this, stabbing him in the back, or spitting in his face. How might onlookers characterize you? Ungrateful? Horrible? Despicable? To Allāh ﷺ belongs the highest similitude, and the deepest, most abiding gratitude. Surely Allāh ﷺ is undeserving of any sin, large or small.

Dhunūb are of two types: transgressions against the rights of Allāh ﷺ and against the rights of His creation. The former encompass such actions as neglecting ṣalāh, not paying zakāh, showing off, self-aggrandizement and the like. The
latter includes the full sphere of violations against the servants of Allāh ﷺ – backbiting, injustice to others, ridicule, theft, and so forth. As between the two transgressions, the violations of the rights of the servant are worse in consequence for they comprise two distinct transgressions: first, disobedience of Allāh’s ﷺ commandments about observing His ﷺ limits; and second, causing damage to the creation of Allāh ﷺ. Consequently, the transgressions against the rights of Allāh’s ﷺ creation are not forgiven by Allāh ﷺ unless forgiveness is sought and received from the injured party. The transgressions against Allāh ﷺ, however, may be forgiven by Him ﷺ. ʿĀisha (Allāh ﷺ be pleased with her) reported that Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

إن الدواوين عند الله ثلاثة:
- ديوان لا يعوبا الله به شينا (ذنوب العباد في حقوق الله عز و جل)
- ديوان لا يغفر الله منه شينا (الشرك بالله إلا إذا كانت هناك توبة)
- ديوان لا يترك الله منه شينا (الذنوب في حقوق العباد)

Records are three:
- the record that Allāh ﷺ does not care much about (violations against His ﷺ rights);
- the record that Allāh ﷺ does not forgive anything of (shirk);
- and the record that Allāh ﷺ does not leave anything of (violations against the rights of others).

We must be cautious about becoming complacent about minor sins for they can become major by recidivism الإصرار (continuing in the sin); belittling the sin الاستصغر; or deriving pleasure when remembering past sins. Indeed, the costs of minor sins are themselves major – for they may deprive our qulūb قلوب of happiness in this world and the next.

Wherever we are, our sins are recorded, to be replayed before us in the next world through a transmission of many witnesses.

Allāh ﷺ suffices as a witness. He sees all. Nothing is quantized for Him. He has always
seen us and seen within us. And for the elect, this is enough. *Allāh*’s ✪ sufficiency as a witness is exemplified by a story of a boy whose father was a thief. One day, when the boy reached an age of discernment, his father decided to initiate him to the ways of larceny. He told his son to stay outside on guard while he would commit theft, and to whistle if the son saw anyone. No sooner than the father jumped over the fence did his son whistle. The father returned, saw no one, and asked the boy why he had whistled. The son replied: “Verily, *Allāh* ✪ sees us!” The father, overwhelmed, returned to *Allāh* ✪ in tawbah.

*Allāh*’s ✪ angels see us. Angels are creatures from light that are infused with knowledge by *Allāh* ✪. Angels ‘know’ by their very being. And some angels never leave our company. *Allāh* ✪ has created special angels, ‘al-Kirām al-Kātibūn’ الملانكة الكرام الكاتبون (noble writers) that record all our external actions but have no access to our qulūb.

Each and every cell of our being records. Modern science has discovered that information about our physical characteristics is contained and stored within our molecular structure, the DNA. The *Qur’an* speaks about recording, storing and replaying information about our daily behaviour and conduct:

\[
\text{﴾ ﻰﻌﻣﻟﻮﻥ ﻞﻜﺎﻧﻮﺍ ﺑﻣﺎ ﻃﺮﺠﻟﻬﻢ و ﺳﺪﻴﻬﻢ و ﻲﻟﺴﻨﺘﻬﻢ ﻋﻠﻴﻬﻢ ﻣﺸﺎﺩ ﻲﻮﻤﻲ ﴾}
\]

\[
	ext{On a Day when their tongues, their hands and their feet will bear witness against them as to what they used to do. (24:24)}
\]

Lastly, space-time itself testifies to our actions. Wherever we are and whatever we do, we leave an impact, or perturbation, in space time. This energy is preserved and *Allāh* ✪ will use His system to ‘decode’ this information. In *Surah Zalzalah*, we are taught that the earth will speak:

\[
\text{﴾ ﻨﺤﺪﺚ ﻣﻮﻣز ة ﻻ ﺍﻹﻧﺴﺎﻥ و ﺳﺪارد ﻟﻬﺎ، ﻛﺎﺭ ﺍﻹﺮﺽ ﺛﺪا ﺑﺎ ﺍﻹﺮﺽ ﺭﺰﺯلﺘﻬﺎ، ﻣﺎ ﺍﻹﻧﺴﺎﻥ ﻓﻘﻬ ﻢ ﻋﻠﻴﻬﻢ ﻋﻠﻴﻬﻢ ﻣﺸﺎﺩ ﻲﻮﻤﻲ ﴿}
\]

\[
	ext{إذا زلزلت الأرض زلزالها، و أخرجت الأرض ألقاها، وقال الإنسان ما لها، يومنذ تحدث} 
\]
When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake. And the earth discharges its burdens. And man says, "What is [wrong] with it?" On that Day, it will report its news. Because your Lord has commanded it. (99:1-5)

That Day people will depart separated [into categories] to be shown [the result of] their deeds. So, however does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it. (99:6-8)

The knowledge of who we are and what we have missed in the journey to Allāh ﷺ engenders an experience in the qalb or pain, sadness, remorse and regret. This burst in the qalb is the true reality of tawbah. Tawbah is the first step after ʿilm. It is a direct consequence of ʿilm. Without ʿilm, there is no tawbah; without tawbah, there is no forward momentum in the path of purification. The greater the tawbah – the burst inside my qalb – the greater the momentum forward to Allāh ﷺ. Indeed, every praiseworthy station of virtue springs from the foundational support of tawbah.

7. Mujāhadah, or Struggle, Against the Nafs
Tawbah leads naturally to mujāhadah. Cleansing our qalb requires going against the nafs and battling our indulgences. Secular psychology, in contrast, teaches us to give the nafs what it wants, to satisfy it. Secular psychology locates the ailments of the nafs in the denial of the tendencies of the nafs. The Islamic perspective is more balanced. It teaches that ailments will depend on the type of nafs that the individual cultivates. If the nafs in question is a bahīmī nafs, then surely starving it of base desires will cause it agony. However, a nafs in balance will never be affected by denial of unessential and superfluous material things. Moreover, a nafs in balance will never experience depression or anxiety. Deprivation of desires does not affect a malāʾikī nafs simply because it is not nourished by eating, sleeping, drinking and copulating. Tragically,
secular psychology, with its narrow concern on satisfying the bahīmī nafs, only accentuates the baser forms of nafs and, therefore, their pathologies. The Islamic approach is less speculative and has been propounded by many earlier scholars who were giants, both in their profound state of purification and the depth and breadth of their intellect. We need more freedom from the self rather than freedom of the self.

The nafs forms the most dangerous barrier between us and Allāh ﷺ, and between us and our own happiness. Going against the tendencies of the nafs will energize us in our journey of tazkiyah. Going along with the nafs will de-energize us. An analogy in the physical world is germane. When one travels down a hill, one loses potential energy; going up increases potential energy. However, going up is harder work and most people prefer going down. In the spiritual world, the more we strive against the nafs, the more spiritual potential energy we gain and the more we are uplifted and elevated spiritually. If we relax, the gravity of our shahawāt and of the dunyā pull us below. To let the nafs indulge freely in anything weakens it for everything.

