Straight Path

# Outline

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# Opening: *Seeds of Reality!*

1. The essentials and indisputable matters of religion, which form ninety per cent, are each diamond pillars, while the controversial matters which are open to interpretation form only ten per cent. Ninety diamond pillars may not be put under the protection of ten gold pillars. Books and interpretations should be telescopes for observing the Qur’an; they should be mirrors; not shadows or deputies!
2. Since by nature man is noble, he seeks the truth. Sometimes he encounters the false, but supposing it to be the truth preserves it in his heart. Then, when delving into reality, without his willing it misguidance strikes him on the head; supposing it to be reality, he plunges his head into it.
3. Anyone who is capable may make interpretations of the law for his own self; but he cannot make the law.
4. Calling others to accept an idea is dependent on acceptance by the ‘ulama; otherwise it is innovation, and should be rejected.
5. If the laws of government are not combined with the principles of wisdom, and the bonds of force not combined with the laws of truth, they will not be fruitful among the mass of the people.
6. A learned guide should be a sheep, not a bird. A sheep gives its lamb milk, while a bird gives its chick regurgitated food.
7. There are two Shari‘as:
* The Firstis the Shari‘a *(common laws)* that we know which orders the actions and conduct of man, the microcosm, and proceeds from the attribute of speech.
* The Second is the Supreme Shari‘a of Creation *(physical laws)*, which orders the motion and rest of the world, the macroanthropos (*insaniyet-i kübra*, big humanity), proceeds from the attribute of will, and is sometimes wrongly called nature. The angels are a vast community; they are the bearers, representatives, and personifications of the creative commands which proceed from the attribute of will and are the Shari‘a of Creation.
1. HADITH: According to an authentic narration, he said: *“My community will be divided into seventy-three sects, and only one among them will attain salvation.”* He was asked: *“Who are they?”* He replied: *“Those who follow me and my Companions,”* meaning the Sunnis or Ahl al-Sunna wa’l-Jama‘a.

# Reading Circle A: *Companions of the Prophet (pbuh)*

After the prophets the most virtuous of mankind are the Companions, is a certain proof that those that are sound out of those narrations refer to minor virtues. For in minor vir­tues and particular perfections a quality may be deemed preferable to that which is superior and in fact preferable. But from the point of view of gen­eral virtue the Companions cannot be reached, who are the subject of Divine praise at the end of Sura al-Fath, and are praised and applauded in the Torah, Gospels, and Qur'an. For now, we shall explain three points of wisdom con­cerning this truth, which comprise three reasons, out of very many reasons and instances of wisdom.

The level of the Companions in closeness to God cannot be attained with the feet of sainthood. For Almighty God is infinitely close to us; closer to us than everything, but we are infinitely distant from Him. Divine proximity may be gained in two ways:

* The First is through the unfolding of Divine immediacy, to which the Divine proximity in prophethood looks, and which the Companions manifested through the legacy of prophethood and conversation of the Prophet.
* The Second Way is to traverse the degrees of our distance from God and be honored with Divine proximity to an extent. Most of the spiritual voyaging of sainthood is according to this, and illumination through the self and through the outside world proceeds in this way.

Thus, the first way is purely given, it is not acquired; it is attraction, the drawing of the Most Merciful One, and it is being loved by Him. The path is short, but very severe, very elevated, very pure, and without shadow. The other is acquired, long, and in shadow. Even if its strange wonders are many, it cannot reach the first in regard to quality and Divine proximity. For example, there are two ways of reaching yesterday. The first is not to be subject to the course of time. Through a sacred power, it is to rise above time, and see yesterday as present like today. The second is to traverse the distance of a year, to travel and turn, and come to yesterday. But still yesterday cannot be held; it leaves the person and departs. In just the same way, there are two ways of passing from the apparent to reality. The first is to be carried away directly on the attraction of reality, and, without entering the intermediate realm of the sufi way, to find reality within the apparent itself. The second is to pass through many levels through spiritual journeying. For sure, the saints are successful in annihilating the soul and kill the evil-commanding soul, but they still cannot reach the Companions. Because, since the Companions' souls had been purified and cleansed, through the many faculties within the soul, they manifested to a greater degree the varieties of worship, and thanks, and praise. After the soul has been annihilated, the worship of the saints acquires a simpleness and plainness.

All the subtle inner faculties of those of the Companions and of the following two generations who possessed the very highest degree of the greater sainthood received their share from the Qur’an itself, and for them, the Qur’an was a true guide and sufficient for them. This shows that just as the All- Wise Qur’an states realities, so it emanates the effulgence of the greater sainthood to those capable of receiving them.

