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A General Description of the Method And Way of Godward Wayfaring

(Now that the details of the twelvefold realms of the Way are known, we may proceed to discuss the method and way of wayfaring and making the journey. Here, there are two descriptions: the first is a brief and general description and another will be a detailed one.)

The First Description

The first thing that is essential for the wayfarer to do is to undertake an inquiry and investigation into different religions and creeds, putting in an effort and endeavour to the extent of his capacity, in order to discover the Unity and Oneness of God, the Exalted, and the reality of His guidance, even if it is only to the extent of a conjecture and probability. After an affirmation, based on knowledge or conjecture, he would emerge from the state of disbelief (*kufr*) and enter the realm of the 'minor submission' *islam al-asghar*; that is, submission of a rudimentary kind and that of the minor faith (*iman al-asghar*).

This is the stage which is unanimously regarded as the duty of every religiously responsible individual *mukallaf*, i.e. someone who being sane and of mature age is considered responsible for his beliefs and acts by the *Shari'ah*), that he should have sufficient rational grounds for whatever beliefs he holds.

Should the *mukallaf* fail to reach any probability after effort and endeavour, he must make a firm resolve and, with humility and lamentation accompanied with a deluge of tears, he must make insistent invocations and pleas, not sparing any persistent and pressing supplications and appeals, until ultimately the way is opened_ to him, as mentioned in the accounts reported of Hadrat Idris and his disciples_may Peace be upon our Prophet and his Progeny and upon him.

These supplications and appeals are a sign that the wayfarer has known his inability and weakness and that he desires guidance from the depths of his heart. It is obvious that God, the Exalted, does not abandon His destitute servants who seek the Truth and the path of Reality.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِينَّهُمْ سُبُلُنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And those who struggle in Us, We shall assuredly guide them to Our ways. (29:69)

I remember that during the days that I was in Najaf Ashraf under the moral and spiritual tutelage of *marhum* Hajj Mirza Ali Qadi, may God be pleased with him, once at the time of daybreak I fell into a brief trance as I sat on the prayer mat on the roof. I saw two men sitting in front of me. One of them was Hadrat Idris_may Peace be upon our Prophet and his Progeny and upon him_and the other was my dear and honoured brother Hajj Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Tabatabai, who resides presently at Tabriz.

Hadrat Idris commenced a conversation with me but in such a manner that he would converse and communicate his speech, but his utterances would be heard from the mouth of my brother. He said, "Terrible events and accidents have occurred in my life whose solution and understanding seemed to be impossible to me on the basis of ordinary and natural course of events, or, rather, that appeared to me to be a logically impossible task. But all of a sudden they were resolved and it became clear to me that a hand from the world of the Hidden and from above the plane of normal causes and effects was solving these riddles and removing these difficulties.

This was the first trip that connected for me the world of nature to the supernatural realm, and our ties of connection began from that point."

At that time it appeared to me that what he meant by his tribulations were the hardships and afflictions of the days of infancy and childhood. What I mean to say is that if one were really to take resort in his Sustainer in the matter of guidance, He would assuredly help and assist him. In such a circumstance seeking the help of Qur'anic verses that suit his condition would be very effective and beneficial. God, the Blessed and the Exalted, has said:

Lo! The hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of God. (13:28)

Also chanting such expressions as:

O Opener! O Guide of the perplexed!

and the like, will prove to be effective. Of course, one must take care to carry them out with sufficient attention and presence of mind and from the depth of one's heart.

One of our friends related this story. He said, "Once I was setting out by the bus for the honour of pilgrimage to Karbala' Mu'alla. My journey was from Iran. Near my seat there sat a youth who was beardless and had a Westernized appearance, and therefore there did not occur any exchange between us. All of a sudden the youth began to cry. I was very amazed. I asked him the reason for his crying.

"He said, 'If I don't tell you, then whom shall I tell! I am a civil engineer. From my childhood, years my training had been such that I grew up to be irreligious. I was a materialist and did not believe in creation and resurrection. All that I felt was a liking for pious people, whether they were Muslims, Christians or Jews.'

