

Dear Beloved Son

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Who was Imam Ghazali (RA)?

Imam Ghazali (RA) [1058-1128 CE] is most famous for his contributions in philosophy, religion and *Sufism*. He is also known as *Algazel* in the West. *Abu Hamid Ibn Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Tusi al-Shafi'i al-Ghazali* was born in 1058 C.E. in *Khorman* (Iran). His father died while he was still very young but he had the opportunity of getting education in the prevalent curriculum at *Nishapur* and *Baghdad*. Soon he acquired a high standard of scholarship in religion and philosophy and was honored by his appointment as a Professor at the *Nizamiyah* University of *Baghdad*, which was recognized as one of the most reputed institutions of learning in the golden era of Muslim history.

After a few years, however, he gave up his academic pursuits and worldly interests and became a wandering ascetic. This was a process (period) of mystical transformation. Later, he resumed his teaching duties, but again left these. An era of solitary life, devoted to contemplation and writing then ensued, which led to the authorship of a number of everlasting books. He died in 1128 C.E. at *Baghdad*.

Imam Ghazali (RA) made major contributions in religion, philosophy and *Sufism*. A number of Muslim philosophers had been following and developing several viewpoints of Greek philosophy, including the Neoplatonic philosophy, and this was leading to conflict with several Islamic teachings. On the other hand, the movement of *Sufism* was assuming such excessive proportions as to avoid observance of obligatory prayers and duties of *Islam*. Based on his unquestionable scholarship and personal mystical experience, Ghazali sought to rectify these trends, both in philosophy and *Sufism*.

In philosophy, *Imam Ghazali (RA)* upheld the approach of mathematics and exact sciences as essentially correct. However, he adopted the techniques of Aristotelian logic and the Neoplatonic procedures and employed these very tools to lay bare the flaws and lacunas of the then prevalent Neoplatonic philosophy and to diminish the negative influences of Aristotelianism and excessive rationalism. In contrast to some of the Muslim philosophers, e.g. *Al-Farabi (RA)* he portrayed the inability of reason to comprehend the absolute and the infinite. Reason could not transcend the finite and was limited to the observation of the relative. Also, several Muslim philosophers had held that the universe was finite in space but infinite in time. *Imam Ghazali (RA)* argued that an infinite time was related to an infinite space. With his clarity of thought and force of argument, he was able to create a balance between religion and reason, and identified their respective spheres as being the infinite and the finite, respectively.

In religion, particularly mysticism, he cleansed the approach of *Sufism* of its excesses and reestablished the authority of the orthodox religion. Yet, he stressed the importance of genuine *Sufism*, which he maintained was the path to attain the absolute truth.

Imam Ghazali (RA) was a prolific writer. His immortal books include *Tuhafat al-Falasifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), *Ihya al-'Ulum al-Islamia* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), "The Beginning of Guidance and his Autobiography," "Deliverance from Error." Some of his works were translated into European languages in the middle ages. He also wrote a summary of astronomy.

Imam Ghazali (RA)'s influence was deep and everlasting. He is one of the greatest theologians of Islam. His theological doctrines penetrated Europe, influenced Jewish and Christian Scholasticism and several of his arguments seem to have been adopted by St. Thomas Aquinas in order to similarly reestablish the authority of orthodox Christian religion in the West. So forceful was his argument in the favor of religion that he was accused of damaging the cause of philosophy and, in the Muslim Spain, Ibn Rushd wrote a rejoinder to his *Tuhafat al-Falasifa*.

Introduction to the Book

It has been learned that one of the students of *Imam Ghazali (RA)* who acquired a lot of knowledge and spiritual benefits from him over a number of years, had a thought in his heart. He thought that he spent a lot of time learning from *Imam Ghazali (RA)* over a number of years from different branches of religious knowledge and gave a lot of sacrifices towards that end. However, he still did not know which branch of knowledge from among the branches of knowledge he studied, would be of real help to him, would illumine his grave, would be beneficial to him on the Day of Judgment and which branches of knowledge would not be of benefit to him on the Day of Judgment, so that he could refrain from those branches of knowledge because *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* said:

"I seek Allah's refuge from the knowledge which is of no benefit".¹

This disciple of *Imam Ghazali (RA)* kept thinking along these lines for a few days and then wrote a letter to *Imam Ghazali (RA)* with the view of getting an answer to his dilemma along with some other questions. Furthermore, he asked in his letter to *Imam Ghazali (RA)* for some advice and to teach him a supplication that he could always recite. He wrote in his letter that although *Imam Ghazali (RA)* has written numerous books on this issue such as "*Ahya al-Uloom ad-Deen*" (Revival of the Knowledge of the Path to God), "*Kimiya as-Sa'ada*" (Alchemy of the Ultimate Success and Happiness), "*Jawahir ul-Quran*" (Priceless Gems of the Holy Quran), "*Arba'een*" (Forty Steps), "*Minhaj ul 'Aabedeen ila Jannatu Rabbul 'Aalameen*" (Best Way for the Worshippers of God Leading them Towards the Paradise of the Lord of All Universes), etc., this weak individual is in need of something that he could always study and always act upon its injunctions. In reply to his letter, *Imam Ghazali (RA)* sent him the following advices.