* TAKE AWAY POINT: *Prophet’s Companions are like the stars in the sky. Whomever follow among them, will be rightly guided.*
* DRILL: How does the Qur’an mention about them?
* PRAYER: *Rabbenâgfir lenâ ve li ihvâninellezîne sebekûnâ bil îmâni ve lâ tec’al fî kulûbinâ gıllen lillezîne âmenû rabbenâ inneke raûfun rahîm (59:10)*

# Reading Circle B: *Different Ordinances*

Sacred laws change according to the ages. Indeed, in one age different prophets may come, and they have come. Since subsequent to the Seal of the Prophets, his Greater Shari'a is sufficient for all peoples in every age, no need has remained for different laws. However, in secondary matters, the need for different schools has persisted to a degree. Just as clothes change with the change of the seasons and medicines change according to dispositions, so sacred laws change according to the ages, and their ordinances change according to the capacities of peoples. Because the secondary matters of the ordinances of the Shari'a look to human circumstances; they come according to them, and are like medicine.

At the time of the early prophets, since social classes were far apart and men's characters were both somewhat coarse and violent, and their minds, primitive and close to nomadism, the laws at that time came all in different forms, appropriate to their conditions. There were even different prophets and laws in the same continent in the same century.

Then, since with the coming of the Prophet of the end of time, man as though advanced from the primary to the secondary stage, and through numerous revolutions and upheavals reached a position at which all the human peoples could receive a single lesson and listen to a single teacher and act in accordance with a single law, no need remained for different laws, neither was there necessity for different teachers. But because they were not all at completely the same level and did not proceed in the same sort of social life, the schools of law became numerous.

If, like students of a school of higher education, the vast majority of mankind were clothed in the same sort of social life and attained the same level, then all the schools could be united. But just as the state of the world does not permit that, so the schools of law cannot be the same.

If you say: The truth is one; how can the different ordinances of the four and twelve schools be true?

The Answer: The same water governs in five different ways in five ill people of different disposition, thus: for one, the water is a cure for his illness, and according to medicine, necessary. For another, it is like poison for his sickness and harmful, and medically prohibited. For another, it causes a small amount of harm, and is reprehensible medically. For another the water is beneficial and without harm; according to medicine that is sunna for him. And for yet another it is neither harmful nor beneficial; he can drink it with good health, and for him it is medically permissible. Thus, here the truth has become numerous; all five are true. Are you able to say: *“The water is only a cure, only necessary, and it governs in no other way?”*

Similarly, impelled by Divine wisdom, the Divine ordinances change according to the schools of law and those who follow them, and they change as truth, and all are true and right. For example, since, in accordance with Divine wisdom and determining, the majority of those who follow Imam Shafi'i are closer to village life and nomadism than the Hanafis, and are lacking in social life, which makes the community like a single body, each person recites the Fatiha behind the prayer-leader so as to himself express his pains at the Court of the Dispenser of Needs and utter his private wishes. And this is absolutely right and pure wisdom. However, since most Islamic governments favored the school of Imam-i A'zam, the great majority of those who follow that school are closer to civilization and town life and more fitted for social life. Thus, the community becomes like a single individual and one man speaks in the name of all; all affirm him with their hearts and bind their hearts to his and his word becomes the word of all; according to the Hanafi school, the Fatiha is not recited behind the prayer-leader. And its not being recited is absolutely right and pure wisdom.

And, for example, since through forming a barrier against the assaults of nature, the Shari'a modifies it and trains the evil-commanding soul, according to the Shafi'i school, most of whose followers are villagers, semi-nomadic, and occupied in manual labor: *“Ablutions are spoilt by touching a woman; the slightest uncleanliness is harmful.”* While according to the Hanafi School, since the great majority of it followers have entered social life and become 'semi-civilized:' *“Touching women does not spoil the ablutions; there is license for a small amount of uncleanliness.”*

Now we shall consider a manual worker and a gentleman. Due to his craft and the manner of his livelihood, a worker is afflicted with mixing with and being in contact with women who are canonically strangers to him. Since he sits at the same hearth as them and is involved with unclean things, nature and his evil-commanding soul find the field empty and may attack him. Therefore, in order to form a barrier against such attacks, the Shari'a states concerning them: *“Your ablutions will be spoilt; do not touch the women. Your prayers will be invalid; do not be tainted.”* A heavenly voice rings in his spiritual ears. Whereas, in accordance with social custom and in the name of common morality, the gentleman —on condition he is honorable— is not afflicted with being in contact with women who are canonically strangers to him, and in the name of cleanliness of civilization, he is not tainted to any degree with unclean things. Therefore, in the Hanafi school, the Shari'a has not shown him harshness and censure; it has shown its permissive side, and lightened it. *“If your hand has been touched, your ablutions are not spoilt. If you are ashamed and do not perform the* istinja*in public, there is no harm in it. A small amount of uncleanliness is permitted.”* It saves him from scruples. Thus, two drops from the ocean as examples for you. Make analogies with them, and if you can, balance them on the scales of the Shari'a in this way, with the balance of Sha'rani's Mizan.