But as for he who feared the position of His Lord and prevented the soul from [unlawful] inclination, then, indeed, Paradise will be [his] refuge. (79:40-41)

And Yūsuf (may Allah’s ﷺ peace be upon him), a nabi, son of a nabi, son of a nabi, stated:

And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy ... (12:53)

Another analogy involves the physical laws that govern our outward appearance. For the perfection of our external image, diet and exercise are essential. For inner beauty, the physical laws also have their spiritual parallels. For diet and exercise, too, are essential for an inner image: a diet of regular and consistent ʿilm and the exercise of
mujāhadah against the nafs, or struggling against the self. One of the scholars noted that the one who is pleased with his nafs has already chosen the path of perdition. The head of wisdom is to counter the nafs, for then the windows to the other world become accessible:

\[
\text{يا أيها الذين أمنا إن تتقوا الله يجعل لكم فرقانا...}
\]

\[
O\ you\ who\ have\ attained\ faith,\ if\ you\ fear\ Allāh,\ He\ will\ give\ you\ furqān\ (a\ criterion)\ ...\ (8:29)
\]

According to Ibn ‘Abbās (Allāh ﷺ be pleased with him) and others, there are exist angels around us who are the recipients of ḥikmah (wisdom). The more consciousness of Allāh ﷺ we have, the more ḥikmah is infused into our qulūb. And so it is that Allāh ﷺ teaches us directly:

\[
\text{... و اتقوا الله و علمكم الله...}
\]

\[
...\ and\ have\ taqwa\ of\ Allāh\ ﷺ;\ and\ Allāh\ ﷺ\ will\ teach\ you\ ...\ (2:282)
\]

Allāh ﷺ guides to His nearness those who struggle in His way:

\[
\text{... و الذين جاهدوا فينا لنهدينهم سبلنا...}
\]

\[
And\ whoever\ struggles\ in\ Us,\ We\ will\ guide\ them\ to\ Our\ ways\ ...\ (29:69)
\]

It is well established that Allāh ﷺ confers upon some of His ﷺ servants special ʿilm. Rasūlullāh ﷺ taught:

\[
\text{إن في كل أمة محدث، و محدث هذه الأمة عمر.}
\]

\[
In\ every\ ummah\ Allāh\ ﷺ\ made\ those\ ‘who\ were\ spoken\ to’.\ If\ there\ was\ someone\ ‘spoken\ to’\ in\ my\ ummah,\ it\ is\ ‘Umar.
\]

The scholars refer to this ʿilm as ʿilm rabbānī, or knowledge from Allāh ﷺ. A text attributed to Rasūlullāh ﷺ states:
Be mindful of the firāsah (inner sight) of the believer, for he sees with the light of Allāh ﷺ.

The attainment of this type of ‘ilm, whereby the rūḥ is infused with direct knowledge from Allāh ﷺ, finds a plausible argument in the study of dreams. During sleep, we dream of images in the past, present and future. Events are frequently revealed through symbols. When we dream, we are not bound by time or subject to the laws of the physical world. Sleep is, as Rasūlullāh ﷺ described it, a minor death. He also taught that when a dream of the believer comes true, that is one sixty-fourth of nubuwwah (Prophethood). As we sleep, our consciousness of this world is greatly diminished, our energies are directed inwardly, and we may have access to knowledge that is empirically inaccessible. When the shahawāt are blocked, a window into the next world is opened. The rūḥ may be allowed to journey to its own world.
الذكر
REMEMBRANCE
1. Introduction

Dhikr is the most essential support structure of mujāhadah. The qulūb are veiled through dhunūb and ghaflah (heedlessness). Ghaflah occurs anytime an individual is not remembering Allāh ⦿. The cure for dhunūb is tawbah and struggling against the shahawāt of the nafs; the cure for ghaflah is dhikr. Rasūlullāh ⌾ taught:

إن لكل شيء سقاية، و إن سقاية القلوب ذكر لله عز و جل.

*Everything has its cleansing agent, and the cleansing agent of the qulūb is dhikr.*

Dhikr is fundamental to tazkiyah. It is the principle element of mujāhadah. Dhikr derives from the root, dhakara in Arabic. The word dhikr is the active noun and carries the linguistic meaning of ‘remembrance’ or ‘mention’. To be in dhikr is to be in a state of remembrance and celebration of Allāh ⦿. It encompasses actions of the tongue, the limbs and the qalb.

2. Types of Dhikr

Dhikr carries both a generic and a specific meaning. Generically, dhikr refers to any act of the qalb and of the jawāriḥ, or limbs, the intent behind which is to worship and draw nearer to Allāh ⦿. Al-Qur’an, for example, is termed ‘the dhikr’. Moreover, within Al-Qur’an, the word dhikr is employed to denote the stories of previous communities and the lessons learnt from them. Dhikr also encompasses gatherings of learning. Acts of obedience are dhikr, as is a powerful expression of dhikr when refraining from indulging in Allāh’s ⦿ prohibitions, no matter how strong the call of the desires. Du’ā’ (supplication) is dhikr, as is sending ṣalāh and salām on Rasūlullāh ⌾.
In its more specific form, *dhikr* refers to particular formulae of remembrance, like *Subḥānallāh* (all perfection belongs to Allāh �_ctor), *Alḥamdulillāh* (praise be to Allāh � cập), *Lā ilāha illallāh* (there is no deity besides Allāh ⶚ ctor), and *Allāhu Akbar* (Allāh ⶚ ctor is Greater).

It is generally accepted that foremost in virtue is *al-Qur’an*, then the specific formulae of *dhikr*, followed by *du’ā’. Ṣalāh is the most meritorious act of worship precisely because it combines and subsumes all of the above.

There may, however, be circumstances where this order of virtue varies. In *ruku’* reciting from the *Qur’an* is prohibited but it is meritorious to recite a specific formula of *dhikr*. Similarly, during the *adhān*, it is highly preferred and recommended to repeat the words of the caller, and to conclude with a specific *du’ā’. Also, in certain emotional states, and depending on the receptivity of the *qalb*, a particular form of *dhikr* may also be employed and preferred. One may, for example, at times prefer the medium of *du’ā’* to *dhikr*, or even, at times, to reciting from the *Qur’an*. In some occasions, one may prefer passages from the *Qur’an* which have a special resonance in the *qalb*.

3. *Dhikr and Shayṭān*

The further removed from *dhikr*, the more susceptible we are to the suggestions of *Shayṭān*. Indeed the *Qur’an* teaches that absence of *dhikr* implies or indicates that the *qalb* is partially or completely controlled by *Shayṭān*:

﴾
﴿

Whoever is blinded from the remembrance of the Most Merciful – We appoint for him a devil, and he is to him a companion. (43:36)

﴾
﴿

(إِسْتَحْوَذُ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فِنَاسًا هُمُ ذَكَرُ اللهَ...
Satan has overwhelmed them and caused them to forget the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ … (58:19)

Ibn ʿAbbās (Allāh ﷻ be pleased with him), whom Rasūlullāh ﷺ called the scribe of the ummah, explained Surah al-Nās by stating that Shayṭān is ever in watchfulness over the qalb of the ʿabd. The moment the servant’s qalb falls into ghaflah, Shayṭān enters into the qalb, whispers and suggests.

