

Part 2. 1: Stages of Spiritual Journey by Allamah Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i

A materialist passes his life in the dark valley of materialism. He is plunged in the sea of evil desires and always is tossed from this side to that side by the waves of material relations of wealth, wife and children. He cries for help, but in vain and in the end gets nothing but disappointment.

Sometimes in this sea a breath of enlivening breeze (divine impulse) pats him and kindles in him a hope that he may reach the shore safely. But this breeze does not blow regularly. It is only occasional.

"In your life you get some pleasant breaths from your Lord. Make a point of being benefited by them and do not turn away from them."

Under the divine impulse the novice decides to somehow or other pass the world of plurality. This journey is called by the gnostics *sayr wa suluk* (spiritual journey).

Suluk means to traverse the path and *sayr* means to view the characteristics and prominent features of the stages and stations on the way.

Riyazat and acts of self-mortification are the provisions required for this spiritual journey. As it is not easy to renounce the material relations, the novice slowly breaks the snares of the world of plurality and cautiously begins his journey from the material world.

Before long he enters another world called "*Barzakh*". This is the world of his evil desires and inner thoughts. Here he finds that material relations have accumulated a lot of impurities in his heart. These impurities which are an offshoot of his material relations, are a product of his voluptuous thoughts and sensual desires.

These thoughts obstruct the novice in the pursuit of his spiritual journey with a result that he loses peace of mind. He wants to enjoy the recollection of Allah for some time, but these thoughts suddenly interrupt him and foil his efforts.

Somebody has well said that man is always engrossed in his petty thoughts and haunted by the ideas of gain and loss. As a result he not only loses his composure and peace of mind, but can also not pay attention to his spiritual journey to a higher world. It is obvious that mental unrest is more harmful than any physical loss or pain. Man can avoid the clash of external relations and interests, but it is difficult for him to get rid of his own ideas and thoughts because they are always with him.

Anyhow, the true seeker of Allah and traveler in his way is not distressed and discouraged by these obstacles and continues to boldly proceed to his destination with the help of his divine impulse, till he safely gets out of the world of petty and conflicting ideas called *Barzakh*. He has to be very vigilant and watchful lest any vicious thought may remain lurking in some hidden corner of his mind.

When these vicious thoughts are turned out, they usually hide in some hidden corner of the mind. The poor spiritual traveler wrongly thinks that he has got rid of their mischief, but when he has found the way to the fountain of life and wants to drink from it, they suddenly appear to ruin him.

This spiritual traveler may be compared to a person who has built a water tank in his house but has not used long. In the meantime the impurities and pollution have settled down in the bottom of the tank although water appears to be clear from above. He thinks that water is clean, but when he gets down into the tank or washes something in it, black patches appear on the surface and he finds that water is dirty.

For this reason it is necessary for the salik (spiritual traveler) to concentrate his thoughts with the help of riyazat and acts of self-mortification so that his attention may not be diverted from Allah. At last when after passing through the *Barzakh* the spiritual traveler enters the spiritual world, he still has to traverse several more stages the details of which we will describe later.

In short the spiritual traveler watching his own lower self and the Divine Names and Attributes gradually advances till ultimately he reaches the stage of total fana (self-annihilation) that is passing away from his own perishable will and then the station of baqa (abiding in the everlasting Will of Allah). It is at this stage that the secret of eternal life is revealed to him.

We can infer this doctrine from the Holy Qur'an also if we ponder over certain verses of it.

Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provisions. (Surah Ali Imran, 3: 169).

Everything will perish save His Countenance. [1](#) (28:88)

That which you have is wasted away, and that which is with Allah remains. (Surah an Nahl, 6:96)

These verses put together show that the countenance of Allah are those "who are living and who have provisions with their Lord." According to the text of Qur'an they never perish. Certain other verses indicate that the countenance of Allah signifies Divine names which are imperishable.

In one of its verses the Qur'an itself has interpreted the Countenance as the Divine names and characterizes the Countenance of Allah as of glory and honor:

Everyone who is living will pass away, and there will remain the countenance of your Lord of glory and honor (Surah ar Rahman, 55:27)

All the commentators of the Qur'an agree that in this verse the phrase "of glory and honor" qualifies the countenance, and it means the countenance of glory and honor. As we know, the countenance of everything is that which manifests it. The manifestations of Allah are His Names and Attributes. It is through them that the creation looks at Allah, or in other words, knows Him.

