**THE TWENTY FIRST WORD**

**SECOND STATION: This comprises five cures for five wounds of the heart.**

**In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.**

**O Lord, I take refuge in You from the evil suggestions of the satans, and I take refuge in You, O my Lord, lest they attend me. (23:97-98)**

O you afflicted with involuntary evil thoughts and fancies, such things resemble a misfortune. The more you dwell on them, the more they grow. If you ignore them, they dwindle away; if you exaggerate them, they swell; if you belittle them, they die down. If you fear them, they become grave and make you ill; if you do not fear them, they become slight and remain hidden. If you do not know their real nature, they persist and become established; if you recognize their nature, they disappear.

I will explain only five out of the many types or aspects of such oft- occurring evil thoughts. I hope that this explanation will benefit both of us, for such thoughts are attracted by ignorance and repulsed by knowledge. If you do not recognize them, they call on you; if you recognize them, they depart. The five aspects are as follows:

*FIRST ASPECT—FIRST WOUND:* Satan first casts a doubt into the heart. If the heart does not admit it, he offers a blasphemy and causes the mind to recall some unclean memories and pictures, some ugly scenes that resemble blasphemy. This causes the heart to despair. People experiencing such thoughts think that they are acting wrongfully toward their Lord and so feel great agitation and anxiety. To free themselves, they flee from the Divine presence and want to plunge into heedlessness and forgetfulness.

O fellow afflicted with such involuntary thoughts! Do not be alarmed, for such thoughts are imaginary and are not blasphemous. An involuntary fancy of unbelief is not unbelief, just as an involuntary fancy of blasphemy is not blasphemy. Logic dictates that a fancy is not an act of judgment, whereas blasphemy (a willful act) is. Such words do not come from your heart, for your heart is displeased with and regrets them. Rather, they come from “the tube of Satan,” an inner faculty situated near the heart through which Satan whispers to it. The harm of involuntary evil fancies comes from imagining them to be harmful, for people think that a fancy not subject to judgment is reality. They ascribe Satan’s work to their hearts by sup- posing that Satan’s whisperings belong to their hearts, and thus think this is harmful and suffer harm. This is just what Satan wants.

*SECOND ASPECT:* Meanings arising in the heart are formless until they enter the imagination. The imagination, always under some prompting, weaves forms and leaves those forms to which it attaches importance on the way. Whatever meaning comes to the heart is clothed in, touched with, or veiled through these forms by the imagination. If the meanings are pure and clean, and the forms dirty and base, there is little contact between them; a pure meaning will not accept the base form as its dress. However, people suffering from involuntary evil thoughts confuse that little contact with being dressed, and exclaim: “How corrupted my heart is! This baseness and meanness will drive me out of religion.” Satan takes advantage of this sentiment. The cure for this wound is as follows:

Just as your outward cleanliness, one of the conditions for the Prayer’s correctness, is not affected or spoiled by the foulness in your intestines, sacred meanings or conceptions are not harmed by nearness to unclean forms. Suppose you are reflecting on God’s signs in the universe or on the Qur’an’s verses and suddenly feel ill, or want to eat or urinate. Your imagination will form whatever is needed to respond, and weave appropriate “lowly” forms. The meanings arising out of your (interrupted) reflections will pass by these forms. But there is no harm, soiling, error, or injury from this passage. If there is any fault, it lies in paying attention to the fact and imagining it to be harmful.

*THIRD ASPECT:* Hidden connections exist between things, and even “threads” of such connections exist among things you never expect to be connected. They are either there in fact, or your imagination makes them according to its preoccupation and tie things together with them. It is due to this connection that the sight of something sacred sometimes brings to mind an unclean thing. As the science of rhetoric puts it: “Opposition, which is the cause of remoteness in the outer world, is the cause of near- ness in the imagination.” In other words, an imagined connection brings the forms of two opposites together. The recollection happening through such a connection is called the *association of ideas*.

For example, while praying or reciting supplications before the Ka‘ba in the Divine Presence, although you are reflecting on the signs of certain Divine truths, the association of ideas may take you to the furthest, lowest trifles. If such an involuntary association of ideas occurs to you frequently, do not be alarmed. Rather, when it passes, turn back. Do not condemn yourself or dwell on it to learn its nature, for this might cause it to grow stronger. When you show regret and consider it seriously, your weak recollection becomes a fixation and turns into a sickness of imagination. Do not be overdistressed—it is not a sickness of the heart. Such a recollection is mostly involuntary and especially common among sensitive, nervous people. Satan finds this a great field of activity. The cure for this wound is as follows:

The association of ideas is mostly involuntary, meaning that one is not responsible for it. Also, association includes proximity, not contact and combination. For this reason, the natures of ideas do not contaminate and harm each other. For example, Satan and the Angel of Inspiration are close to each other around the heart, and sinners and the pious live side by side. Such proximity is harmless. When unclean fancies enter among your pure thoughts due to the association of ideas, they are harmful only if intentional or when one imagines them to be harmful and becomes over-attentive to them. Sometimes the heart becomes tired or the mind entertains itself with anything that flits across it. Satan uses these to serve up unclean things.

*FOURTH ASPECT:* A kind of involuntary fancy arises from seeking a reli- gious deed’s best form. This can be better called a *scruple*. If people suppose it to be a true or pure piety, it becomes more vigorous and makes the resulting condition more severe. It can reach such a degree that, while searching for even better forms of the deed, such people fall into what is forbidden. Sometimes seeking after what is commended in worship causes people to neglect what is obligatory therein. Pausing over whether the act of worship was canonically acceptable or not, they repeat it. This state continues, and they soon fall into despair. Satan takes advantage of this state to wound these people. There are two cures for this wound.