إِن الشيطان جاعٌ على قلب ابن آدم، إذا غفل وسوس و إذا ذكر الله خنس.

Verily Shayṭān is watchful over the heart of the child of Adam. When he is in heedlessness, Shayṭān whispers and suggests. And when he returns to dhikr, Shayṭān disappears.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ stated as part of a longer text:

وأمركم أن تذكروا اللّه تعالى، فإن مثل ذلك كمثل رجل خرج العدو في أثره سراً، حتى إذا أتي على حصن حصين، فأحرز نفسه منهم، كذلك العبد لا يحرز نفسه من الشيطان إلا يذكّر الله تعالى.

... Allāh ﷻ ordered you to be in remembrance of HIM ﷺ. The likeness of one in dhikr is that of a man who flees from an enemy until he reaches an impregnable fortress and protects himself from them. So it is with the servant of Allāh ﷺ: there is no other means to protect the qalb from Shayṭān except through remembrance of Allāh ﷺ.

When the ʿabd resumes dhikr of Allāh ﷻ, Shayṭān retreats and hides. Dhunūb and ghaflah weave together to produce the veiling of the qalb, for Shayṭān enters our hearts through the gates of our own negative attributes – through the windows of our own choosing. Finding the qalb desolate and deserted with no dhikr of Allāh ﷻ, Shayṭān constructs and fortifies his throne. Then he consolidates his whispers in frequency and intensity. And the servant hears the whispers and the echoes of Shayṭān’s suggestions even within ṣalāh.

The absence or scarcity of dhikr in one’s life is an attribute of the most despised creature to Allāh ﷻ, the munāfiq (hypocrite), who acts in accordance to the rancour and
ill-will present in his qalb while feigning faith. Among the attributes of the munāfiq enumerated by Allāh ₪ in the Qur’an are:

\[
\text{و إما قاموا إلى الصلاة قاموا كسالى، وراءون الناس و لا يذكرون الله إلا قليلا }
\]

... And when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing [themselves to] the people and not remembering Allāh ₪ except a little. (4:142)

The believer, in contrast, comes to ṣalāh with focus and devotion, eager to give life to his ṣalāh through intense remembrance of Allāh ₪. Rasūlullāh ﷺ exemplified this in its most beautiful form, not only in his practice of ṣalāh, but even by his call to ṣalāh. He would urge Bilāl (Allāh ₪ be pleased with him) with these words to begin the adhān:

أرحنا بها يا بلال!

*Bring us comfort and solace with it, O Bilāl!*

*Dhikr* possesses the unique power of repelling Shayṭān and fortifying the qalb. Dhikr generates, as it were, a nūr in the qalb, which ‘burns’ away Shayṭān and his scheming, as fire would keep away objects too close to it. Indeed, the light of *dhikr* will be translated into illumination in the realm of the barzakh (transitional world) and the Hereafter.

In an obvious way, *dhikr* at least keeps the tongue safe from transgressing against others. At deeper levels of *dhikr*, with the qalb involved, a true consciousness of Allāh ₪ develops that facilitates good and restrains the ‘abd from ḥarām. Moreover, *dhikr* serves a preventative function, effectively keeping the nafs busy from constructing negative khawāṭir (inner discourses). The blocking of the nafs’ inner discourse, blocks potential acts of ḥarām at their very root.
4. Necessity of Dhikr

We exist only to know and to show ‘ubūdiyyah to Allāh � amore. There can be no ‘ubūdiyyah without dhikr. Vital to our very ‘raison d’être’ is the station of remembering our Lord ♨ and living in His presence ♨. Without dhikr, our life mission would certainly flounder. Indeed, how can we forget our Creator ♨ and Sustainer ♨ when He ♨ is closer to us than our jugular vein? Is it possible, and to Allāh ♨ is the highest similitude, to ignore or forget one that observes and scrutinizes your every step? And throughout the vicissitudes of our life, through every twist and turn, while we were heedless of Allāh ♨, He ♨ was never forgetful of us. Our hearts kept beating, ease followed hardship, and bounty after bounty enveloped us. To Allāh ♨, we must turn in tawbah.

The necessity of dhikr is mentioned emphatically and abundantly in the Qur’an. Believers are exhorted to remember Allāh ♨ much, intensely and profoundly throughout time and space:

﴾ﻜﺜﻴﺭﺍﺬﻜﺭﺍﷲﺍﺫﻛﺮﻭﺍﺀﺍﻤﻧﻮﺍﺍﻠﺫﻴﻥﺃﻴﻬﺎﻳﺎ﴿

O you who believe, remember Allāh ♨ with much remembrance. (33:41)

﴿ﺗﻔﻠﺤﻭﻦﻟﻌﻟיהןﻜﺜﻴﺭﺍﷲﺍﺫﻛﺮﻭﺍﻭﷲﻔﺿﻠﻥﺍﺑﺘﻐوىﻭﺍﻷﺭﺾﻓﺎﻧﺘﺷﺭﻭﺍﺓﻟﺻﻼﺓﻗﺿﻳﺖﻓﺈﺫﺍ﴿

And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allāh ♨, and remember Allāh ♨ often that you may succeed. (62:10)

﴿ﻣﺑﺼﺮﻮﻥﻫﻢﻓﺈﺫﺍﺘﺫﻛﺭﻮﺍﺍﻠﺷﻴﻁﺎﻥﻤﻥطﺎﺌﻒﻣﺴﻬﻡﺇﺬﺍﺇﺗﻗﻭﺍﺍﻠﺫﻳﻥﺇﻦ﴿

Indeed, those who fear Allāh ♨ -- when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him ♨] and at once they have insight (7:201)

﴿ﻋﻅﻴﻣﺎﺃﺠﺮﺍﻭﻤﻐﻔﺭﺓﻠﻬﻡﷲﺃﻋﺪﺍﻠﺫﺍﻜﺮﺍﺕﻭﻛﺛﻴﺭﺍﷲﺍﻟﺫﺍﻜﺭﻴﻥﻭ…”```

... and for men and women who engage much in remembrance of Allāh, He prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward. (33:35)
5. **Mujāhadah of Dhikr**

The seeker of Allāh ﷺ who longs to remain in dhikr must battle ghaflah at every opportunity and give it no respite or quarter. Dhikr will, with due intensity and focus, drive away Shayṭān and clear the qalb. There are, however, instances when this does not happen – when a person is still overwhelmed by Shayṭān – for Shayṭān’s absence or presence is determined by the relationship between dhunūb and ghaflah. The individual might still be indulging the nafs and falling into dhunūb, and his dhikr might be rare and occasional. Its intensity and focus might therefore be inadequate to cleanse the serious stain of certain dhunūb and drive away Shayṭān. Consider this analogy:

You are in a dark forest, alone, at night, defenseless. A pack of hyenas begins to approach you. They are fierce and unrelenting. In the darkness, you see their glimmering eyes. They edge closer and closer – an entire pack, poised to attack. You clasp twenty pounds of rotten meat firmly in your hands. Fearful, you try to dispel them. “Go away”, you say. “Go away”. Will they go away? As long as you have the rotten meat clasped in your hands, there is no hope. What, then, is the recourse? Only one: throw the meat as far away as possible then drive them away and hope they will most likely devour the meat and leave you alone.