With this explanation we come to the conclusion that every existing thing perishes and wastes away except the glorious and beautiful names of Allah. This also shows that the gnostics to whom the verse, "Nay, they are living and have their provisions with their Lord", applies, are the manifestations of the glorious and beautiful Names of Allah.

From the above it is also clear what the Holy Imams meant when they said: "We are the Names of Allah." Obviously to be the head of a government or to be the highest religious and legal authority is not a position which could be described by these words. What actually these words denote is the state of passing away in Allah, abiding permanently with His countenance and being a manifestation of His glorious and beautiful Names and Attributes.

In connection with the spiritual journey another important and essential thing is meditation or contemplation (muraqabah). It is necessary for the spiritual traveler not to ignore meditation at any stage from the beginning to the end.

It must be understood that meditation has many grades and is of many types. In the initial stages the spiritual traveler has to do one type of meditation and at later stages of another type. As the spiritual traveler goes forward, his meditation becomes so strong that if ever it was undertaken by a beginner, he would either give it up for good or would be mad.

But after successfully completing the preliminary stages, the gnostic becomes able to undertake the higher stages of meditation. At that time many things which were lawful to him in the beginning get forbidden to him.

As a result of careful and diligent meditation a flame of love begins to kindle in the heart of the spiritual traveler, for it is an inborn instinct of man to love the Absolute Beauty and Perfection. But the love of material things overshadows this inherent love and does not allow it to grow and become visible.

Meditation weakens this veil till ultimately it is totally lifted. Then that innate love appears in its full splendor and leads man's conscience towards Allah. The mystic poets often figuratively call this divine love "wine".

When the gnostic continues to undertake meditation, for quite a long time, divine lights begin to be visible to him. In the beginning these lights flash like lightning for a moment and then disappear. Gradually the divine lights grow strong and appear like little stars. When they grow further, they appear first like the moon and then like the sun. Sometimes they appear like a burning lamp also. In the gnostic terminology these lights are known as the gnostic sleep and they belong to the world of *Barzakh*.

When the spiritual traveler has passed this stage and his meditation grows stronger, he sees as if the heaven and the earth were all illuminated from the East to the West. This light is called the light of self and is seen after the gnostic has passed the world of *Barzakh*. When after coming out of the world of *Barzakh* primary manifestations of self begin to occur, the spiritual traveler views himself in a material form. He often feels that he is standing beside himself. This stage is the beginning of the stage of self stripping.

Allamah Mirza Ali Qazi used to say that one day when he came out from his room into the veranda he suddenly saw himself standing quietly beside himself. When he looked carefully, he saw that there was no skin or flesh on his face. He went back into his room and looked into the mirror. He found his face was as empty as it had never been.

Sometimes it happens that the gnostic feels as if he did not exist at all. He tries to find himself but he does not succeed. These are the observations of the early stages of self-stripping, but they are not free from the limitations of time and space. In the next stage, with Allah's help the spiritual traveler can rise above these limitations also and can view complete reality of his self. It is reported that Mirza Jawad Malaki Tabrizi passed full fourteen years in Akhund Mulla Husayn Quli Hamdani's company and took from him lessons in gnosis. He says:

"One day my teacher told me about one of his pupils that thence forward his training was my responsibility. This pupil was very pains-taking and diligent. For six years he kept himself busy with meditation and self-mortification. At last he reached the stage of knowing his self and having been stripped of his evil self (passion and lust). I deemed it proper that the teacher himself should tell that fact to this pupil. So I took him to the house of the teacher whom I told what I wanted. The teacher said: "That's nothing." At the same time he waved his hand and said: "This is stripping." That pupil used to say: "I saw myself being stripped of my body and at the same time felt as if another person just like me was standing beside me."

It may be mentioned here that to see the things existing in the world of *Barzakh* is comparatively of small account. It is of greater significance to view one's own lower self (nafs) in an absolutely stripped state, for in this case self appears as a pure reality free from the limitations of time and space. The viewing of the earlier stages was comparatively preliminary and partial and this viewing is so to say the perception of the whole.