¹ Zaid Bin Arqam (RA) reported: I am not going to say anything but only that which *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* used to say. He used to supplicate: "O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from incapacity, from sloth, from cowardice, from miserliness, decrepitude and from torment of the grave. O Allah, grant to my soul the sense of righteousness and purify it, for Thou art the Best Purifier thereof. Thou art the Protecting Friend thereof, and Guardian thereof. O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the knowledge which does not benefit, from the heart that does not entertain the fear (of Allah), from the soul that does not feel contented and the supplication that is not responded." seek refuge in you from knowledge which does not benefit, from a heart which does not feel humble, from a soul that does not feel contented and from an invocation that is not answered." (Muslim)

First Counsel - Revelation

My dear son...

May Allah (SWT) grant you a long life as His obedient servant and may He place you in His service alone. May Allah (SWT) guide you to the right path of those who love Him and are loved by Him. Know, my son, that real advice should be sought in the Revelation and the Sunnah of Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam). If you have attained advice from it, what need have you of my advice? And if not, then tell me what you have attained in these past years.

Second Counsel - Time

My dear son...

Among the many pieces of advice which the Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) gave to the Muslims was the following:

"The sign that Allah (SWT) has turned away from His worshipper is his busying himself in that which does not concern him; and if a man has passed an hour of his life in other than for which he was created, it is certainly fitting that his grief should be prolonged [on the Day of Resurrection], and whosoever has reached [the age of] forty, and his good does not surpass his evil, let him prepare for the Fire."

This piece of advice should suffice the people of knowledge.

Third Counsel - Knowledge

My dear son...

To advise others is an easy matter, the difficulty is accepting advice, since it is bitter for those who follow their own inclinations and desires. They love the forbidden from the depth of their hearts. This is more applicable to seekers of knowledge and students of learning, those of them who are busy in the grace of spirits and the benefits of this world. They believe that mere abstract knowledge, without proper action, will rescue them. This is the belief of the philosophers. Praise and Glory be to Allah (SWT), the Greatest of all. They do not know this much, that when they acquire knowledge, if they do not work according to it, the indictment against them is certain. Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

"The person most severely punished on the Day of Judgment is the learned one who did not follow Allah (SWT)'s guidance and did not benefit from his knowledge."

It has been narrated that someone saw Al-Junayd (RA)² after his death in a dream. Al-Junayd (RA) was asked: "What news do you have, Abul Qasim?" He replied:

"Perished are the speeches and vanished are the allusions, nothing benefited us except the prostrations which we made in the middle of the night."

² He is Junaid ibn Muhammad Abu al-Qasim al-Khazzaz al-Baghdadi (830-910 AD) a great Scholar who rejected many of the practices which had crept into the science of Tassawuff and asserted that Tassawuff is what is contained in the Qur'an and noble Sunnah.

Fourth Counsel - Allah's Mercy

My dear son...

Be not bankrupt of good deeds, nor void of [spiritual] status. Know for certain that abstract knowledge alone will neither increase you in power nor strengthen your situation. Likewise, if a brave warrior in possession of ten Indian swords and other weapons was alone in the wilderness, and a great ferocious lion attacked him, do you think the weapons could defend him if they were not used against the lion? It is well known that arms cannot defend people unless they are brought into use. By the same principle, if a man read a hundred thousand scientific theories, they would be of no use to him if he did not try and apply them. Similarly, if a man suffering from fever and a kidney disorder, he should be treated with ginger and [other] plants. Without treatment no recovery is achieved. A poet once said:

Though you measure two thousand bottles of wine

Unless you drink, no thrill is thine

If you studied a hundred years and collected a thousand books, you would not be prepared for the mercy of Allah (SWT) the Exalted, except by action. Allah (SWT) says:

"Man shall have nothing but what he strives for. [53:39]"

"Whosoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness. [18:110]"

"A recompense for what they used to do. [9:82]"

"As for those who believe and do good work, they will have for them the gardens of Paradise as an abode. No change will they desire from them. [18:107]"

"Except he who repents, believes and does good work. [25:70]"

Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) also said:

"Islam is built on five pillars: testifying that there is no deity but Allah (SWT) and that Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) is the Messenger of Allah (SWT), establishing the prayer, paying the zakah, fasting in Ramadan and performing hajj of the sacred house for those able to do so."

Iman (faith) is confession with the tongue and belief with the heart and performance of the pillars of Islam. There are countless proofs on the necessity of actions; this is despite the fact that the servant shall attain Paradise by the grace and favour of Allah (SWT) the Exalted, but such [grace] follows the servant's readiness to obey and worship Him. Verily the mercy of Allah (SWT) is very close to the doers of good.

It may be said that the slave may reach that status through faith alone. We say 'Yes', but when will he be able to reach it? How many obstacles will he be faced with? The first of these obstacles is the ravine of *Iman* and who is secure [enough to guarantee] that he will not lose his *Iman*? And if a man loses his *Iman*, he will be bankrupt and be dismayed in the Hereafter. Hasan Al-Basri (RA)³ said:

"Allah (SWT) will say to His slaves on the Day of Judgment: 'Allow My slaves to enter Paradise by My Mercy and divide it amongst them according to their deeds.'"