The individual at night is you with your qalb. The night is the darkness of your hawā. The meat is your shahawāt. The hyenas are the shayātīn. Exclaiming “go away” is your occasional dhikr which is effective only when you throw away the meat. For as long as you clasp tight to your shahawāt, you are only inviting Shayṭān’s onslaught. The only recourse is to abandon your shahawāt through a process of tawbah and mujāhadah.
The process of cleansing, after *tawbah*, is gradual. *Shayṭān* will encircle you like a shark, waiting for traces of weakness. And in the early stages of your *tawbah*, you are still vulnerable. It is said that an indication that you will not recede back, is if you have been in *tawbah* and have not returned to the sin after seven years. And *Allāh* ﷻ draws the repentant to Him ﷻ and guides whom He ﷻ pleases.

*Dhikr* is our unique connection to *Allāh* ﷻ throughout time and space. The seeker thus desires to be in *dhikr* at all times and through every vicissitude of life. The seeker is furthermore aware that the absence of even a moment of *dhikr* in this life causes grief in the parallel life of paradise. *Rasūlullāh* ﷺ taught that the people of *jannah* would feel regret – without pain – for all earthly moments not spent in *dhikr* of *Allāh* ﷻ. In *jannah*, every form of ‘ibādah ceases except *dhikr*. *Dhikr* becomes integral to our nourishment and continued, infinite life. *Dhikr* is the oxygen of the inhabitants of paradise. Certainly those that taste the life-sustaining and refreshing power of *dhikr* here, in this world, desire never to relinquish it in any theatre of human activity.

Through remaining in the state of authentic forms of *dhikr*, the ‘*abd* harmonizes himself with the world at large, for every created thing magnifies and glorifies *Allāh* ﷻ. Everything is in a state of *dhikr*: the wind, the sea in stillness or tumult, the air, the clouds. In fact, one of the early scholars stated that solace may be found, not in unauthentic forms of *dhikr*, which essentially arouse the lower *nafs*, but in the sounds of nature: the chirping of birds, the rustling of wings, the squeaking of a door and even, as one reported, the rotation of a pulley! In fact, *Rasūlullāh* ﷺ told us that mountains and parcels of earth inquire of one another daily whether anyone passed by them who was in *dhikr* of *Allāh* ﷻ. And when it is affirmed that yes, someone did, the mountains, the valleys, and the parcels of land rejoice. When we are in the *mujāhadah* of *dhikr*,
our *qalb* resonates with the world around us. The seekers before us comprehended this fundamental principle. In one instance, quoted by Ibn al-Jawziyy (*Allāh’s *mercy be upon him*), a party made its way to see one of the elect women of her time. As they approached, they were told that she was not taking visitors. She had shut her doors and had been crying for three days. They inquired about the cause of her sorrow and were told: She killed an ant – a creature in dhikr of its Maker *ﷺ*.

6. Virtues of Dhikr

Many authoritative texts speak of the essential, life-giving nature of dhikr. They reiterate that dhikr is the source of spiritual nourishment and its absence results in the presence of spiritual ailments or even spiritual death. Homes and institutions that are not breathing and beating with dhikr are defunct and deceased:

\[
\text{مثل الذي يذكر ربه والذي لا يذكر ربه مثل} \text{ الحي والموت.}
\]

*The parable of those that are in dhikr of Allāh *ﷺ* and those that are not, is the parable of the living and the dead.*

\[
\text{مثل البيت الذي يذكر فيه الله والبيت الذي لا يذكر فيه الله مثل} \text{ الحي والموت.}
\]

*The parable of the house in which there is dhikr of Allāh *ﷺ* and the house where there is no dhikr of Allāh *ﷺ* is the parable of the living and the dead.*

And Rasūlullāh *ﷺ* warned us of interactions bereft of dhikr. He *ﷺ* cautioned that anytime an ‘*abd sits, lies down, stands or walks anywhere without dhikr, the time spent is suspended and deficient. And he *ﷺ* also warned:

\[
\text{ما جلس قوم مجلسنا لم يذكروا الله فيه و لم يصلوا على نبيه إلا كان عليهم حسرة.}
\]

*Whenever a group of people meet and do not remember Allāh *ﷺ* or send peace upon His Messenger *ﷺ*, then that meeting will be an agony for them (on the day of judgment).*
When those who congregate and leave their gathering without dhikr of Allāh ₪, (it is as though) they leave behind them the stinking corpse of a donkey.

The dhakir, or one in remembrance of Allāh ₪ is, in comparison to another of similar station, the better servant. For example, a scholar who is often in dhikr of Allāh ₪ is better than one that is not. Similarly one in jihād for Allāh ₪ and who is in dhikr of Him, is nearer to Allāh ₪ than one who is not in dhikr of Him ₪. So integral is dhikr to our spiritual and intellectual nourishment that Allāh ₪ commands us not to obey or follow one who is negligent of dhikr. No matter what the person’s perceived prowess, such persons who root themselves outside of Allāh’s ₪ dhikr will be extreme and unbalanced in their thinking and living. Allāh ₪ states:

﴾ ﻓﺭﻃﺎ ﻋﻦ ﻗﻠﺒﻪ ﻣﻥ ﺕﻁﻊ ﻭ ﻻ ﻥﻁﻉ ﻣﻥ ﻁﻌﻁﺎ ﻓﻡ ﻥﺫﻜﺭﻥﺎ ﻭ ﻭﺍﺕﺒﻊ ﻭ ﺃﺫﻜﺭﻥﺎ ﻣﻥ ﻭ ﻷ ﻨﻤﻡ ﺕﺨﻴﺭ ﻭ ﻭ ﻷ ﻨﺫﻜﺭﻥﺎ ﻓﻲ ﺙﺩﻜﺭﺕﻪ ﻓﻲ ﻭ ﻷ ﻕﻠﺒﻪ ﻓﻲ ﻭ ﻷ ﻕﻠﺒﻪ ﻓﻲ ﻭ ﻷ ﻤﻥ… ﴿

... and do not obey one whose qalb we made heedless of our dhikr, who follows his hawā, and whose affair is beyond all moderation (18:28)

A powerful Ḥadīth Qudsī that emphasizes the profound connection between the dhakir and Allāh ₪ states:

أنا عند ظنٍّ عبّدٍ ي، وأنا معه إذا ذكرني، فإن ذكرني في نفسه، ذكرته في نفسه، وإن ذكرني في ملاء، ذكرته في ملاء خير منهم...

I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. When he remembers Me in his self, I remember him in My Self. When he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a better gathering.

Dhikr possesses the distinction of placing one in the maʿīyāh, or ‘presence’ of Allāh ₪. This maʿīyāh of Allāh ₪, in a manner befitting of His Majesty, indicates Allāh’s ₪ support and succour; it is a special relationship reserved for those servants whose hearts dilate and tremble with the mention of Allāh ₪, who are ever in longing to be alone in ‘uns (solace) with Him ₪, who value their time in this world only by the function of their dhikr of Him ₪.
When the ‘abd is in dhikr of Allāh ﷺ within the deepest recess of his qalb, Allāh ﷺ is in dhikr of the ‘abd within His Self ﷺ, in a way befitting of His unique attributes. And who would not desire this most honorific gift and grace? Surely, to be remembered by a dear one, a close intimate, brings delight and tranquility to your qalb, that they, whom you love, are remembering you and that you are present in their hearts. But Allāh’s ﷺ remembrance of you is something infinitely more magnificent. You, the ‘abd, are being ‘remembered’ by Him ﷺ, the Lord ﷺ of the worlds. What greater gift than this in all the universe?