* TAKE AWAY POINT: *Each and every of the true ordinances are valid and complete within themselves.*
* DRILL: What are the main ordinances among Muslims?
* PRAYER:
	+ Allahumme sebbit kalbî alâ dinike
	+ Allahümme erinel hakka hakkan verzuknâ ittibâ'ahu ve erinel bâtıla bâtılan verzuknâ ictinâbehu

O God! Grant blessings and peace to the one in whom were embodied the lights of Your love through the beauty of Your attributes; the comprehensive mirror to the manifestations of Your Most Beautiful Names; in whom was focused the rays of Your love for the art which is in Your creatures; the most perfect and wonderful of Your artefacts, who was a sample of the perfections of Your art and an index of the beauties of Your inscriptions; and who reflected the subtleties of Your love and Your desire that Your art be appreciated; the most elevated herald of Your fine art, who proclaimed in resounding voice admiration for the beauty of Your inscriptions, the most wonderful praiser of the perfections of Your art; who reflected together in his being the varieties of Your love and Your appreciation for the good morals of your creatures and the subtleties of Your artefacts' qualities, comprehending all fine conduct and good morality through Your favor and the subtleties of commendable attributes through Your grace; who was the most excellent criterion and measure of everything You mention in Your Criterion of Truth and Falsehood, the Qur'an, those whom You love from among the righteous, the patient, the believers, those who fear You, who turn to You, and who repent, and all the classes of those whom You infuse with life and honor through Your love in Your Criterion of Truth and Falsehood, until they become as the leader of those whom You love; the master of those beloved by You and chief of Your beloveds; and grant blessings and peace to all his Family and Companions and brothers. Amen. Through Your mercy, O Most Merciful of the Merciful!

# Reading Circle C: *Sufism*



*Behold! Verily on the friends of God there is no fear, nor shall they grieve*. (10:62)

Underlying the terms Sufism, path, sainthood, and spiritual journeying is an agreeable, luminous, joyful, and spiritual sacred truth. This truth has been proclaimed, taught, and described in thousands of books written by authoritative scholars among the people of illumination and unveiling, who have told the Muslim community and us about it. May God reward them abundantly! Now, because of some compelling circumstances at this time, we shall point out a few droplets, like sprinklings, from that vast ocean.

The aim and goal of the Sufi path is – knowledge of God and the unfolding of the truths of faith – through a spiritual journeying with the feet of the heart under the shadow of the Ascension of Muhammad (pbuh), to manifest the truths of faith and the Qur’an through tasting and certain enhanced states, and to an extent through direct vision; it is an elevated human mystery and perfection called the Sufi path or Sufism.

Yes, since man is a comprehensive index of the universe, his heart resembles a map of thousands of worlds. For innumerable human sciences and fields of knowledge show that man’s brain in his head is a sort of center of the universe, like a telephone and telegraph exchange for innumerable lines. Similarly, the millions of light-scattering books written by incalculable saints show man’s heart in his essential being to be the place of manifestation of innumerable cosmic truths, and to be their pivot, and seed.

Since the human heart and brain are thus central, and comprise the members of a mighty tree in the form of a seed, and within them are encapsulated the parts and components of an eternal, majestic machine pertaining to the hereafter, certainly the heart’s Creator willed that it should be worked and brought out from the potential to the actual, and developed, and put into action, for that is what He did. Since He willed it, the heart will certainly work like the mind. And the most effective means of working it is to be turned towards the truths of faith on the Sufi path through the remembrance of God in the degrees of sainthood.

**First Point:** The Shari‘a is directly, without shadow or veil, the result of the divine address, through the mystery of divine oneness in respect of absolute dominicality. The highest degrees of the Sufi path and of reality are like parts of the Shari‘a. Or they are always like its means, introduction, and servant. Their results are the incontrovertible matters of the Shari‘a.