³ This is Abu Sa'id al-Hasan ibn Abi-l-Hasan Yasar al-Basri (642-728), also known as Imam Hasan al Basri (RA), who was from the *Salaf*, a well-known Sufi Muslim theologian and scholar of Islam who was born in Medina from Persian parents.

Fifth Counsel - Evaluation

My dear son...

He who does not work shall have no reward. It is reported that a man of the *Bani Israel* worshipped *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted for seventy years. *Allah (SWT)* intended to test him before the angels, so He sent him an angel to tell him that he did not merit Paradise even with this worship. When the angel informed him of this the worshipper replied:

"We are created for worship and we can but worship Him."

The angel returned saying:

"O my God, you know best what he said."

Allah (SWT) the Exalted said:

"Since he did not turn away from worshipping us, then with grace we shall not turn away from him. O my Angels, bear witness that I have forgiven him."

Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

"Evaluate your works before you are asked to account for them. Weigh your works before you are evaluated." Ali said: "Those who think that they can achieve their aims without work are dreaming, and those who think that they will attain the goal through exertion alone are self-confident and consider themselves self-sufficient."

Hasan Al-Basri (RA) said:

"Seeking and demanding Paradise without actions is a sin from amongst the sins."

He also said:

"The sign of [attaining] reality is in giving up regard for work, not in giving up the work."

Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

"The wise man is he who judges himself and works for what is after death, and the fool is he who pursues his desires and [vainly] longs for Allah (SWT) the Exalted."

Sixth Counsel - Intention

My dear son...

How many nights you have remained awake seeking knowledge and reading books, forbidding yourself the pleasure of sleep! I do not know for what purpose [you did this]. If it was for attaining worldly benefits and securing its vanities, its status and position and asserting your superiority over your peers and brothers, then woe to you and again woe; but if your purpose was to revive the *Shari'ah* of *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* and to train your character, and break the *Nafs Al-Ammarah* (the soul commanding to evil), then blessed are you and again blessed. The poet spoke truly when he said:

"To spend the night awake and weeping for others than Allah is a foolish waste."

Seventh Counsel - Death

My dear son...

Live as long as you may, for verily you must die. Love whoever you wish, for one day you shall taste its separation, and do what you will, you will be rewarded accordingly.

Eighth Counsel - Hypocrisy

My dear son...

So what have you gained from learning scholastic theology, medicine, administration, poetry, prosody, astronomy, syntax and morphology except to waste your time against the will of the Lord of Majesty. I saw in the Gospel of *Sayyidina Isa (AS)* that he said:

"From the moment that a corpse is placed on the funeral bed until it is placed at the edge of the grave, Allah (SWT) by His Greatness will ask him forty questions. The first of which is: 'O my servant, you have purified [yourself in] the sight of mankind for years and not for one hour have you purified [yourself] for Me.' Everyday He looks into your hearts and says: 'What are you doing for other creatures though you are surrounded by my kindness? Are so you deaf that you cannot hear?'"

Ninth Counsel - Action

My dear son...

Knowledge without action is insanity and action without knowledge is vanity. Know that knowledge today will not distance you from sins, nor bring you into obedience, nor distance you from the fire of Hell tomorrow. If you do not act today and do not derive lessons from your past days, you will say on the Last Day:

"Return us to our previous life and we will do good deeds"

and it will be said to you:

"O fool, it is from there that you have come."

Tenth Counsel – The Grave

My dear son...

Plant resolution in your spirit, and place defeat in your lower self and death in your physical body. For your true destination is the grave and the people of the grave are awaiting you at every moment. Take care, beware lest you arrive without provision for the journey. *Sayyidina Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq (RA)*⁴ said:

"These bodies are but cages like those of birds, or like the stables of animals; so consider for yourself of which you are. If you are of the heavenly birds, when you hear the roll [of the drum]: 'Return to your Lord', you will fly upwards until you reach the highest towers of Paradise."

As *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* said:

"The throne of the Compassionate shook at the death of Sa'd Ibn Mu'adh⁵."

May Allah (SWT) save you if you were as one of the animals, as Allah the Exalted says:

"They are like cattle, nay more misguided. [7:179]"

So do not consider yourself safe from the removal of the security of your home to the fire of Hell.

It was narrated that *Hasan Al-Basri (RA)* was given a drink of cool water. He took the glass whereupon it fell from his hands and he fell unconscious. When he regained consciousness, he was asked:

"What is the matter O Abu Sa'id (RA)?"

He said:

"I remembered the desire of the inmates of Hell when they say to the people of Paradise: 'Give us some of the water or some of the provisions that Allah has granted you [7:50]"

⁴ He is *Abdullah ibn Abi Qahafa (RA)* [573-634] and considered to the most superior of human beings after the Prophets (AS) and the one who succeeded *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* as the first Caliph of the Muslims.

⁵ He is *Sa'd ibn Mu'adh (RA)* a chief of the *Banu Aus* tribe in *Medina* and converted to *Islam* in 622 (1 AH), when *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* arrived in *Medina*.

Eleventh Counsel - Sleep

My dear son...