Agha Sayyid Ahmad Karbala'i, another well-known and prominent pupil of the late Akhund says: "One

day I was sleeping somewhere when all of a sudden somebody awakened me and said to me: 'Get up at once if you want to see the 'eternal light.' I opened my eyes and saw an immensely bright light shining everywhere and in all directions."

This is a stage of the enlightenment of self. It appears in the shape of an infinite light.

When a lucky spiritual traveler has passed this stage, he passes other stages also with a speed in proportion to the attention he pays to meditation. He views Allah's Attributes or becomes conscious of Allah's Names as an absolute quality. On this occasion he suddenly feels that all existing things are only a unit of knowledge and there exists nothing but one single power.

This is the stage of the vision of the Divine attributes. The stage of the vision of Divine names is still higher. At this stage the devotee sees that in all the worlds there exists only one Knower and only one Omnipotent and Living Being.

This stage is far higher than that of the consciousness of the Divine Attributes, a state which appears in the heart, for now the spiritual traveler does not find any being knowing, powerful and living except Allah. This degree of vision is usually achieved during the recitation of the Qur'an, when the reader feels that there is somebody else who is listening to his recitation.

It may be remembered that recitation of the Qur'an is very effective in securing this state. The devotee should offer the night prayers and should recite in them those surahs during the recitation of which prostration is obligatory, namely Surah Sajdah, Surah Hamim Sajdah, Surah Najm, and Surah al-'Alaq, for it is very pleasant to fall prostrating while reciting a surah. Experience has also proved that it is very effective for this purpose to recite the Surah Sad in the Thursday night prayers (wutairah). This characteristic of this surah is indicated by the report concerning the merits of this surah also.

When the devotee has completed all these stages and visions, he is surrounded by divine impulses and every moment he goes closer to the stage of real self-annihilation, till he is so seized by a divine impulse that he is totally absorbed in the beauty and perfection of the "True Beloved." He no longer pays heed to himself or to anybody else. He beholds Allah everywhere. *There was Allah and nothing was with Him.*

In this condition the devotee is plunged in the fathomless sea of divine vision.

It must be remembered that this does not mean that everything in the material world loses its existence. Actually the devotee sees unity in plurality. Otherwise everything continues to exist as it is. A gnostic has said: "I was among the people for 30 years They were under the impression that I was taking part in all their activities but actually throughout this period I did not see them and did not know anyone but Allah."

The coming about of this state is of great importance. In the beginning it may come about only for a moment, but gradually its duration grows longer, first it may last for about 10 minutes or so, then for an hour and subsequently even for a longer period. This state may even become permanent by the grace of

Allah.

In the sayings of the gnostics this state has been termed as "abiding in Allah" or "the ever-lasting life in Allah". Man cannot attain to this stage of perfection unless he passes away from self. On attaining to this stage the devotee does not see anything except Allah.

It is said that there was an enraptured sufi who was seized by a divine impulse. His name was Baba Farajullah. People asked him to say something about the world. He said: "What can I say about it? I have not seen it since I was born."[2](#)

In the beginning when the vision is weak, it is called a state and its occurrence is beyond the control of the devotee. But when as a result of continued meditation and by the grace of Allah this state becomes a permanent feature, then it is called a station. Now the state of vision gets under the control of the spiritual traveler or devotee.

Obviously a strong spiritual traveler is he who along with viewing these states keeps an eye to the world of plurality also and maintains well his relations to the world of unity and to the world of plurality at the same time. This is a very high position and cannot be attained easily. Perhaps this position is reserved for the Prophets and some other chosen people who are favorites of Allah and who can say: "The state of my relation to Allah is such that the most favorite angel cannot attain to it."[3](#) and at the same time declare: "I am a human being just like you."[4](#)

Somebody may say that only the Prophets and the Imams can attain to these high positions. How is it possible for others to attain to them? Our reply is that Prophethood and Imamate are undoubtedly the special assignments to which others cannot reach. But the station of 'absolute Oneness' and passing away in Allah which is called wilayat is not exclusively reserved for the Prophets and the Imams, who have themselves called upon their followers to try to attain to this station of perfection.