"One night I was attending a party arranged by my friends, most of whom were Bahais. For several hours we were busy dancing and having fun and so on. After some time I felt ashamed of myself and felt disgusted with what I was doing. I left the room and went upstairs.

There, alone, I cried for some time, a prayer arose from within me, "O God, Who are the only god that there is! Help me!" Then after a while I came downstairs. That night party carne to an end, and we dispersed. Next day as I was going for a technical assignment with the railway chief and some senior officials, all of a sudden I saw a sayyid at a distance. He had a bright face and he was coming towards us. He approached and greeted me. Then he said, "I have some errand with you." I promised to see him in the afternoon the next day.

"Incidentally, after he was gone one of my companions said to me, "That was a saintly man. Why did you answer his greeting so indifferently?" *That was because* when the sayyid greeted me I thought that he needed something, that he had come there to see me for that purpose. By chance, the railway chief ordered me to go next day afternoon to some place and to carry out his instructions. The time he had mentioned coincided precisely with the one that I had promised to meet the sayyid. I told myself that I would not be able to see him.

The next day when the hour of my assignment was drawing near I began to feel unwell. Gradually I had such a fever that I had to take to the bed. Then they brought a physician to examine me. Naturally I had to excuse myself from the assignment given me by the railway chief. Soon afterwards when the messenger sent by the railway chief had left, I realized that my fever had subsided and my condition had horned to normal. I felt totally well. I guessed that there must be a secret in it.

Accordingly I got up and set out for the place of that sayyid. As soon as I sat down with him, he gave me such a lucid lecture on the principal doctrines along with all their related proofs and reasons, which were so convincing that I became a believer. Then he gave me some instructions and said to me, "Come again tomorrow" I went to see him again, and then I visited him several times. He described the incident that had happened to me precisely as it had occurred. He would also describe for me all my acts and intentions, which nobody knew except me.

Some time passed in this manner until one day I was compelled to attend a party with some friends.

There, I was forced to join them in gambling.

The next day when I visited him, he said to me all of a sudden, "Are you not ashamed to have committed that mortal sin?" Tears of repentance appeared in my eyes and I said to him, "It was a wrong thing for me to do. I promise not to do it again." He said, "Take a bath of repentance, and never do such a thing." Then he gave me some instructions.

Ultimately he changed the very course of my life and my life_style. This incident occurred in Zanjan. Later, when I wanted to go to Tehran he told me to go and visit certain 'ulama' in Tehran. Finally I was told to make a pilgrimage to the holy shrines. This is the journey that I am making at the behest of that sayyid. "

Our friend said: "In the vicinity of Iraq, twice, I heard him suddenly break into tears. I asked him why he had cried. He said: 'Just now we have entered the territory of Iraq, as Hadrat Abu Abd Allah (a) has greeted me."

The purpose of narrating this episode is that if someone really sets out with a genuine and pure intention and seeks guidance from God from the depth of his heart, he would succeed in obtaining guidance even if he had doubts concerning the very existence of God.

When the wayfarer has succeeded at this stage, he should extend his quest to *islam al-akbar* and *iman al-akbar* The first thing that is essential at this point is the knowledge of the rules of the *Shari ah*, which he must learn from a jurist (*faqih*). After he has received that knowledge he should put it into practice. In practice, too, he must persevere until his conviction and gnosis increase degree by degree.

For knowledge gives birth to action and action in turn brings knowledge. Should anyone have a sincere knowledge of and belief in something, he would of necessity try to make his actions conform to his perceptions. The absence of action_in accordance with the rule that every effect is traceable to its cause_discloses that one's knowledge was not certain and that he did not have any belief or faith in the matter.

Rather, it was a mere fancy painted by his ingenious faculty of imagination. Should one have a real and true knowledge that the One God is the Absolute Sustainer and Provider; one would never kill oneself obtaining the means of livelihood for oneself.

Rather, he would be content with making as much effort as has been enjoined by the *Shari 'ah* and he would endeavor to the extent of his ability and with a peaceful mind to procure sufficient means for himself and his family But should he get himself embroiled in anguish and agitation for the sake of livelihood and make extraordinary efforts, that would mean that he does not know God to be the Absolute Provider or, rather, that he considers God to be a provider subject to certain conditions.