If mere knowledge were sufficient for you and you do not need any work other than this knowledge, then the call [of Allah (SWT)]:

"Is there anyone supplicating? Is there anyone who seeks forgiveness? Is there anyone who wants to repent?"

would have been useless. It was narrated that a group of Companions (RA), mentioned *Abdullah Ibn Umar (RA)*⁶ to *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* and he said:

"An excellent man he, if only he would pray at night."

Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said to one of his Companions:

"O [so and so] do not sleep too long in the night, for much sleep makes one impoverished on the Day of Judgment."

Twelfth Counsel - Dhikr

My dear son...

"Awaken at night to pray [tahajjud⁷]. [17:79]"

This, my son, is a command.

"And in the hours of the early dawn, they were found praying for forgiveness. [51:18]"

This verse indicates thankfulness.

"And those who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning. [3:17]" This verse indicates dhikr of Allah the Exalted.

Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said:

"Three voices are beloved to Allah the Exalted: the voice of the cock, the voice of the one who reads the Qur'an and the voice of those seeking forgiveness in the early morning."

*Sufyan Al-Thawri (RA)*⁸ said:

"Allah the Exalted has created a breeze which blows in the early hours of the morning, that carries the dhikr and the supplications to the Supreme King."

He (RA) also said:

"In the early hours of the night, a caller from under the Throne calls: 'Let the worshippers rise', and they will get up and pray till the early hours of dawn. At that point a caller will call: 'Let those who pray for

⁶ He is *Abdullah (RA)* the second son born to *Sayyidina Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA)* and his wife *Zaynab bint Madh'uwn* and accepted *Islam* at a young age.

⁷ The optional night prayers in *Islam* which is considered extremely virtuous and beneficial in getting one close to *Allah (SWT)*.

⁸ He is *Sufyan al-Thawri ibn Said (716–778)* was a *Tabi'i* Islamic scholar, *Hafidh*, Jurist, and a *Hadith* compiler, of whom a great number of anecdotes are recorded.

forgiveness arise', they will get up and seek forgiveness. At dawn a caller will say: 'Let the heedless arise', and they will get up from their beds as the dead resurrected from their graves."

Thirteenth Counsel - Tahajjud

My dear son...

It is narrated in the testaments of *Luqman (RA)*⁹ the wise that he said to his son:

"O my son, let the cock not be more clever than you - it calls at the early hours of dawn while you are asleep."

Assuredly he said well who said:

*The pigeon cooed in the darkness of the night
On a branch, in weakness, while I was asleep.
I lied; for I swear that were I [Allah's] loved
Not the pigeons alone, but I too would weep;
I think I am lovesick, excessively lovelorn
For my Lord - but I weep not, though animals weep!*

Fourteenth Counsel - Obedience

My dear son...

The essence of knowledge is to know what obedience and worship are.

You should know that obedience and worship is to conform to the law in the commands and prohibitions in word and deed. This means that what you say, do and forsake should be according to the Shari'ah.

Thus fasting on the day of *Eid*¹⁰ and the three appointed days [of pilgrims in the valley of *Mina*¹¹] is a sin, and if you pray in a usurped garment, this too is a sin although it appears to be a form of worship.

Fifteenth Counsel - Shari'ah

My dear son...

Your words and deeds should be according to the *Shari'ah* since knowledge and action without observance of the *Shari'ah* is deviation. Do not be deceived by ecstatic utterances and vehement cries of the *Sufis*, because this path can be traversed by fighting one's whims and selfish desires through [spiritual] exercises, not through falsity and wrong practices.

⁹ *Luqman* (also known as *Luqman The Wise*) was a wise man for whom *Surah Luqman* the thirty-first sura (chapter) of the *Qur'an*, was named, he was believed to be from Africa.

¹⁰ *Muslim* festival after the fasting in the month of *Ramadhan*.

¹¹ A valley where Muslims performing *Hajj* (pilgrimage) stay.

You should know that a fluent and quick tongue and a closed heart full of heedlessness and lust are signs of unhappiness. Until you annihilate your selfish lower self of desires and lusts through strict and sincere mujahadah (self-disciplinary exercises), your heart will never become illuminated with the light of knowledge.

You should be aware that some of your questions addressed to me cannot be answered in writing or in speech. If you attain that station you know what it is, otherwise it is impossible to know since it is a matter known by experience, and whatever is known by experience cannot be described in words. It is known that the sweetness of sweet and the bitterness of bitter cannot be known except by tasting. It is narrated that an impotent man wrote to his friend asking him to describe the pleasure of love-making. His friend replied:

"O [so and so] I had thought that you were merely impotent but now I have come to know that you are a fool as well; assuredly this delight is known by experience. If you attain it you will know it, and if not, it cannot be described in writing or speech."

Sixteenth Counsel - Aqidah

My dear son...

Some of your questions are of this type, but the portion which can be answered, we have mentioned in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* and other works. We shall mention here some of the relevant extracts: The traveller of the path must be in possession of four things:

1. The first: Correct *Aqidah* (belief) free of *Bid'ah* (heretical innovation).
2. The second: Sincere repentance that prevents him from returning to sin which is humiliation.
3. The third: To settle all dues even with your foes so that there will remain no one who has a right over you.
4. The fourth: To attain enough knowledge of the *Shari'ah* that suffices you to comply with the Commands of *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted. Then a share from other sciences [disciplines] that leads one to salvation in the Hereafter.