And when we are in dhikr of Allāh ﷺ in a gathering, Allāh ﷺ is in dhikr of us in a nobler and better gathering: His creation in the spiritual world – the angels, and who knows what other creative treasures. In fact, Rasūlullāh ﷺ described gatherings of dhikr, such as circles of knowledge, as gardens of paradise. He ﷺ advised his companions that if they were to pass by the gardens of paradise, they should stop and graze therein. When asked what those gathering were, he ﷺ identified them as the gatherings of dhikr.

For truly it is these gatherings that connect you to Allāh ﷺ, invite you into the wondrous landscape of His dhikr ﷺ and beckon the qalb to peace, serenity and security. In another text, Rasūlullāh ﷺ taught that Allāh ﷺ has specially created angels that roam the world looking for such gatherings and, upon finding them, surround them with their wings, reaching up to the lowest heavens. Some ‘ibād who have sat in such blessed gatherings may well know how those moments engender feelings of tranquility and peace and how, at times, hearts may feel the gentle embrace of the angels.

And thus the ‘abd persists diligently in dhikr and ‘ibādah, his qalb tasting grief every
time it loses sight of its Beloved, for it is only *dhikr* that removes the *qalb*’s painful loneliness. Hearts are prone to grief and anxiety for which there is no salve except *dhikr*. The ‘*abd* continues to strive and strive until:

... My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory acts [of ‘*ibādah*] until I love him. And when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his eyesight with which he sees, his hands with which he strikes, his legs with which he walks. If he asks of Me, I will surely grant him, and when he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely shelter him.

As *dhikr* infuses the ‘*abd* completely, “space-time” becomes thin and transparent between the *qalb* of the ‘*abd* and Allāh’s ⨆ nearness. The elect have now been drawn close, given a perpetual audience, hearts basking in waves of peace in His ⨆ majestic presence. And Allāh ⨆ gives His gifts to whomever He chooses ⨆.
SOLITUDE AND RETREAT
1. Introduction

All of us are graced with a *malāʾīkī nafs* that sends signals to our *qalb*. Only rare, the most bereft individuals, have a *malāʾīkī nafs* that is dormant, asphyxiated with *dhunūb*, or dead. Without the spiritual input of the *malāʾīkī nafs*, the *qalb* dies. When the *malāʾīkī nafs* is alive, however, its signals may be magnified by spending time away from environments that feed the lower *nafs*. The links and attachments to the *dunyā*, which directly or indirectly are the cause of our falling into *maʿṣiyah*, must be severed. The *nafs* must be stilled.

*Khalwah* is not an end in itself. Moments of *khalwah* allow the signals from the *malāʾīkī nafs* to be absorbed by the *qalb* itself, either directly or through the media of the *ʿaql* and the *nafs*. The core of *khalwah*, then, is to focus within, to mute the chatter of the lower selves, to listen to and connect with the heavenly longings of the angelic *nafs*. *Khalwah* is integral to *tawbah* – no one can achieve a genuine repentance without long, extended moments of *khalwah*. *Khalwah* is hence integral to the process of *tazkiyah* itself.

2. The Fruits of *Khalwah*

One of the *salaf* noted:

> إذا أراد الله أن ينقل العبد من ذل المعصية إلى عز الطاعة آنها بالوحدة، و أغنه بالقناعة،
> و بصره بعيوب نفسه، و من أعطى ذلك فقد أعطي خير الدنيا و الآخرة.

*When Allāh ῶ wills to move the ʿabd from the humiliation of sin into the exaltation of*
obedience, He consoled him with moments of solitude, enriches him with contentment and makes him conscious of the deficiencies of his self. And whoever has been given this has been given the good of this world and the Hereafter.

This text clearly links mujāhadah with khalwah. Moreover, it enumerates the sweetest fruit of khalwah: finding fullness in loneliness, and solace and serenity with Allāh ﷺ. The solitude of khalwah is never empty, for physical emptiness is replaced with fullness and richness at the level of the qalb – incomparable fullness and richness. Those who taste its fruits become stricken with its delights. In fact, some of the early ṣāliḥīn were at times ruffled to see the presence of a human being when, before, they were in a state of delightful peace in their khalwah. Lubabah (Allāh’s ﷺ mercy be upon her), one of the ṣāliḥāt, exemplified this longing for khalwah with Allāh ﷺ so eloquently when she stated: “I feel hayā’ from Allāh ﷺ that He ﷺ sees me busy with anyone or anything else besides Him ﷺ.”

The only bearable company, as one phrased it, is the present, absent one – the one who, when present, does not perturb the focus of your qalb in the slightest, and whose remembrance, when absent, enhances the feelings of tranquility in your qalb. As one of the early salaf stated: “There are those who are dead, when our qalb remembers them, it experiences fullness of life. And there are those who are alive, when our qalb sees them, it dies.” It is established that at higher levels of tazkiyah, certain individuals may well be in khalwah while in the presence of others. For they have, through mujāhadah and Allāh’s ﷺ rahmah, insulated their qulūb so that although they are physically present with others, their qulūb are absent, unperturbed in the least by external distractions. Rasūlullāh ﷺ was the most perfect exemplification of this. Though he ﷺ interacted with people, his qalb was not among them. He ﷺ is even reported to have said: “My eyes sleep, but my qalb does not.” The aspiration for the seeker, therefore, is to acquire a qalb that is disengaged – thoroughly independent –
from the elements of this dunyā, remaining always, no matter what worldly fluctuations, a vessel of malāʾīkī elements. And Allāh ₿ grants His Grace to those servants He ₿ chooses.

The initial text mentioned earlier, further contrasts the loneliness of khalwah with the enrichment of qanāʿah (contentment). Qanāʿah is attained during khalwah, for the nafs learns to satisfy itself with Allāh ₿ and not with the myriad toys of dunyā. The qalb finds a higher and nobler contentment. How easily approachable this qanāʿah is since the seeker, at anytime, may direct his qalb toward its spiritual qiblah: Allāh ₿. And once the contentment in khalwah is tasted, of what avail are the distractions of the world that merely serve to scatter and shatter the composure of the inner-self? Imam Shāfiʿī (Allāh’s ₿ mercy be upon him) once chanted:

وإن كنت ذا قلب فنوع 
فأنت ومالك الدنيا سواء.

If you were to have a qalb that is content, you and the one who owns the treasures of earth are equals.

It is only when we do not have this happiness that we seek fulfillment through the medium of dunyā and its endless distractions. An often repeated phrase of wisdom states:

من علامات الإفلاس الاستناد بالناس.