He thinks, for instance, that God is the Provider if he works as hard as he does, putting him to pains, as

if God were his provider on condition that he had money and continued to receive his monthly income, and so on.

On this basis, inner and outer agitation reveals the absence of conviction concerning God being the Provider, or it signifies that one knows God to be a provider subject to certain conditions. This is what is meant by the saying that action is the result and product of knowledge. To give an example of knowledge following as the result of action, should one make the following declaration,

Glory belongs to my Lord, the Exalted, and Him do I praise,

believing it to be a fact, he would perceive his own lowliness, and it is obvious that lowliness cannot exist without exaltation: the lowly one would always stand in contrast to one who is exalted and majestic.

Accordingly, he would inevitably come to perceive the station of Absolute Majesty. Then he would understand that this Majesty is accompanied with Knowledge and Power. Hence, from a very minor action, such as this *dhikr* said in prostration, one would discover the absolute majesty and the absolute power and knowledge of God, the Blessed and the Exalted. This is the meaning of knowledge being the product of action and to this refers the statement of God Almighty:

.. And righteous action elevates it... (35: 10)

One must make a far_reaching effort in carrying out the obligatory duties and put in considerable effort in abstaining from unlawful things (*muharramat*). Because the neglect of obligatory duties and the commission of unlawful acts is contrary to Godward wayfaring. All the efforts of the wayfarer are beneficial when these two matters are observed.

Otherwise, in the same way that gold, adornment and ornaments are useless on a body bearing filth, so also the performance of supererogatory acts and austerities prescribed by the *Shari 'ah is* of no benefit for an impure heart and soul. Also, one must be careful to avoid the reprehensible acts (*makruhat*) and to carry out the supererogatory ones, for attainment to the ranks of *Islam al–akbar* and *iman al–akbar* depends on these acts. Because every act has a special property which is exclusive to it and results in perfecting one's faith. The same matter is referred to in the tradition narrated by Muhammad ibn Muslim:

Faith cannot be without action, and action is a part of it. Faith is not established except with action.

Accordingly, the wayfarer must carry out every supererogatory act even if it is only for once, so that he may partake of its benefit. Hence it has been mentioned in the statements of Amir al_Mu'minin ('a) that "Perfect faith is the offspring of perfect action." Hence the wayfarer of the way of God must not refrain from supererogatory acts in his journey towards the station of *iman al-akbar*.

Obviously, his faith will remain deficient to the very degree to which he is negligent in performing the acts. Hence, if a wayfarer purifies his tongue and all other members and organs and makes them observant of the divine etiquette, in the full sense of the term, while he does not make any effort to spend his wealth in the way of God, he would not advance beyond that stage and his faith would not become perfect but would remain deficient.

The same deficiency would keep him from rising to the higher stations. Accordingly, he must make every member partake of its share of faith until the faith pertaining to it is attained. For instance, the heart, which is the sovereign of the body, must be kept engaged in contemplation (*fikr*) and *dhikr*. *Dhikr* means the heart's remembrance of the Names and Attributes of the Supreme Creator.

Contemplation consists of the attention of the heart and its journey through "the signs in the horizons and in the souls" and careful reflection over and examination of the realm of creation and journey through it The human heart is watered from the mainspring of faith by the means of these two actions:

Lo! The hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of God. (13:28)

After that each of the parts of one's being is made to partake of its share of faith, one must commence the inner struggle (*mujahadah*) and by its means remove the deficiencies pertaining to *Islam al–akbar* and *iman al–akbar*, and reach the frontiers of certainty after obtaining deliverance from doubt and conjecture.

Those Who believe and do not vitiate their faith with wrongdoing _they, for them is security and they are the guided. (6:82)

The result of *mujahadah*, apart from one's establishment on the straight path, is security and safety from the trouble of satans.