It is narrated that *Al-Shibli (RA)*¹² served four hundred teachers and said:

"I read four thousand Ahadith (traditions) and selected one of them for practice, because having pondered over it and considered it seriously, I realised that here lay my salvation, since it embodied the knowledge of the predecessors and those who followed them. And that [tradition] was, that the Messenger of Allah said to one of his Companions: "Work for your world according to your position in it. Work for your Hereafter according to the length of your remaining in it. Work for Allah (SWT) the Exalted according to your need of Him and work for the Fire according to your endurance in it."

Seventeenth Counsel - Companionship

My dear son...

If you understand this tradition, there is no need for too much knowledge. There is also another story to meditate and reflect over. *Hatim Al-Asam (RA)*¹³ was among the friends of *Shaqiq Al-Balkhi (RA)*¹⁴.

¹² He is *Shaykh Abu Bakr Shibli* (861 – 946 CE), a Jurist (of *Maliki* School), a *Sufi* and a disciple of *Junayd Baghdadi*.

One day *Shaqiq (RA)* asked *Hatim (RA)*:

"You have kept my company for thirty years; what have you gained in the course of these years?"

Hatim (RA) replied:

"I have gained eight benefits from the knowledge which is sufficient for me. I hope my salvation and safety are embodied in them."

Shaqiq (RA) asked *Hatim (RA)* to mention them. *Hatim Al-Asam (RA)* said:

1. "The first benefit is that I observed the creation and saw that everyone had a loved one and one passionately desired whom he loved and longed for. Some of the beloved accompany the lover up to the brink of sickness and death and others to the gate of the graveyard. All of them return and leave him there alone. No one goes into the tomb with him. I looked into the matter and said to myself: 'The best beloved is that which would enter the tomb with the lover to console him'; I found it to be nothing else than good works, so I took this as my beloved, to illuminate my grave for me and to comfort me in it and not leave me alone.
2. The second benefit is that I saw that people were following their lusts and hastening towards the desires of the souls; and I meditated on the saying of the Exalted: *"But as for whoever has feared the majesty of his Lord and has refrained his soul from lust, truly the Garden shall be his dwelling place. [79:40/41]"*. Convinced that the Qur'an was true and right, I began to deny my soul [its pleasures] and hurried to combat it and refuse it its passionate desires, until it enjoyed real satisfaction in obedience to *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted.
3. The third benefit is that I saw that every human being trying his best to accumulate as much as he can from the wreckage of this world and then holding on strongly to it. I meditated on the Qur'anic verse: *"What is with you must vanish; what is with Allah (SWT) must endure. [19:96]"* So I gave freely my worldly possessions for His sake by distributing them among the poor so that it would be my provision in the future with Him the Exalted.
4. The fourth benefit is that some people whom I observed think that their dignity and honour lie in the multitude of their family and large clans. They were fascinated by these things. Others claimed honour and dignity in abundance of wealth and children and they were proud of it. Some believed honour and power abide in appropriating the wealth of others, doing injustice to them and shedding their blood. Others considered dignity to consist of extravagance and spending wealth in a foolish manner. I meditated upon the saying of the Exalted: *"The most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. [49:13]"* I chose righteousness for myself, convinced that the Qur'an is right and true and those claims and opinions of the people are all false and temporal.
5. The fifth benefit is that I found the people slandering each other and speaking ill of one another out of envy of fortune, power and knowledge. I meditated upon the saying of *Allah (SWT)*: *"It is We who divide their livelihood among them in the life of this world. [43:32]"*. I realised that the process of dividing livelihood is entirely in the hands of *Allah (SWT)* since the beginning of time. Therefore I never envied anyone and was satisfied with the distribution of *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted.

¹³ A contemporary and a friend of *Shaqiq Al-Balkhi (RA)*.

¹⁴ He was a great ascetic who passed away in 810 CE.

6. The sixth benefit is that I saw people becoming enemies of each other for different reasons. I meditated upon the saying of the Exalted: *"Verily Satan is an enemy to you, so treat him as an enemy. [35:6]"* I became aware that enmity with anyone but Satan was not permissible.
7. The seventh benefit is that I saw everyone working very hard, exhausting himself to obtain food and sustenance, tempted by doubts and forbidden things. They degrade themselves in humiliation. I pondered over the saying of the Allah the Exalted: *"There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependent on Allah. [11:6]"* I knew that my livelihood is guaranteed by Allah (SWT) the Exalted so I engaged myself in worship and cut off my covetousness of all else, other than He.
8. The eight benefit is that I saw that everyone relied on some created thing, some on the dinar and dirham, some on wealth and property, some on trade and craft and some on creatures like themselves. I meditated upon the saying of the Exalted: *"And whosoever places his reliance on Allah (SWT), sufficient is [Allah] for him. For Allah (SWT) will surely accomplish His purpose. Verily for all things has Allah (SWT) appointed a due proportion. [65:3]"* I therefore placed full trust in Allah the Exalted. He is sufficient for me and He is the best Disposer of affairs.'