That is to say, the ways of the Sufi orders and of reality are like means, servants, and steps for reaching the truths of the Shari‘a, till at the highest level they are transformed into the meaning of reality and essence of the Sufi way, which are at the heart of the Shari‘a. So then they become parts of the Greater Shari‘a. It is not right to think of the Shari‘a as an outer shell and reality as its inner part and result and aim, as some Sufis do. Yes, the Shari‘a unfolds according to the levels of men. It is wrong to suppose that what the mass of people imagine is the external aspect of the Shari‘a is its reality, and to give the names of reality and Sufi path to the degrees of the Shari‘a that are disclosed to the elite. The Shari‘a has degrees which look to all classes.

It is in consequence of this that the further the Sufis and those who seek reality advance, their longing for the truths of the Shari‘a increases, as does their captivation by them and their following them. They consider the most minor aspect of the Prophet’s (pbuh) practices to be their greatest aim, and strive to follow them and imitate them. For however higher divine revelation is than inspiration, the conduct of the Shari‘a, which is the fruit of revelation, is higher to the same degree than the conduct of the Sufi path, the fruit of inspiration. Therefore, following the Prophet’s (pbuh) practices is the basis and principal element of the Sufi path.

**Second Point:** The Sufi path and way of reality should not exceed being means. If they are made the ultimate aim, the incontrovertible teachings and actions of the Shari‘a and following the practices of the Prophet (pbuh) become merely a matter of form, while the heart looks beyond them. That is to say, such a person thinks of his circle for the remembrance of God rather than the obligatory prayers; he is drawn more to his recitations and supplications than to his religious obligations; he is more concerned with avoiding offending against his order’s rules of behaviour than with avoiding grievous sins. Whereas the recitations of the Sufi path cannot be the equivalent of the obligatory acts that constitute the incontestible matters of the Shari‘a; they cannot take their place. The etiquette of the Sufi path and its invocations should be a solace and a way of obtaining true pleasure from the obligatory acts; they should not themselves be the source. That is, the *tekke* should lead a person to perform the five daily prayers assiduously in the mosque. If he performs them there hurriedly as a formality, thinking that he will find true pleasure and perfection in the *tekke*, he is drawing away from reality.

**Third Point:** It is sometimes asked: *“Can there be any Sufi path outside the practices of the Prophet (pbuh) and matters of the Shari‘a?”*

*Answer:* There are some such paths, and there are not. There are, because some of the highest saints were executed by the sword of the Shari‘a. And there are not, because the authoritative scholars among the saints have agreed on this rule of Sa‘di-i Shirazi: *“It is impossible, Sa‘di, to be victorious on the way of felicity, except by following the Chosen One.”* That is, it is impossible for one outside the highway of God’s Messenger (pbuh), who does not follow him, to attain the true lights of reality. The meaning of this is as follows:

God’s Messenger (Peace and blessings be upon him) was the Seal of the Prophets and the addressee of God in the name of all mankind; mankind, therefore, cannot advance outside his highway; it is essential to be under his banner. But since ecstatics and those immersed in divine contemplation are not responsible for their opposition; and since man possesses certain subtle faculties that are not held accountable, and when such faculties dominate a person, he cannot be held responsible for opposing the obligations of the Shari‘a; and since man possesses subtle faculties that just as they are not accountable, so they are not under the jurisdiction of the will and cannot be controlled by the mind, for they do not heed the heart or the mind; certainly, when those faculties dominate in a person, – but only at that time – he does not fall from the rank of sainthood by opposing the Shari‘a, he is held excused. On condition, however, that he does not deny or insult the truths of the Shari‘a and rules of belief, or display contempt towards them. Even if he does not carry out the injunctions, he has to acknowledge that they are right. But if he is overcome by that state and assumes a position, I seek refuge with God, which infers denial and giving the lie to those incontestible truths, it is the sign that he has deviated from the path!

*Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed, You are All-Knowing, All-Wise*! (2:32)

*O God! Grant blessings and peace to the Supreme Help in every age and the Sublime Spiritual Pole at all times, our master Muhammad, the magnificence of whose sainthood was manifested in his Ascension, as was the station of his being the beloved of God, and under the shadow of whose Ascension are included all sainthoods, and to all his Family and Companions. Amen. And all praise be to God, the Sustainer of All the Worlds*.

# Appendix A: *The Highway of the Practices of the Prophet (pbuh)*

We shall indicate briefly a matter that has been disputed by the Shi‘ites and the Sunnis and has been magnified to such an extent that it has been included in the books on doctrine, among the fundamentals of belief.