Of the signs of bankruptcy is to seek intimate consolation with people

The single-minded pursuit and acquisition of dunyā will only make us more restless. The toys of dunyā are limited, its promises never-ending, its illusions limitless. The more the nafs is given, the more it desires. Consequently we have a negative feedback, a paradox. The interplay between the infinite desires of the nafs and the finite world it
hankers after is sure to create anxiety and dissatisfaction. The *nafs* wants everything. It wants what it ultimately cannot have. Indulging the *nafs* is therefore the calculus of frustration. Competition for limited resources will fuel social conflict, leading to a survival of the fittest philosophy, a world where affinity and symbiosis become impossible and the weak are destroyed. Such leads to a life of endless seeking and endless wretchedness. One who does not find solace with *Allāh* ﷺ will never find it in anything. *Allāh* ﷺ is the only Sufficer of all needs.

\[
\text{... فابتغوا عند الله الرزق و اعبدوه و اشكووا له...}
\]

... *And seek sustenance from Allāh, serve Him, and begrateful to Him ...* (29:17)

\[
\text{... أليس الله بكاف عبده...}
\]

*Is Allāh not sufficient for His servant ...* (39:36)

3. **Khalwah of Šalāh**

*Šalāh* is perfect *khalwah*. It is *the* connection to *Allāh* ﷺ, par excellence. *Šalāh*, as *Rasūlullāh* ﷺ taught, was ‘*the peace and coolness of his eyes.*’ He ﷺ loved the *khalwah* of *šalāh*. Some nights he ﷺ stood in *šalāh* for long hours, his *qalb* ﷺ fully absorbed in the presence of *Allāh* ﷺ, deriving a pleasure that renders everything needs redundant.

*Šalāh* forces a disruption in our attachment to *hawā* and compels us to attach ourselves to *Allāh* ﷺ at least five times a day. *Šalāh* is *nūr* (light) from *Allāh* ﷺ to illuminate and lighten the burdens of our hearts and allow them to soar in nearness to Him ﷺ. For the intent of *šalāh* is to breathe life into our *qulūb* that are weighed down heavily with *shahawāt*, *ghaflah* and the mundane procession of this *dunyā*. *Šalāh* is our audience before the King of kings ﷺ. But our audience is only as good as the decorum present within our *qulūb*. Surely a worldly sovereign would accept no less. What then, of the
Sovereign of sovereigns ⦿? Ibn al-Qayyim (Allāh’s ⦿ mercy be upon him) notes in words to this effect: Ṣalāh without the witness of the qalb is lifeless. It is like offering a king a dead corpse as a gift and desiring his closeness. Would it be accepted?

Ṣalāh has outward and inward conditions. As the body orients itself towards its qiblah, the Ka’bah, so too the qalb must orient itself towards its own qiblah: Allāh ⦿. As the body stands facing the Ka’bah, the qalb also must not falter in its focus on its Beloved ⦿. It is reported that Rasūlullāh ﷺ advised: “... when you stand (in Ṣalāh), do not turn or swerve (your qalb), for Allāh ⦿ continues to offer His Most Majestic Face to the ‘abd so long as the ‘abd does not turn or swerve (his qalb).” And Ibn al-Qayyim (Allāh’s ⦿ mercy be upon him) states that when the qalb is in true presence and focus during Ṣalāh, a window to the next world is opened. The veils are lifted. The ‘abd has been granted access. And when he turns, the veils slam down. Indeed, one text asserts that when the ‘abd turns his qalb away, Allāh ⦿ asks:

إلى أين؟ إلى خيرمني؟

Where? To something better than Me?

There is no flight or refuge from Allāh ⦿ except to Him ⦿. There is no peace away from the Source of Peace ⦿.

The ‘abd must interrogate his nafs to find if it has found benefit in Ṣalāh – whether Ṣalāh was light and rose to the heavens, or whether it was barren, heavy, and sank to the earth. The ‘abd must search his qalb and evaluate it before the Ṣalāh and after. A Ṣalāh without transformative impact on the qalb is an audience wasted with negligence before the King ⦿.

It is well known that:
The focal desire of an individual is that which brings delight to his eyes.

For some, șalāh results in punishment. Those are they who are negligent about the basic external prerequisites of șalāh. Then come those who are investigated by Allāh ﷺ. The investigated will run the probable risk of being punished, for they entertained distractions in their qulūb and did not struggle against them. The third category are those who battle the distractions in their qulūb. For them is expiation of sin, but no reward. Fourth are those who have fought off distractions, but now struggle with keeping the qalb in focus. They reap reward. And last are the muqarrabīn, whose qulūb live in the presence of the Sovereign ﷺ, who worship Allāh ﷺ as though they see Him ﷺ. They attain everything.

We are inside șalāh as we are outside șalāh. Shayṭān enters through our preferred windows of dhunūb, through the gates of our own choosing. He uses the deadly arsenal of our own dhunūb against us. And when Shayṭān has encamped within our nafs, we take him wherever we go – even into șalāh. The cure, therefore, is an ardent mujāhadah against our shahawāt and dhunūb in order to come to șalāh free from the shackles of our transgressions.

When the ‘abd enters into șalāh by proclaiming that ‘Allāh is Greater’ than everything that is experienced and conceived, he enters into a dialogue with Allāh ﷺ. Rasūlullāh ﷺ taught that in the recitation of al-Fātiḥa, Allāh ﷺ ‘interacts’, in a manner befitting of His Majesty ﷺ, with the ‘abd. For when the ‘abd says, “All praise belongs to Allāh ﷺ, the Lord of the Worlds”, Allāh ﷺ replies: “My servant has praised Me”; when the ‘abd recites, “The Loving, the Love-Giving”, Allāh ﷺ replies: “My servant has magnified his
praise of Me”; when the ‘abd recites, “Owner of the Day of Judgement”, Allāh ﷻ replies: “My servant has glorified Me”; when the ‘abd recites, “Only You, do we worship, and only You, do we ask for help”, Allāh ﷻ replies: “This is between Me and My ‘abd”; and when the ‘abd recites: “Guide us on the straight path. The path of those whom You have favoured. Not of those who have earned Your anger, nor of those who have gone astray”, Allāh ﷻ replies: “My servant has asked of Me, and My servant will have what he has requested.”

Again and again – no less than seventeen times daily – does the ‘abd request, in the dialogue of al-Fātiḥa, that Allāh ﷻ guide him to al-Ṣirātul-Mustaqim, the straight path. This ṣirāt is elusive and its obstacles numerous. The ‘abd is weak. How can he meet the manifold conditions of will, resolve, action, knowledge, sincerity, uprightness, patience, and so forth, without Allāh’s ﷻ succour and His Guidance? Allāh ﷻ guides out of His bounty and allows misguidance out of His wisdom and justice. The request of the ‘abd is thus imperative for his felicity in this world and the next. For as in the dunyā, the ākhirah too has a path: a bridge over the fire of hell that leads to paradise. Everyone will traverse it. In the dunyā, if the ‘abd was steadfast, then in the ākhirah the bridge will be traversed with ease. Those who deviated from the straight path will find only affliction in their attempt to cross over the bridge.

In the dunyā, those whose hearts Allāh ﷻ illuminated with nūr will find that nūr actualized as a guiding source as they traverse the bridge in the next world. And those who were bereft of nūr in this dunyā, or who extinguished it in their hearts, will find no light as their companion; or they will find a flickering light that dwindles into nothingness as they begin their journey over hell.

Those who tread the path of dunyā and warded off hawā, shahawât and maʿāsī, will
find their path in the ākhirah to be smooth and clear from distractions and obstacles. But those who deviated from the path, who were seduced by the distractions of the dunyā, will find that the objects of their distractions will be given life and energy in ākhirah – and they will be the pliers to snatch them into the fire of hell.