The Holy Prophet has asked his Ummah (Muslim nation) to follow in his footsteps. This shows that it is possible for others also to advance to this position, or else such instructions would have no meaning. The Qur'an says:

Surely in the Messenger you have a good example for him who looks to Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:21)

There is a report in the Sunni books that once the Holy Prophet said: "Had you not been talkative and of uneasy hearts you would have seen what I see and would have heard what I hear."

This report shows that the real cause of not attaining to human perfection is fiendish thoughts and vicious acts. According to a report from the Shi'ah source also, the Holy Prophet has said: "Had not the satans been roaming around their hearts, the human beings would have seen the whole kingdom of the heavens and the earth."

One of the characteristics of this high human position is that it enables the individual holding it to comprehend the divine kingdoms according to his capacity. He gains the knowledge of the past and the future of the universe and can dominate and control everything, everywhere.

The famous gnostic, Shaykh Abdul Karim al-Jili writes in his book, the 'Perfect Man' that once he was overcome by such a condition that he felt as if he had been unified with all other existing things and could see everything. This state did not last more than a moment.

Obviously it is because of the devotees' preoccupation with their physical needs that this state does not last long.

A well known sufi says that a man gets rid of the traces of material development only 500 years after his death. This period is equivalent to half a day of the divine days. Allah has said:

Surely a day with your Lord is like one thousand years of your reckoning. (Surah al-Hajj, 22:47)

It is evident that the next worldly blessings and divine bounties and favors are innumerable and unlimited. The words expressing them have been coined on the basis of human needs and new words need to be coined with the expansion of human requirements. That is why it is not possible to express all divine truths and favors by words.

Whatever has been said is only symbolical and metaphorical. It is impossible to express the higher truths in words. It has been said: "You are in the darkest world." According to this tradition man is living in the darkest of the worlds (earth) created by Allah.

Man coins words to meet his daily requirements on the basis of what he sees and feels in this material world. He has no knowledge of the relations, blessings and spirits of the other worlds and, therefore, he cannot coin words for them. That is why there do not exist proper words in any language of the world which may express higher truths and concepts. Now when our knowledge is limited and our thinking faulty, how can this problem be solved?

There are two groups of people who have talked about higher truths. The first is that of the Prophets. They have direct contact with the non-material worlds, but they also say: "We, the Prophets, have been ordered to talk to the people according to their intellectual capacity." That means that they are compelled to express the truths in a way intelligible to the common people.

Therefore they have avoided to describe the nature of the spiritual lights and their brilliance. They have not talked about the truths unintelligible to man. They have only used such words as paradise, houries and palaces for the truth about which it has been said: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no one has thought about it". They have even admitted that the truths of the other worlds are indescribable.

The second group is of those who advance along the path prescribed by the Prophets and perceive the truths according to their capability. They also use a figurative style.

Sincerity of Devotion

It must be remembered that without being sincere in the way of Allah it is not possible to attain to spiritual stations and stages. Truth cannot be unraveled to a spiritual traveler unless he is fully sincere and single-minded in his devotion.

There are two stages of sincerity. The first stage is of carrying out all religious injunctions for the sake of Allah only. The second stage is of devoting one's entire self exclusively to Allah. The first stage is indicated by the following verse:

They are ordained nothing but to worship Allah keeping religion pure for Him. (Surah al-Bayyinah, 98:5)

The second stage is indicated by the following verse:

Save single minded slaves of Allah. (Surah as Saffat, 37: 128)

There is a well known Prophetic tradition to the effect that he who has kept himself pure for Allah for 40 days, fountains of wisdom flow from his heart to his tongue.

This tradition also alludes to the second stage of sincerity. The Qur'an has at certain places described a deed as salih (virtuous and pious). For example it said: "Whoever did a salih (virtuous and pious) deed", And at some other places it describes some men as salih. For example at one place it says: "Surely he was one of the salih (pious)."

Similarly it has sometimes described a deed as sincere and sometimes a man as sincere. It is obvious that man's sincerity depends on his deeds and he cannot be sincere unless he is sincere in all his deeds and in all that he does or says. Allah says:

"To Him ascends good word and the good deed raises it. (Surah al-Fatir, 35: 10)

It may be remembered that a man who attains to the grade of personal sincerity, is endowed with certain other characteristic qualities which are not possessed by others.