The Sunnis say: *“Ali (May God be pleased with him) was the fourth of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Abu Bakr the Veracious (May God be pleased with him) was superior to him and was more deserving of the Caliphate, therefore it passed to him first.”* While the Shi‘ites say: *“It was ‘Ali’s right. An injustice was done to him. ‘Ali was the most worthy of them all.”* A summary of the arguments for their claims is this. They say: *“The Hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) about ‘Ali, and with his title of King of Sainthood his being the recognized authority of the vast majority of the saints and spiritual paths, and his extraordinary knowledge, courage, and worship, and the Prophet’s (Upon whom be blessings and peace) intense concern for him and towards his descendants all show that he was the most worthy. The Caliphate was always his right; it was seized from him.”*

**The Answer:** The fact that ‘Ali (May God be pleased with him) followed the first three Caliphs, whom he repeatedly acknowledged, and held the position of their Shaikh al-Islam, refutes these claims of the Shi‘ites. Furthermore, the victories of Islam and the struggles against its enemies in the time of the first three Caliphs and the events in ‘Ali’s time, refute the Shi‘ites’ claims, again from the point of view of the Islamic Caliphate. That is to say the Sunnis’ claim is rightful.

If it is said, there are two sorts of Shi‘ites, the Sainthood Shi‘a and the Caliphate Shi’a. Because they mixed hatred and politics the second group may have been unjust, but the first group were not concerned with partisan politics. However, the Sainthood Shi‘a joined the Caliphate Shi‘a. That is, some of the saints of the Sufi orders looked on ‘Ali as superior and they endorsed the claims of the Caliphate Shi‘a.

**The Answer:** ‘Ali (May God be pleased with him) has to be considered in two respects. One is from the point of view of his personal perfections and rank, and the other is from the point of view of his representing the collective personality of the Prophet’s (PBUH) family. As for this collective personality, it displays an aspect of the Most Noble Messenger’s (PBUH) essential nature.

Thus, in regard to the first point, foremost ‘Ali himself and all the people of truth gave precedence to Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. They saw their ranks as higher in the service of Islam and closeness to God. As for the second point, as the representative of the collective personality of the Prophet’s (PBUH) family, which represents an aspect of the Muhammadan Truth, ‘Ali has no equal. The highly laudatory Hadiths about ‘Ali look to this second point. There is a sound narration that corroborates this: the Noble Messenger (PBUH) decreed: “The descendants of each prophet are from himself. My descendants are those of ‘Ali.”

The reason the Hadiths praising ‘Ali more than the other three Caliphs have become so widespread is that the people of truth, that is, the Sunnis, spread many narrations about him in response to the Umayyads and Kharijites attacking and disparaging him unjustly. The other Rightly-Guided Caliphs were not subject to such criticism and detraction, so no need was felt to spread Hadiths about them.

Furthermore, the Prophet (PBUH) saw with the eye of prophethood the grievous events and internal strife to which ‘Ali would be exposed in the future, and in order to save him from despair and his community from thinking unfavorably of him, he consoled him and guided his community with significant Hadiths like “Whosever master I am, ‘Ali too is his master.”

The excessive love of the Sainthood Shi‘a towards ‘Ali (May God be pleased with him) and – influenced by the Sufi Orders – their deeming him superior, does not make them answerable to the degree of the Caliphate Shi‘a. For those who follow the path of sainthood look towards their spiritual guides with love, and the mark of love is excess; it wants to see the beloved as greater than his rank. And that is how it sees him. Ecstatic may be forgiven excesses of love. So their deeming ‘Ali more worthy because of their love may be excused on condition it does not turn into disparagement of the other Rightly-Guided Caliphs and enmity towards them, and does not go beyond the fundamental teachings of Islam.

As for the Caliphate Shi‘a, since political prejudice took a hold of them they could not rid themselves of hatred and aggression, so forfeited their right to be excused. Even, confirming the saying, “Not for love of ‘Ali, but out of hatred of ‘Umar,” since Persian national pride was wounded at ‘Umar’s hand, they showed their revenge in the form of love of ‘Ali. So also ‘Amr ibn al-‘As’s rebellion against ‘Ali and ‘Umar ibn al-Sa‘d’s tragic war against Husayn aroused in the Shi‘a an intense anger and enmity towards the name of ‘Umar.

The Sainthood Shi‘a have no right to criticize the Sunnis, for the Sunnis have not decried ‘Ali, indeed, they love him sincerely. But they avoid the excessive love which is described as dangerous in Hadiths. The Prophet’s (pbuh) praise of ‘Ali’s followers in the Hadiths refers to the Sunnis. For it is the Sunnis among ‘Ali’s followers who love him in a moderate fashion and are the people of truth. Just as excessive love of Jesus (Upon whom be peace) is dangerous for Christians, so it has been made clear in sound Hadiths that that sort of excessive love for ‘Ali is dangerous.