أَلا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاء اللَّهِ لاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Lo! Verily, there is no fear on the friends of God, nor do they sorrow. (10:62)

Fear consists of being alarmed by something that has not yet happened and whose occurrence is expected and which causes one to be agitated and anxious. Grief consists of a sorrow arising from something unpleasant that has already occurred. These two things have no access to the wayfarer of God's way, for the wayfarer has settled his matter with God once and for all and he has no goal and purpose except God. He will neither grieve on account of any unexpected loss nor fear some unexpected event. His is the abode of certainty and those who possess it have been called by God as His 'friends' (awliya'), and to such a one refers the saying of Amir al_Mu'minin

He has seen his path and found his road, recognizing his minaret and removing s veils. So he is has a certainty; like the light of the sun.

And it is he who has said of such wayfarers:

The waves of knowledge founded on real perception and insight rush upon them from all sides, and they feel the essence of faith and certainty tangibly in their hearts and souls. That which appears tough and harsh to the seekers of comforts is soft, smooth and easy to them, and they are used to what the ignorant regard with fear and aversion. They are in the world with their earthly bodies, but their spirits dwell on the highest summits of the sacred heights of the realms of *malakut*

It is at this stage that the gates of gnostic revelation and vision (kashf wa shuhud) are opened to him.

It is obvious that the traversing of these stations is not contrary to the wayfarer's presence in the world and his engagement in his previous occupations. His inner gnostic experience has no relation to his outward conditions such as married life, profession, trade, farming and the like.

The spirit of the wayfarer journeys through the realm of *malakut* in the company of the beings of *malakut*, while he is in the midst of the people and engaged in carrying out the affairs of the world. His parable is that of someone who is struck with a tragedy and suffers bereavement for the death of a relation.

This bereaved person, while he is in the midst of the people, speaks, walks around, sits, eat and sleeps. But within him there is a turmoil arising from the thought of his dear one so that whoever looks at him

finds him to be sorrowful.

The wayfarer of God's way, while he is engaged in affairs relating to physical nature has links and connections with His God. An ocean of longing surges in his heart and a fire of love consumes his inner being. The sorrow of separation melts his heart and none knows of his inner turmoil except God. But whoever looks at his countenance gets some idea that it is the love of God and the longing and quest for His Sacred Being that has made him such.

This description reveals that the lamentations, pleadings and invocations of the Pure Imams, as indicated by the supplications narrated from them, were neither a pretense nor for the purpose of others' training and guidance. Such a misconception arises from ignorance and the lack of perception of realities.

Their station is nobler and more majestic than that they should say things that are affected and devoid of reality and substance, intending thereby to summon people to God through a series of make_believe and feigned supplications.

Is it right for us to think that those heartrending wails, lamentations and plaintive invocations of the Master of all masters, Hadrat Amir al_Mu'minin, and those of Hadrat Sajjad, may Peace be upon them, weren't genuine but artificial and merely contrived for others' instruction? Never! Not by no means!

Those religious leaders, may God's Peace be upon all of them, had passed beyond the stages of Godward wayfaring and entered the sanctuary of God, to reach the station of subsistence after annihilation (*baqa' bad al jana*), which is life in the Worshipped One (*baqa' bil_ma'bud*).

Their state is one which combines the two realms of Unity and plurality (*wahdat wa kathrat*), and they perpetually observe Divine Unity (*ahadiyyat*) in the manifestations of the worlds of contingency and plurality relating to *mink* and *malakut*.

Accordingly, at the high summits of their excellences they are always observant of the essentials and implications of the worlds of *mink* and *malakut*. Or, rather, they do not avoid or withhold themselves from observance of the most minor of the laws, etiquette, and states associated with these worlds, while, at the same tune, they preserve their links with the higher worlds. That is why they are called 'beings of light' (*mawjudat al-nuriyyah*).

In any case, when the wayfarer succeeds and traverses these worlds and overcomes Satan, entering the world of victory and triumph, it is time for journey through the adjacent worlds. At this point, the wayfarer would have passed through the world of. matter and entered the path of the world of spirits to confront the greatest journey, which is departure from the world of the soul and spirit and transition from the domain of *malakfut* to the realms of *jabarut* and *lahut*.

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