An important characteristic which he acquires according to a text of the Qur'an he becomes immune from the domination of Satan. The Qur'an quotes Satan as saying:

My Lord, I swear by Your honor, I shall adorn the path of error for them in the earth and shall mislead all of them, except such of them as are your sincerely devoted slaves. (Surah al-Hijr, 38:82)

It is clear that Allah's sincerely devoted slaves have been excluded here not because Satan was forced by Allah to do so. They have been excluded because owing to their attaining to the station of 'unity',

Satan can no longer gain control over them. As these people made themselves pure for Allah, they see Allah wherever they cast their eyes.

Whatever shape Satan may assume, they see the manifestation of Allah's glory in it. That is why Satan has admitted from the beginning his helplessness against them. Otherwise, it is his job to seduce the children of Adam and to lead them astray. He can have no mercy on anyone.

The second point is that the sincerely devoted slaves of Allah will be exempted from reckoning on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an says:

And the trumpet is blown and all who are in the heavens and the earth swoon away save him whom Allah wills. (Surah az-Zumar, 39:68)

This verse definitely shows that an unspecified group of people will be saved from the horrors of the Day of Judgment. When we match this verse with another verse which reads:

They will surely be produced save sincerely single-minded people, (Surah as Saffat, 37:39 - 40)

it becomes clear what that group will be. The sincerely devoted people need not be brought up for reckoning. They have already secured eternal life as the result of their meditations, self-annihilation and ceaseless acts of devotion. They have already passed the reckoning and judgment and as having been slain in the way of Allah, they have provision with their Lord.

Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision (Surah Ali Imran 3: 169)

Moreover, only that one is produced who is not present. These people are already present even before the beginning of the Day of resurrection, for Allah says that they have a provision with their Lord.

The third point is that on the Day of Judgment people will generally be rewarded and recompensed for their deeds. But these sincerely single-minded people will be favored with rewards beyond their deeds. Allah says:

You are not requited but what you did, save sincerely single-minded slaves of Allah. (Surah az-Zumar, 39:40)

If it is claimed that this verse means only that the sinners will be punished for their sins, but the reward given to the virtuous will purely be a favor bestowed on them by Allah, we will say that this verse is general in its connotation and does not exclusively refer to the sinners. Moreover, there is no contradiction between Allah's favor and His recompense, for Allah's favor means that He sometimes rewards a great deal for small deeds.

In spite of this kind of favor the reward still remains for the deeds performed. But what this verse says is

quite a different thing. It says that what Allah will bestow on His sincerely single-minded slaves, will be a pure favor, not a reward for any deeds at all. Another verse says:

There they have all that they desire and there is more with Us (Surah Qaf, 50:35)

This verse means that the inmates of Paradise will have all that man can desire or wish. Not only that, but Allah will bestow on them what they cannot imagine or think of. This point is worth considering.

The fourth point is that this group holds such a high position that its members can glorify Allah in the most appropriate manner. Allah says:

Glorified be Allah from what they attribute to Him, except what the sincerely single-minded slaves of Allah say of Him (Surah as-Saffat, 37: 159 - 160)

This is the highest position that a man can occupy.

The above mentioned details show what the blessings of this last stage of gnosis are. But it must be kept in mind that these blessings can be obtained only when a spiritual traveler's ceaseless devotion reaches the stage of self-annihilation so that he may be called to have been slain in the way of Allah and may become eligible for the reward reserved for martyrs.

Just as in the battlefield the sword cuts off the connection between the body and soul of a martyr, similarly a spiritual traveler snaps off the connection between his body and soul by fighting against his appetitive soul. For this purpose he acquires the help of his spiritual power instead of using his physical force.

In the beginning of his spiritual journey a devotee should lead an ascetic life and should constantly contemplate on the worthlessness of the vanities of the world and thus should break off his relation to the world of plurality. When he would cease to be interested in the world, no material gain will ever please him nor will any material loss grieve him.