***If the Sainthood Shi‘a say:*** “Once ‘Ali’s consummate spiritual attainments are accepted, it is impossible to give precedence to Abu Bakr the Truthful.”

**The reply:** It was as though the personal perfections of Abu Bakr, the Supremely Veracious, and ‘Umar, the Supreme Distinguisher between True and False (May God be pleased with them), had been placed in the pan of some scales together with their achievements during their Caliphates, realized through their performance of the duties inherited from the Prophet (pbuh), and in the other pan had been placed ‘Ali’s (May God be pleased with him) extraordinary personal perfections together with the internal Caliphate struggles, which resulted from the tragic events he was compelled to enter upon and were the object of suspicion and distrust, and the Sunnis saw that Abu Bakr’s or ‘Umar’s or ‘Uthman’s (Dhi’l-Nurayn) pan weighed heavier, and so they gave them precedence.

Moreover, as is proved in the Twelfth and Twenty-Fourth Words, prophethood is so elevated in comparison to sainthood that a tiny manifestation of it is superior to a large manifestation of sainthood. In regard to this, the successes of the Supremely Veracious and the Supreme Distinguisher between True and False during their Caliphates was an indication for the Sunnis that their share in the legacy of prophethood and the establishment of its laws had been divinely bestowed. Since ‘Ali’s personal perfections did not dismiss that greater share, which had been inherited from the Prophet (pbuh), he acted as Shaikh al-Islam for Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, the two Illustrious Elders, in the time of their Caliphates, and esteemed them. How should the Sunnis, who love and revere ‘Ali, not love and revere the two Elders, whom ‘Ali loved and revered sincerely? Let us make this truth clear be means of an example:

One of the sons of a very rich man is given twenty *batmans* of silver and four *batmans* of gold from his father’s legacy, and another is given five of silver and five of gold. So if the third is given three of silver and five of gold, of course the last two will receive less in quantity, but more in quality. Like this example, the lesser amount of the two elders’ share of the gold of the truth of divine immediacy, which was manifested in the legacy of prophethood and the establishment of its laws, would weigh heavier than the great amount of divine proximity and the perfections of sainthood which sprang from the jewel of sainthood. These points should also be taken into account when weighing them up. But if they are compared with one another from the point of view of personal courage, knowledge, and sainthood, the matter takes on a different complexion.

Also, there can be no comparison in respect of the collective personality of the Prophet’s (pbuh) family, which was represented in the person of ‘Ali (May God be pleased with him), and of the Muhammadan Truth, which was manifested as a total inheritance in that collective personality. For contained in it was the mighty mystery of the Prophet Muhammad himself (pbuh).

As for the Caliphate Shi‘a, they can claim no rights before the Sunnis other than shame. For although they say they have tremendous love for ‘Ali, they disparage him, and their creed necessitates accusing him of immorality. For they say that although Abu Bakr the Veracious and ‘Umar were acting unjustly, ‘Ali feigned approval for them; according to Shi’i terminology, he dissimulated. That is, he was frightened of them and behaved hypocritically. But it is not love to hold that someone who was such a hero of Islam, won the title Lion of Allah, and was the commander and guide of the faithful, was simulating love for people he did not love out of fear and deception, and was feigning approval for them in fear for more than twenty years, and was following wrongdoers. ‘Ali would disclaim love that sort.

Thus, the people of truth’s creed in no way disparages ‘Ali, nor levels accusations of immorality at him. It does not attribute cowardice where there was such remarkable courage, but says that if ‘Ali had not considered the Rightly-Guided Caliphs to be right, he would not have recognized them for a minute, nor obeyed them. It means that since he thought them right and preferable, he made over his courage and striving to the way of justice.

*In short:* Too much or too little of anything is not good. Moderation is the middle way and has been chosen by the Sunnis. But, alas, Kharijite ideas have infiltrated the Sunnis to an extent; so too addicts of politics and some atheists criticize ‘Ali. They say, God forbid, that he did not understand politics so was not entirely worthy of the Caliphate and could not govern, and because of these unjust accusations, ‘Alawis feel affronted at the Sunnis. Whereas Sunnis hold no principles or basic beliefs that necessitate such ideas. Indeed, they prove the opposite.