And the pace at which the individual walked on the straight path in this dunyā will translate into the speed he crosses the ṣirāt in the ākhirah. Those who were quick and immediate to heed the call of their Lord ₪ will traverse the path with the speed of light; whereas those who were sluggish, half-hearted in their response, will fumble and fall.

We map out our future. We design our ākhirah by our dunyā. We choose our ṣirāt there by our ṣirāt here.

The ṣirāt here is illuminated by the words of Allāh ₪ and His Rasul ₪. And those who drink from the ḥawd of Rasūlullāh ₪, in the ākhirah are those that drank from his ḥawd ₪ in this life. His ḥawd ₪ here is his sunnah ₪. Those who are kept away from his ḥawd ₪ in ākhirah are those that keep away from his sunnah ₪ in this world.

4. Khalwah and Mujāhadah

Through khalwah, the process of mujāhadah is enhanced and enriched. One of the early scholars noted: “I have found nothing more instructive and instrumental for the attainment of ikhlāṣ than khalwah.” Since ikhlāṣ is the kernel of ‘ubūdiyyah, and ‘ubūdiyyah necessitates mujāhadah, then ikhlāṣ requires mujāhadah. And since khalwah helps generate or enhance ikhlāṣ, then khalwah is an essential element of mujāhadah. Through khalwah, the qalb gains clarity and perspective. Through khalwah, the moral universe becomes accessible to the qalb. Those who are externally
focused, who cannot abide by khalwah, find even the most basic moral truths difficult to understand. ‘Abdullāh ibn Mubārak (Allāh’s mercy be upon him) in one report, was once asked: “What is the best, most efficient way to cure and purify the qalb?” He responded, “Minimize your interaction with people.” Most people do not think properly or act properly; most people do not believe in Allāh; and most people are ungrateful. Rasūlullāh warned us that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of one thousand people will be in the fire of jahannam.

Moments of khalwah, then, are essential for the seeker in the path of tazkiyah. The avid business people of the dunyā have their moments of retreat. They reflect on their condition, evaluate their progress and develop a strategic plan for improvement. For a holistic life, the ‘abd needs to organize his time. He needs to reserve time for ‘ibādah in order to nourish his qalb, as well as time to nourish his earthly body and pursue a livelihood in permissible ways – and time for khalwah to best plan how to do both. Khalwah in dhikr and fikr (reflection) helps orient and focus our qulūb on Allāh. It is instrumental in clearing our minds, absorbing what we learn, disciplining ourselves through the various elements of mujāhadah, assessing our condition and planning ahead. We need to distance ourselves from our selves. The seeker of khalwah is concerned with his own rectification. He retreats mindful of the fact that he, himself, is a cause of harm – and that his retreat may save others from his own evil.

Khalwah holds another precious gift as well: silence.
SILENCE AND QUIETNESS
1. Introduction

Khalwah brings the opportunity for quietness or ṣamt. In khalwah, we discover the joy and benefits of silence. This should consequently create in us the desire for quietness, even outside of our khalwah. For the seeker of Allāh ﷺ soon realizes that the tongue is a prolific source of dhuniḥ. This much is certain. Consider the vices of the tongue: lying; backbiting; slander; excessive talk; ridiculing others; vain discussion; over-praising others, and joking and jesting indiscriminately. Rasūlullāh ﷺ joked rarely, not customarily; even then, he ﷺ always joked in truth, never with exaggeration.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ taught that:

من كان يؤمن بالله واليوم الآخر، فليقل خيراً، أو ليصمت.

Whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day should speak what is good or keep silent.

The intent of ṣamt, therefore, is to protect oneself from the tongue’s sharr (evil), and to condition its use for the acquisition of khayr (good). Khayr in this context is any spoken word which is pleasing to Allāh ﷺ.

2. The Iʿtidāl of the Tongue

If the quest of my life is saʿādah (happiness), a state of nadam (remorse) will envelop me regarding the past use of my tongue. I will now feel khawf (fear) regarding any probable misuse of my tongue. And I will resolve to restrain my tongue and use it only for khayr. The goal of restraining the tongue is not silence as a form of worship, but rather using the tongue with iʿtidāl (balance and moderation). ṣamt is not an end in itself.
Statements by the earliest practitioners of *tazkiyah* are numerous regarding the use of the tongue. One of them said: “If speech were of silver, then silence would be of gold.” The companion Abu Dardā’ (*Allāh ṣallallāhu `alaihi wa sallam* be pleased with him) once stated: “Do justice to your ears from your tongue, for you were given two ears and one tongue in order that you listen more than you speak.” One story relates that a seeker of knowledge traveled a long distance to learn from a man of much *ʿilm* and *ḥikmah*. When he found the scholar’s dwelling, he sat outside his door and waited. When the ʿālim came out, the student greeted him. The ʿālim responded to the greeting and left. When the ʿālim returned home, the same thing happened. This continued for three days. Finally, the student politely told the ʿālim about his story and about his intention to seek *ʿilm*. He also complained to him of his indifference and lack of conversational generosity. The ʿālim then replied: “My tongue is a scorpion. If I let it loose, it will begin by biting me.” The student heard this sage advice, learned it and left. The teacher was no doubt blessed with wisdom.

Silence is wisdom. It is said that when Luqmān (*may Allāh’s ṣallallāhu `alaihi wa sallam* peace be upon him) was in the service of Dāwūd (*may Allāh’s ṣallallāhu `alaihi wa sallam* peace be upon him) he saw him making an object. Luqmān (*peace be upon him*) did not know what Dāwūd (*peace be upon him*) was doing, and upon seeing him work time and time again, Luqmān felt the urge to ask Dāwūd what he was making. But Luqmān kept silent; his wisdom prevented him from asking. Finally, when Nabī Dāwūd completed his task, he exclaimed: “What an excellent shield in war!” Upon hearing this and learning what he ached to know, Nabī Luqmān said:

الصمت حكم/حكمة وقليل فاعله．

*Silence is law / wisdom – and rare are those who practice it.*
Another benefit of silence is that it rarely brings its practitioner regret, unlike speech. The more ample our words are, the more likelihood there is of falling into ḥarām or, at finer levels, muddying the mirror of our qalb. Rasūlullāh ﷺ when asked by Muʿādh (Allāh ✠ be pleased with him) if people would be taken to account for what they utter, replied to Muʿādh:

May your mother mourn you, oh Muʿādh (meaning that if Muʿādh did not understand this concept, he is ‘dead’ or might as well be dead spiritually). What else besides the harvests of peoples’ tongues drag them on their faces in the fire of hell?

Indeed the misuse of tongue contributes to the spiritual death of the qalb.

And Rasūlullāh ﷺ also said:

Whoever guarantees me that which is between his jaws (tongue) and that which is between his legs (private organs), I guarantee him paradise.

This truth inspired one ṣāliḥ of the early generation to state: “There is nothing more deserving of extended periods of imprisonment than the tongue.” Hearts are like pots; they boil and steam of that which they contain. Tongues are their spoons. The following story is an illustration of this fact. It is related that a few righteous men in the company of Rābiʿah al-Vʿādawīya (Allāh’s ✠ mercy be upon her) began a conversation about the worthlessness of dunyā. Rābiʿah said to them, “I see dunyā with its four corners in your hearts.” Surprised at her comment, they inquired about how she could arrive at such a conclusion. She replied: “You looked at the nearest thing to you in your heart and spoke about it.”