So that you grieve not for what you have missed and exult not for what you have been given. (Surah al-Hadid, 57:23)

Indifference to the happiness and sorrow does not mean that the spiritual traveler does not feel happy even about the bounties of Allah or does not grieve at anything which may distress Him, for happiness about Allah's favors is not the result of his love for worldly trivialities such as wealth, rank, honor, fame etc. He loves the bounties of Allah because he finds himself overwhelmed by His mercy.

After passing this stage the devotee feels that he still loves himself ardently. Whatever spiritual effort and exercises he makes is the result of his self-love. Man is selfish by nature. He is always ready to sacrifice everything else for his own self. He would be willing to destroy anything for the sake of his own survival. It is difficult for him to do away with this natural instinct and to overcome his selfishness.

But so long as he does not do so, he cannot expect the divine light to manifest itself in his heart. In other words unless a spiritual traveler annihilates his individual self he cannot establish his connection with Allah. Therefore it is necessary for him first to weaken and ultimately to smash the spirit of selfishness so that whatever he may do, is done purely for the sake of Allah and his sense of self-love may turn into love for Him.

For this purpose ceaseless effort is necessary. After passing this stage the devotee's attachment not only to his body and every other thing material ceases to exist, but even his attachment to his soul is finished. Now whatever he does, he does for Allah alone. If he eats to satiate his hunger or provides for the bare necessities of life, he does so only because his Eternal Beloved wants him to continue to live.

All his wishes become subject to the Will of Allah. That is why he does not seek any miraculous power for himself. He believes that he has no right to undertake any sort of spiritual exercise with a view to know the past or predict future events or to practice thought-reading or to cover very long distances in a very short time or to make any changes in the universal system or to invigorate his libidinous faculties, for such acts are not performed for pleasing Allah, nor can they be motivated by sincere devotion to Him.

They mean only self-worship and are performed for the satisfaction of one's licentious desires, although the person concerned may not admit this fact and although he may apparently be sincerely devoted to Allah. But according to the following verse he only worships his desire.

Have you seen him who makes his desire his god? (Surah al-Jathiyah, 45:23)

Therefore the spiritual traveler should pass all these stages cautiously and do his best to gain complete control over his vanity. We shall further talk on this subject later.

When a devotee reaches this final stage, he gradually begins to lose interest in himself and ultimately forgets himself totally. Now he sees nothing except the eternal everlasting beauty of his True Beloved.

It must be borne in mind that it is essential for the spiritual traveler to gain complete victory over the fiendish horde of licentious desires, love for wealth, fame and power, pride and conceit. It is not possible to attain perfection if any trace of self-love is left, that is why it has been observed that many a distinguished man even after years long spiritual exercise and ceaseless acts of devotion could not attain perfection in gnosis and was defeated in his battle against his phenomenal self.

The reason was that his heart was not fully purified, and petty desires still lurked in some corner of his heart, though he was under the impression that all his evil qualities had been uprooted. The result was that at the time of test the suppressed desires once again raised their head and began to thrive, with the result that the poor devotee fell on evil times.

Success against the lower self depends on the favor of Allah and cannot be achieved without His help.

It is said that one day the late Bahrul 'Ulum was very cheerful. On being asked about the reason of that, he said: "After performing ceaseless acts of devotion for 25 years now I find my deeds free from ostentation." The lesson in this story is worth being remembered well.

It is to be remembered that a spiritual traveler must abide by the Islamic injunctions from the very beginning of his embarking on the path of gnosis to the end of it. Even the slightest digression from the law is not allowed. If you find that anyone in spite of claiming to be a gnostic, does not follow all the rules of Islamic law and is not strictly pious and virtuous, he may be regarded as a hypocrite and impostor. But if he commits a mistake and has some valid reason to justify his wrong action, then it is a different thing.

It is a big lie and calumny to hold that the Islamic code of law may be disregarded by a wali (Muslim saint). The Holy Prophet held the highest position among all living beings, but he still abided by the injunctions of Islam till the last moments of his life.