First cure: Such a scruple may be right for the *Mu‘tazilite*s, who argue: “Deeds and things for which religion holds humanity responsible are either, of themselves and in regard to the Hereafter, good and therefore commanded, or bad and therefore prohibited.” Thus, from the point of view of reality and the Hereafter, things are good or bad in their essence, and the Divine command and prohibition are dependent on this. Following this school of thought, a scruple arises in every act of worship: “Have I been able to perform this act in the good way that in essence it is?”

However, the *Ahlu’s-Sunna wal-Jama‘a* (people representing the great majority of Muslims who are believed to be on the right path) argue: “Almighty God orders a thing and it becomes good. He prohibits a thing and it becomes bad.” So, whether a thing is good or bad depends on the Divine command and prohibition. Therefore, a thing is goodor bad for peopleaccording to whether they have done something ordered or prohibited or whether they have done it in accordance with the rules established by the Shari’a. In addition, a thing is religiously good or bad not in respect to its apparent correctness and its apparent features, but with respect to the Hereafter.

For example, you performed *wudu’* (ritual ablution) or Prayer accord- ing to the rules of each. But there was a cause that of itself would invalidate them. However, you were completely unaware of it. Your ablution and Prayer are therefore sound and good. But the *Mu‘tazilite*s argue: “In essence they were bad and unsound. But they may be accepted due to your igno- rance, which is an excuse.” According to the *Ahlu’s-Sunna wal-Jama‘a*, you should not indulge in scruples about a deed you did in conformity with the rules of the Shari‘a; do not worry about whether it was sound or not. Rather worry about if it was accepted; do not become proud and conceited.

Second cure: *There is no difficulty in religion*. Since the four Schools of Law are on the right path, and since realizing a fault, which leads to seeking forgiveness is preferable (particularly for those afflicted with scruples) to seeing deeds as good, as the latter leads to pride, it is better for such people to see their deeds as faulty and ask God’s forgiveness rather than seeing them as good and becoming proud. Give up your scruples and say to Satan:

This is merely a difficulty, for it is difficult to be aware of the exact truth and good in things. Excessive anxiety is contrary to the principles of *there is no difficulty in religion* and of *religion is ease*. As my deed conforms with the requirements of an established School of Law, it is sufficient. After that, in confession of my inadequacy, I take refuge with Divine Compassion. I humbly ask forgiveness for the duty of worship, which I cannot perform in a way worthy of it, and meekly supplicate that my defective deeds be accepted.

*FIFTH ASPECT:* Some suffer scruples in the form of [what they think are] doubts in matters of belief. Sometimes they confuse a passing fancy with a conceptualized idea, mistakenly considering this doubt to arise from them- selves and therefore possibly harmful to their belief. They may think that such a doubt impairs their rational, conscious confirmation of the essentials of belief, or that thinking of something related to unbelief has made them unbelievers. That is, they confuse the use of reflection, study, and objective reasoning on the causes of unbelief with being contrary to belief. Frightened by these suppositions, which result from Satan’s whispering, they believe that their hearts have become corrupted and their belief impaired. Unable to put these mostly involuntary states right by their free will, they give way to despair.

The cure is as follows: Imagining or reflecting on unbelief is not unbelief, and picturing or reflecting on misguidance is not misguidance. For imagination, conceptualization, picturing, and reflection are different from confirmation by reason and acceptance by heart; they are voluntary to certain degree. It is hard for the free will to control them so that we should be answerable for them.

Confirmation and acceptance are deliberate, for they depend on certain criteria and intentional reasoning. In addition, just as the former are not the same mental activities as confirmation and acceptance, neither are they the same as doubt and hesitation. However, they may pave the way to doubt if they are repeated unnecessarily and become established. If people continually support the opposing side on the pretext of objective reasoning or fairness, they may favor it involuntarily and thereby fall into danger. Gradually their state of mind becomes fixed and they become officious advocates of Satan or the enemy.

The most characteristic scruple here is that one confuses the theoretically possible with the reasonably likely. This violates a principle of reasoning in theology: A theoretical possibility does not negate certain knowledge of a present reality or contradict the demands of reason. For example, it is theoretically possible that the Black Sea could sink into the ground right now. However, we know and judge with certainty that that it has not done so. The theoretical possibility of its being otherwise causes no real doubt and does not impair our certainty about the present reality.

Theoretically, the sun might not set today or rise tomorrow. But this possibility does not impair our certainty or engender any real doubt. Such baseless suspicions arising from theoretical possibilities—for example, the death of this world and the resurrection of the dead in the Hereafter, which are among the truths of belief—do not impair the certainty of belief. Moreover, one of the established principles of the sciences of the methodology of Islamic law and the foundations of religion states that a possibility based on no evidence is not worth considering.

Question: What is the Divine purpose in letting involuntary evil thoughts and scruples pester us, for they cause harm and afflict believers?

Answer: If they are not carried to excess and allowed to overwhelm the person, essentially they are the cause of the vigilance and awareness that make people seek the truth and that which is better. They are also the means to seriousness, disperse indifference and repel carelessness and heedlessness. For this reason, the Absolutely Wise One put them in the hand of Satan as a whip of encouragement for us in this arena of testing, and Satan hits our heads with them. If they cause excessive hurt, we should complain to the All-Wise and All-Compassionate One and say: “I seek refuge with God from Satan, the accursed.”