At this point *Shaqiq (RA)* said:

"May Allah bless you and grant you success. I looked into the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Zabur and the Qur'an and have found that the four books revolve around these eight benefits. Whoever works according to them is working according to these four books."

Eighteenth Counsel – Spiritual Guide

My dear son...

You must have learned from these two accounts that you are not in need of multiplying knowledge. Now I shall attempt to clarify for you what travelers of the right path should do. You should know that the traveler should have a shaykh or a murshid (spiritual guide or teacher) to instruct him and cleanse him of bad manners through the process of tarbiyah, and replace them with good character. The concept of tarbiyah resembles the farmer's action of extracting thorns and weeds from amongst his crops so that they may grow better. The follower of the path requires a murshid to improve his character and guide him upon the path towards Allah (SWT) the Exalted. Allah (SWT) sent Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) to the people to guide them to His path and when he passed away he left behind him his representatives and successors in his place so that they may direct the people towards Allah (SWT) the Exalted.

The condition of the *Murshid*¹⁵ to be a deputy of Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) is that he must be learned - not that every learned one is fit for it. I will point out to you certain signs so that not everyone can claim he is a murshid. We say that the *Murshid* is the one who turns away from the love of this world and the love of prestige and power, and has followed another man of insight in a chain that reaches up to the master of the messengers.

The *Murshid* should have excelled in disciplining himself in scarcity of food, speech and sleep and in abundance of prayer, charity and fasting. He should have kept the company of a shaykh with deep insight so that the qualities of good character have become his way of life such as the qualities of patience and perseverance, prayer, gratitude, reliance upon Allah (SWT), conviction, generosity, contentment and

¹⁵ Arabic for "guide" or "teacher". The path of *Sufism* starts when a student takes an oath of allegiance (*Bay'ah*) with a teacher. After this oath, the student is called a *Murid*.

tranquility of the soul, moderation, humility, knowledge, truthful sincerity, modesty, trustworthiness, dignity, serenity, deliberation and other similar characteristics. He is then a light from the lights of *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* and can be taken as a *Shaykh*¹⁶ (*Murshid*). But the presence of such people is rarer than red sulphur.

He who is fortunate enough to find such a *Murshid* [with the qualities that we have mentioned] and the *Murshid* accepts him, [then he] should respect him outwardly and inwardly.

Outward respect entails that he should not argue with him or engage in discussing each and every question even if he knows that the shaykh is wrong. He should not spread his prayer mat before the *Shaykh*, except at the time of salah and when he completes his *Salah*, he should remove it. He should not offer excessive optional salah in the presence of the *Shaykh* and he should do whatever the *Shaykh* commands him according to his capacity and ability.

As for inward respect, this requires that whatever he hears and accepts from his *Shaykh* outwardly, he should not deny inwardly, neither in deeds nor in words, lest he be branded with hypocrisy. If this is not possible, then he should leave the company of the *Shaykh* until his inner state of affairs is in complete harmony with his outward self.

He should be warned to refrain from keeping the company of immoral people, so that he may oust from the courtyard of his heart any loyalty of friendship with the *Satan* from among *Jinn* and human beings and purify himself of satanic habits. In any event, he should choose poverty over wealth.

Know that *Tasawwuf*¹⁷ has two characteristics: steadfastness and serenity from the creation. Whosoever is steadfast and makes his manners and morals most beautiful in dealing with people and treats them with forbearance, is a *Sufi*¹⁸.

Steadfastness entails that he should take for himself only so much as he deserves. Dealing with people in a beautiful manner entails that you do not burden people according to your own desires, but burden yourself according to their desires so long as they do not violate the *Shari'ah*.

Then you asked me about *ubudiyyah* (becoming a servant of *Allah (SWT)*); it comprises three things:

1. The first: the careful observance of the command of the sacred law.
2. The second: satisfaction with decree, fate and the dispensation *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted.
3. The third: forsaking pleasing yourself in order to seek the pleasure of *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted.

You asked me about *Tawakkul* (total reliance on *Allah (SWT)*): it means that you should strengthen your belief in everything promised by *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted, that is, that you believe that whatever has been destined for you will reach you inevitably, even if everybody in the universe should strive to keep it from you and whatever has not been written for you will never reach you even if all of creation assisted you.

You asked me about *Ikhlās* (sincerity): it entails that all your actions should be for the sake of *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted. Do not allow your heart to take pleasure with the praises of people, nor to be saddened by their condemnation.

¹⁶ A synonym for *Murshid* as used in this context.

¹⁷ The science of Spirituality in Islam.

¹⁸ The one who is a student of the science of *Tasawwuf*.

You should know that *Riya* (hypocritical show) is born from exalting mankind. Its remedy is to perceive them subjugated to the Power [of *Allah (SWT)*] and to consider them even as inanimate objects in their inability to attain contentment and misery. In this way you may escape from showing off to them, for as long as you regard them as possessing power and free will, the desire to show off will always be there.

Nineteenth Counsel - Referral

My dear son...

The remainder of your questions have either been answered in my books, so seek [the answers to] them there. Writing the answers of some of the questions is forbidden. You should act according to what you know so that the matters which you were unaware of will be disclosed to you.

Twentieth Counsel - Rationale

My dear son...