Therefore it is absolutely wrong to say that a wali is not obligated to observe the law. Anyhow, it is possible to say that an ordinary man worships Allah in order to consummate his potentialities, but a wali worships Him because his high position requires him to do so. Aisha is reported to have said to the Holy Prophet: "When Allah has said about you:

So that Allah may forgive you of your sin, that which is past and that which is to come, (Surah al-Fath, 48:2) then why do you exert yourself so much to perform the acts of worship?"

The Holy Prophet said: "Should I not be a thankful slave of Allah?"

This shows that certain individuals worship Allah not for the consummation of their personality, but to show their gratitude to Allah.

The states which a spiritual traveler experiences and the lights which he beholds, should be a prelude to his acquisition of certain traits and qualities. Otherwise a simple change in his condition is not enough. The spiritual traveler must completely get rid of all remnants of the lower world in himself by means of meditation and ceaseless acts of devotion.

It is not possible to acquire the position of the virtuous and the pure without acquiring their qualities. A little slip in the matters of meditation and acts of devotion may cause a spiritual traveler a tremendous loss. The following verse throws light on this point:

Muhammad is but a messenger. Other messengers have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dies or is slain, you will turn back on your heels? (Surah Ali Imran, 3: 144)

Therefore the spiritual traveler must cleanse his heart and purify himself inwardly and outwardly so that he may be graced with the company of the pure souls. Allah says:

Forsake outward as well as inward sins. (Surah al-An'am, 6: 120)

Acting according to this verse the spiritual traveler must pass all those stages which enable him to arrive at the stage of sincere devotion. These stages have been briefly enumerated in the following verse:

Those who believe, and have left their homes and strive with their wealth and their lives in Allah's way, are of much greater worth in Allah's sight. These are they who are triumphant. Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him, and acceptance, and Gardens where enduring pleasures will be theirs. There they will abide forever. Surely with Allah there is an immense reward. (Surah at-Tawbah, 9:20-22)

According to this verse there are four worlds preceding to the world of sincere devotion: (i) World of Islam, (ii) World of faith, (iii) World of emigration, and (iv) World of Jihad in the way of Allah. According to the Prophetic tradition in which it has been said: "We have returned from a minor holy war to a major holy war", the spiritual traveler's struggle is a major holy war (major jihad), and as such his Islam also should be a major Islam and his faith also a major faith.

After passing the stages of Islam and faith he should muster enough courage to be able to emigrate in the company of the inward messenger with the help of the outward messenger or his successor. Thus he should undertake self-mortification, so that he may gain the status of a person slain in the way of Allah.

The spiritual traveler must keep it in mind that from the beginning of his spiritual journey till the stage of self-mortification he has to face many obstacles, which are created either by man or the Devil. He has to pass through the worlds of major Islam and major faith before reaching the stage of self-mortification and gaining the status of a martyr.

In the spiritual journey major Islam, major faith, major emigration and major holy war are preliminary stages preceding the final stage. The major obstacles in the way to these stages are called major infidelity and major hypocrisy. At this stage the junior devils can do no harm to the spiritual traveler, but Satan who is their supreme head still tries to obstruct his progress.

Therefore, while passing through these stages he should not think that he is out of danger. So long as he does not pass out of above-mentioned "major worlds", Satan will continue to obstruct his way.

The spiritual traveler should keep up his spirit and beware of Satan, lest he be involved in major infidelity or major hypocrisy. After passing through the worlds of major Islam and major faith the spiritual traveler undertakes major emigration and then by means of self-mortification he passes through major self-resurrection and then passes into the valley of those who are sincerely devoted to Allah. May Allah grant us all this success.

[1.](#) Countenance of Allah signifies the Divine names and attributes through which Allah manifests Himself in all existing things. All things will perish but their countenance will remain because that is the manifestation of Allah. In simpler words it may be said that the 'basis' on which depends the existence of things does not perish.

[2.](#) The biography of Baba Faraj, the enraptured is available in Tarikh Hashari. It is about the learned men and the sufis and

gnostics of Tabriz. There is a couplet in it regarding the above words of Baba Faraj. There are similar versified sayings of Hāfiz and the renowned Arab mystical poet, ibn Fāriz.

[3.](#) A tradition of an Imam.

[4.](#) In the Qur'an Allah asks the Holy Prophet to tell the pagans: "I am a human being just like you, except that I receive revelation."

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