The greater the consciousness about the harms of our tongue, the less we will speak –
first shunning everything ḥarām, then the makrūh, then the shubuhāt, and then, finally, permissible but superfluous discourse. As a litmus test for our tazkiyah of the tongue, consider this invaluable advice in the mujāhadah against the tongue, offered by one righteous teacher to his student: “When you desire to speak, keep silent; and when you desire silence, you may speak.”

And to Allāh ﷺ belong the treasures of wisdom and the treasures of silence.

3. The Discourse of the Nafs

Like the tongue, the nafs has its own hadīth (discourse). This inner discourse can be serene waves of peace, imperceptible whisperings, incessant chatter, or turbulent and violent noise. Some discourse occurs more frequently and with greater intensity depending on the ‘abd's qalb and the stage of its tazkiyah. The seeker to Allāh ﷺ, concerned now with the inner terrain of his qalb, naturally seeks to silence the whispers of the nafs and transform them into dhikr. The key to this enterprise is renewed and re-invigorated mujāhadah of the nafs. For the qalb and the nafs, as established, are two separate entities. However, ‘movements’ in the nafs affect the qalb. Ripples and reverberations in the nafs agitate and cloud the qalb.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ stated: “There is in every child of Adam two lammāt - one from Shayṭān and one from the malak (angel).” He ﷺ went on to express that the lammah لَمَّة of Shayṭān is expressed through the promise of sharr (evil) and the rejection of what is correct and true. The call to sharr شَرَّ and the rejection of ḥaqq حق (truth) are expansive and uncountable. They include every manifestation that is antithetical to the shari‘ah. Rasūlullāh ﷺ concluded by explaining that the malak promises khayr خَيْر and the acceptance of ḥaqq. Again, khayr and ḥaqq are vast in their spectrum.
For some 'ibād the lammah of Shayṭān is almost non-existent. The qalb is only susceptible to rare moments of ghaflah. One of them said: “I have a qalb which if I disobeyed, I would disobey my Lord.” For this 'abd, all input into the qalb is from the malā'ikī nafs, with the other states of the nafs in perfect balance. Consequently, all that the qalb is imbued with is khayr. And this is the ultimate state of istiqāmah, or steadfastness.

The qalb is veiled by ghaflah and dhunūb. Ghaflah is cured with dhikr, dhunūb with tawbah and mujāhadah. Shayṭān uses our own negative character traits against us. Mujāhadah, at the internal level, modifies and reduces these negative inner characteristics. Therefore, the two fundamental elements for the reformation of the qalb are internal mujāhadah and dhikr, which, when jointly undertaken with patience and persistence, produce a resonance in the qalb. The energy of this resonance is a nūr in the qalb, analogous to a blazing fire in this world. The firmament of the 'abd's qalb becomes illuminated, like a sky adorned by stars. The stars from this resonance of dhikr sweep away the shayāṭīn, safeguarding the qalb of the 'abd like a protected, celestial sphere. Is not Allāh ⋆ sufficient for His 'abd?

﴿ ﺄﻠﻴﺲ ﻟﻠﻪ ﺑﻜﺎﻑ ﻋﺒﺪﻪ...﴾

Is Allāh not sufficient for His servant ... (39:36)

The movement of the nafs is called a harakah or a khāṭir – a type of communication or request from the nafs to the qalb. Every act has an internal genesis; it is preceded by a khāṭir, either from the lammah of Shayṭān or from the lammah of the malak. The khawāṭir (plural of khāṭir) of the nafs are facilitated by five factors: lack of 'ilm, lack of tawbah, lack of mujāhadah, lack of dhikr and the environment.
a. The absence of ʿilm generates a state of ignorance within the nafs which Shayṭān employs for his llamah. A nafs with lack of ʿilm is more inviting to destructive khawāţir. The deeper the ʿilm, the more the ʿabd can distinguish between the various khawāţir – where they emanate from and how to best combat them.

b. The less mujāhadah, the baser the state of the nafs (bahīmī, sabuʿī, or shayṭānī), the less transparent the qalb is to khayr, the more receptive it is to the llamah of shayṭān, and the worse the khawāţir. The more the ʿabd indulges in ḥarām, the more muted the ability to distinguish between various types of khawāţir and their different shades. Some khawāţir are so subtle, so deceptive, that the ʿabd must refrain from the makrūh, mubah, and fuṣūl in order to ascertain them. To mitigate khawāţir generally, the ʿabd must close the channels and passageways of Shayṭān into his qalb with mujāhadah and dhikr.

c. The more polluted the environment, the more unwholesome the khawāţir. Images, sounds, and actions all have their effects on the qalb, even when the ʿabd does not directly involve his jawāriḥ in maʿṣiyah. The nafs is a storehouse of information and data, which then become the subject matter of the hadīth of the nafs, which then later translate into will and resolve. The khawāţir ultimately stir the qalb itself. The seeker must therefore bar the channels that feed information into the nafs. Khalwah is thus crucial because it deprives the nafs from negative external stimuli. Without khalwah or with laxity in khalwah, the hadīth of the nafs will re-emerge and claim the inner sanctum of the ʿabd.

d. The absence of dhikr allows negative khawāţir to be manufactured, intensified and perpetuated. An increase of dhikr, in depth and frequency, fills up the spiritual space of the inner-self, leaving relatively no emptiness to be occupied by negative khawāţir.
The nafs will not be stilled until the ‘abd wins the possession of the keys to his own qalb by utilizing the jawārih in the obedience of Allāh ﷺ. Once the external mujāhadah is won, and the keys (of the jawārih) are firmly controlled, the ‘abd will naturally be led to the next battlefield: the qalb itself. This inner battle (murāqabah of the qalb) involves recognizing and identifying khawāṣir, controlling them and preventing the actualization of the base ones.

Through murāqabah, we listen to the silent discourse of the lower nafs with the radar of the malāʾikī nafs. Every movement of the lower nafs causes murkiness in the qalb. We should attempt to block the dictates of the lower nafs before they are actualized. For the movement of the nafs affects our material world. One ṣāliḥ of the early salaf stated: “I disobey Allāh ﷺ and I see it (its negative impact against me) in the behaviour of my spouse, my riding beast and my servant.”

The types of khawāṣir are two: khiṭāb خطاب and muṭālabah مطالبة. Khīṭāb is the internal communication of the nafs – it does not suggest externalization. Muṭālabah is a communication with a request to conform. Every muṭālabah is a khiṭāb but not every khiṭāb is a muṭālabah. While incremental and continuous improvement in ‘ilm, mujāhadah, dhikr and environment contribute to gradually disengage the nafs from generating negative khawāṣir, the immediate duty of the ‘abd is to prevent the externalization of the khāṣir of muṭālabah, and to ensure that it is not actualized at the level of the jawārih.

Once the khawāṣir of negative muṭālabah are blocked successfully and diminish in intensity and frequency until they gradually fade into insignificance, and possibly,
nothingness; the *khawāfir* of negative *kiṭāb* will too, *insha’Allāh*, be reduced to insignificance. The *lammah* of the *malak*, then, reigns sovereign in the universe of the *qalb* and the lower *nafs* is perfectly silent.