After this day, question me not except by the language of reason. As He the Exalted says:

"And had they waited patiently until you came forth to them, it would have been better for them. [49:5]"

Accept the advice of Al-Khidr (AS) when he said:

"Ask me no questions about anything until I myself speak to you concerning it. [18:70]"

And do not be in a hurry to reach the time when it shall be disclosed to you. Allah the Exalted says:

"I will show you My signs so do not be in a hurry. [21:37]"

So do not ask me before the time is ripe. Be sure that you will not reach [a station] except by traveling [towards it]:

"Do they not travel through the earth and see? [30:9]"

Twenty First Counsel - Devotion

My dear son...

By *Allah (SWT)*! If you travel you will see wonders at every stage. Devote your soul, for the most important thing in this matter is devotion of the soul. *Dhun Nun Al-Misri (RA)*¹⁹ said to one of his disciples:

"If you have the power to devote your soul, come to me; and if not, then do not busy yourself in the idle practices of the Sufis."

¹⁹ He is Dhul-Nun al-Misri (796-859) an Egyptian Sufi saint, hence commonly known as Al-Misri (The Egyptian).

Twenty Second Counsel - *Dawah*

My dear son...

I advise you regarding eight things. Accept them from me lest your knowledge becomes your enemy on the Day of Judgement. Perform four of them and avoid four of them.

Those that you should forsake:

1. Firstly, do not dispute with anyone in any matter as far as possible. For in argumentation lies much harm and its evil is greater than its benefit. It is the source of all reprehensible qualities such as showing off, envy, arrogance, rancour, enmity, boasting, etc. Of course, if there arises a question between you and an individual or a group and your intention is that truth may become manifest and not lost, debating is permissible. But there are two signs of such a desire:
 - a. That it makes no difference whether the truth is revealed by your tongue or the tongue of another.
 - b. That you prefer discussion in private than in public.

Listen carefully and I will draw your attention to a helpful point. Know that asking the shaykh questions about problems, is just like presenting the sickness of the heart to the doctor, and the answer lies in your struggle to treat the sickness.

You should know that the ignorant are those whose hearts are diseased, while the learned are the doctors; the partially learned cannot perfect the treatment and the perfectly learned do not treat every sick person, but will treat those whom he hopes will respond to the treatment and the cure. If the malady is chronic or incurable, then he will not give any treatment, for this is a waste of time.

Then know that the sickness of ignorance is classified into four types; one of them is curable and the others incurable:

- a) He whose questions and objections stem from envy and malice and every time you reply to him in the best, clearest and most eloquent answer, it only increases his malice, enmity and envy. The method [of dealing with him] is not to occupy yourself with answering him. It is said:

One hopes for the removal of every enmity Except enmity arising from envy.

It befits you to shun and leave him in his sickness. *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted says:

*"Therefore shun those who turn away from Our Message and desire nothing but the life of this world.
[53:29]"*

In all that he says and does, the envious person sets fire to the fruit of his knowledge.

"Envy eats up good deeds as fire eats up wood."

- b) He whose sickness arises from stupidity is also incurable. As *Isa (AS)* said: "Indeed I did not fail in bringing the dead to life, but I failed in curing the stupid." The fool occupies himself with acquiring knowledge over a short span of time and learns a very little share of the intellectual and religious sciences. This fool knows not and thinks that which is obscure to him

is also obscure to the great scholar. If he does not know this much, [then obviously] his question will originate from folly and you must not attempt to answer him.

- c) He who is seeking guidance and whatever he does not understand of the speech of the great scholars, he lays to the defects of his own understanding. His questioning is in order to seek benefit; but he is slow-witted and cannot arrive at the truth of things. Again, you must not attempt to answer him, as *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* said: "We, the Prophets, have been commanded that we speak to people according to their level of understanding."

As for the disease which is curable, it is that of the intelligent seeker of guidance, who is not overcome with envy, anger, or the love of lust, prestige and wealth. Moreover, he is seeking the Straight Path and his questions and objections do not arise from envy, aberrant argumentation or testing the *Shaykh*. His sickness is curable and it is permitted to attempt to answer him, rather it is a must.

2. The second thing to avoid is to guard against and shun becoming a preacher and warner, since its harm is much unless you practice what you preach first and then preach it to the people. Think then about what was said to Isa "O son of Maryam, preach to yourself, and when you have preached to yourself, then preach to others; or otherwise be ashamed before your Lord." If you are entrusted with this task, avoid two characteristics:
- a. Beware of artificiality in speech in explanations and allusions and vehement cries and versification and poetry because *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted hates pretension and the person pretentious beyond bounds gives evidence of inner confusion and a heedless heart.

The meaning of *Tadhkeer* (reminding) is that the servant should remember the Fire of the Hereafter and his own shortcomings in the service of the Creator. He should reflect on his past life which he squandered in what did not concern him. He should think about the challenges that lie before him, such as the possible invalidity of his iman at the end [of his life], his condition at the time that his soul is seized by the Angel of Death and whether he will be able to answer the questions of the angels *Munkar* and *Nakir* in the grave.