The Sunnis cannot be condemned because of ideas that come from Kharijites and atheists. Indeed, the Sunnis are firmer followers of ‘Ali than the ‘Alawis. They mention ‘Ali in the laudatory fashion he deserves in all their khutbas and prayers. And the saints and purified scholars, the vast majority of whom belonged to the Sunni school, recognized him as a spiritual guide and the king of sainthood. The ‘Alawis should ignore the Kharijites and atheists who have deservedly earned the enmity of both the ‘Alawis and the Sunnis, and not take sides against the people of truth. Some ‘Alawis even abandon the Prophet’s (pbuh) Sunna out of spite for the Sunnis. Anyway, we have said too much on this matter, for it has been discussed inordinately by the religious scholars.

O Sunnis, who are the people of truth, and ‘Alawis, whose way is love of the Prophet’s (pbuh) family! Quickly put an end to this meaningless, disloyal, unjust, and harmful dispute between you. Otherwise the atheistic current which is now so influential will make one of you a tool against the other, and use the one to crush the other. And after defeating the one it will destroy the tool. As believers in divine unity, it is essential that you leave aside unimportant matters that cause division, for there are a hundred fundamental sacred bonds between you that enjoin brotherhood and unity.

# Appendix B: *Principles Leading to God’s Love!*

The ways leading to Almighty God are truly numerous. While all true ways are taken from the Qur’an, some are shorter, safer, and more general than others. Of these ways taken from the Qur’an is that of **impotence, poverty, compassion,** and **reflection,** from which, with my defective understanding, I have benefited.

Like ecstatic love, **impotence** is a path which, by way of worship, leads to winning *God’s love*; but it is safer. **Poverty** too leads to the divine name of *All- Merciful*. And, like ecstatic love, **compassion** leads to the name of *All- Compassionate*, but it is a swifter and broader path. Also like ecstatic love, **reflection** leads to the name of *All-Wise*, but it is richer, broader, and more brilliant path. This path consists not of ten steps like the ten subtle faculties of some of the Sufi paths employing silent recollection, nor of seven stages like the seven souls of those practicing public recitation, but of **four steps**. It is reality (*hakikat*), rather than a Sufi way (*tarikat*). It is Shari‘a.

However, let it not be misunderstood. It means to see one’s impotence, poverty and faults before Almighty God, not to fabricate them or display them to people. The method of this short path is to follow the practices of the Prophet (pbuh), perform the religious obligations and give up serious sins. It is especially to perform the prescribed prayers correctly and with attention, and following them to say the tesbihat.

The verse,  *“Therefore, do not justify yourselves,” (53:32)* points to the **first step**.

The verse,  *“And be not like those who forget God, and He therefore makes them forget their own selves,” (59:19)* points to the **second step**.

The verse,  *“Whatever good happens to you is from God, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself,” (4:79)* points to the **third step**.

The verse,  *“Everything will perish save His countenance,” (28:88)* points to the **fourth step**. A brief explanation of these four steps is as follows:

**First Step:** As the verse, *“Therefore, do not justify yourselves”* suggests, it is to not purify the soul. For on account of his nature and innate disposition, man loves himself. Indeed, he loves himself before anything else, and only himself. He sacrifices everything other than himself to his own soul. He praises himself in a manner befitting some object worthy of worship. He absolves and exonerates himself from faults in the same way. As far as he possibly can, he does not see faults as being appropriate for him, and does not accept them. He defends himself passionately as though worshipping himself. Even, using on himself the members and faculties given him as part of his nature in order to praise and glorify the True Object of Worship, he displays the meaning of the verse, *”Who takes as his god his own desires.” (25:43; 45:23)*

He considers himself, he relies on himself, he fancies himself. Thus, his purification and cleansing at this stage, in this step, is to not purify himself; it is not to absolve himself.

**Second Step:** As the verse, *“And be not like those who forget God, and He therefore makes them forget their own selves” teaches*, man is oblivious of himself and not aware of himself. If he thinks of death, it is in relation to others. If he sees transience and decline, he does not attribute them to himself. His evil-commanding soul demands that when it comes to inconvenience and service of others, he forgets himself, but when it comes to receiving his recompense, and to benefits and enjoyment, he thinks of himself and takes his own part fervently. His purification, cleansing, and training at this stage is the reverse of this. That is to say, when oblivious of himself, it is not to be oblivious. That is, to forget himself when it comes to pleasure, and ambition and greed, and to think of himself when it comes to death and service of others.

**Third Step:** As the verse, *“Whatever good happens to you is from God, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself”* teaches, the nature of the evil-commanding soul demands that it always considers goodness to be from itself and it becomes vain and conceited. Thus, at this step, a person sees only faults, defects, impotence, and poverty in himself, and understands that all his good qualities and perfections are bounties bestowed on him by the All- Glorious Creator.

He gives thanks instead of being conceited, and offers praise instead of boasting. According to the meaning of the verse, *Truly he succeeds who purifies it,(91:9)* his purification at this stage is to know his perfection to lie in imperfection, his power in impotence, and his wealth in poverty.

**Fourth Step:** As the verse, *“Everything will perish save His countenance”* teaches, the evil- commanding soul considers itself to be free and independent and to exist of itself. Because of this, man claims to possess a sort of dominicality. He harbors a hostile rebelliousness towards his True Object of Worship. Thus, through understanding the following fact, he is saved from this. The fact is this:

According to the apparent meaning of things, which looks to each thing itself, everything is transitory, wanting, accidental, non-existent. But according to the meaning that signifies something other than itself and in respect of each thing being a mirror to the All-Glorious Maker’s names and charged with various duties, each is a witness, it is witnessed, and it is existent. The purification and cleansing of a person at this stage is as follows:

In his existence he is non-existent, and in his non-existence he has existence. That is to say, if he values himself and attributes existence to himself, he is in the darkness of non-existence as great as the universe. That is, if he relies on his individual existence and is unmindful of the True Giver of Existence, he has an individual light of existence like that of a fire-fly and is submerged in an endless darkness of non- existence and separation. But if he gives up egotism and sees that he is a mirror of the manifestations of the True Giver of Existence, he gains all beings and an infinite existence. For he who finds the Necessary Existent, the manifestation of whose names all beings manifest, finds everything.

**Conclusion:** The four steps in this way of **impotence, poverty, compassion, and reflection** have been explained in the twenty-six Words so far written, which are concerned with knowledge of reality, the reality of the Shari‘a, and the wisdom of the Qur’an. So here, we shall allude briefly to only one or two points, as follows:

This path is shorter, because it consists of four steps. When impotence causes a person to give up the soul, it turns him directly to the All-Powerful One of Glory. Whereas when a person on the way of ecstatic love, the swiftest way, gives up the soul, his way directs him to a temporary beloved. Only when he discovers the beloved’s impermanence does he turn to the True Beloved.

Also, this path is much safer, because the ravings and high-flown claims of the soul are not present on it. For apart from impotence, poverty, and defect, the soul possesses nothing so that it oversteps its mark.

Also, this path is much broader and more universal. For in order to attain to a constant awareness of God’s presence, a person is not compelled to imagine the universe to be condemned to non-existence and to declare:  *“There is no existent but He,”* like those who believe in the Unity of Existence, nor to suppose the universe to be condemned to imprisonment in absolute oblivion and to say,  *“There is nothing witnessed but He,”* like those who believe in the Unity of Witnessing. Rather, since the Qur’an has most explicitly pardoned the universe and released it from execution and imprisonment, the person on this path disregards the above, and dismissing beings from working on their own account and employing them on account of the All- Glorious Creator, and in the duty of manifesting the Most Beautiful Names and being mirrors to them, he considers them from the point of view of signifying something other than themselves; and being saved from absolute heedlessness, he enters the divine presence permanently; he finds a way leading to the Almighty God in everything.

**In Short:** Dismissing beings from working on account of other beings, this way is to not look at them as signifying themselves.

*Note from 28th Letter:* Thanks is the most essential of the four fundamental principles of the way of worship and winning God’s love, the highest and most elevated way. These four principles have been defined as follows: *“Four things are necessary on the way of the impotent, my friend: “Absolute impotence, absolute poverty, absolute fervor, and absolute thanks, my friend.”*

* TAKE AWAY POINTS:
	+ *Steps to achieve God’s Love: Impotence (elementary), Poverty (middle), {Fervor (high), Thanks (college)}, and therefore Compassion (master), and Reflection (doctor).*
		- *Feel your impotence 🡪 Rely on His Power, trust in His Wisdom; and be patient!*
		- *Feel your poverty 🡪 Rely on His Mercy, give thanks; and be content!*
		- *Be compassionate 🡪 All-Compassionate*
		- *Achieve reflection 🡪 All-Wise*
	+ *Compassion requires servicing and helping others.*
	+ *Reflection: Specialized Reflection Internally vs. Generalized Reflection Externally.*

Reflection

Compassion

Thanks

Fervor

Impotence

Poverty

God’s Love

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*Congratulations! You’ve completed this unit.*