He should think of his condition on the Day of Judgment at its various stages, and whether he will be able to cross the Bridge safely or will fall into the Fire of Hell. He should continue to think of these matters in his heart so as to shake its placidity and make it alert. *Tadhkeer* is lamenting for these calamities, telling people about them, warning them about their flaws and negligence, showing them the defects of their souls so that the heat of these fires will touch the people of the assembly, and these afflictions make them impatient to rectify the past years according to their ability and regret their past days passed in other than obedience to *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted. All this carried out in this way is called 'preaching'.

It is as though you saw a flood approaching someone's house while he and his family were within, and you cried: "*Danger, danger, flee from the flood!*" Would your heart desire in this situation to convey your news to the man of the house in pretentious sentences, accompanied by gestures and jokes. No one would wish such a thing at all. Such is the status of the preacher and he must avoid such things.

- b. The second characteristic to avoid is that your concern in preaching be not that people become wrought up in your assembly and show excitement and tear their clothes, so that it be said: *"What an assembly this was!"* For this is all a product of inclination to this world which is born from heedlessness. In fact your purpose and concern should be to summon people from this world to the Hereafter, from disobedience to obedience, from cupidity to abstinence, from stinginess to generosity and from delusion to piety.

You must make the Hereafter beloved to them and make them hate the world. Teach them the science of worship and renunciation, because their temperaments lean towards deviation from the way of Religion and indulging in what is displeasing to Allah the Exalted and acquiring evil attributes. Cast awe into their hearts and warn them of fearful matters to come. Their inner characteristics may change and their outward dealings may improve. Maybe they will show the yearning to obey and to withdraw from disobedience. This, then, is the correct way to preach.

Preaching that is different from this is a burden for he who speaks and he who listens. In fact, it has been called a ghou, and a devil that snatches people away from the Path and destroys them. People must flee from such a preacher because the mischief that he makes in their religion cannot be achieved by Satan himself. He who is able and powerful enough should bring him down from the pulpit and prevent him from continuing his activities, because this is included in the framework of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

3. The third thing that you should forsake is that you should not mingle with the princes and the sultans, and nor should you see them, for seeing them, sitting with them and mixing with them is a great mischief.

If you are impelled to do this, refrain from praising and speaking well of them, for *Allah (SWT)* is angered when when the wrongdoer and the unjust is praised. And whoever prays [to *Allah (SWT)*] to lengthen their lives, has wanted that *Allah (SWT)* should be disobeyed in His Hand.

4. The fourth thing to avoid is not to accept anything of the gifts of the princes, though you know it is permissible, because coveting what they possess corrupts the religion. This is because it results in compromise to and tolerance of wrongdoing, consideration of their status and agreeing with their oppression. All of this corrupts the religion and the least of its evil is that when you accept their gifts and benefit from their world, you become fond of them; and whoever loves another obviously loves the prolonging of his life and presence, and in loving the continuance of the life of the oppressor, there is a willingness [to continue] the oppression of the worshippers of *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted. What can be more harmful to the Deen and the Hereafter than to want destruction in the world?

Beware, beware, that you may be deceived by the suggestion of Satan or by the words of people who say: "It is better to accept their dinars and dirhams and distribute them among the poor and destitute, for they spend in the way of wrongdoing and disobedience, while your spending on the weak is better than their spending it." *Verily the cursed one has cut off the necks of many people by this evil whispering; and its mischief is excessive (we have discussed this in Ihya Ulum al - Din, so refer to it).*"

As for the four things that you should do, they are as follows:

1. First: that you make your dealings with *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted such that, if your servant acted thus with you, you would be pleased with him and you would not think ill of him nor become angry. Whatever you would not expect from your slave in the metaphorical sense, accept not for *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted who is your Real Lord and Master.
2. Second: in all your dealings with people, treat them as you would be pleased to be treated by them, because the iman of a worshipper is incomplete until he loves for all other people what he loves for himself.
3. Third: if you read or pursue knowledge, your knowledge should reform your heart and purify your soul, just as if you discovered that you had one week to live, you would of course not occupy yourself studying the science of jurisprudence, morality, principles [of jurisprudence], scholastic theology and the like; because you would know that these disciplines would not help you. You would rather engage yourself in monitoring the state of your heart and in apprehending the characteristics of your soul, shunning attachment to the world, purifying your soul from the blameworthy characteristics, occupying yourself with the love and worship of *Allah (SWT)* and adopting the praiseworthy characteristics. No day or night passes upon a servant in which his death may not take place.
- 4) Fourth: do not accumulate of this world more than what suffices for one year, as *Sayyidina Rasul-ullah (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* never exceeded that for some of his wives and said: "*O Allah (SWT), make the provision of the family of Muhammad (Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) sufficient*", and he did not accumulate it for all his wives. In fact he used to prepare it only for her whom he knew had weakness in her heart. As for the lady of yaqeen (perfect conviction), he used not to accumulate for her more than the provision of a day and a half.

Twenty Third Counsel - Contemplation

My dear son...

Hear one more thing from me and contemplate about it until you find salvation. If you were informed that the sultan was going to select you for appointment as a minister, know that in the course of this period you would not engage in anything but improving your garments or body, your house or its furnishing, upon whatever you thought the sultan's eye would be cast upon. Now think about what I have indicated to you, for you are quick-witted and a few words are sufficient for you. Did not *(Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)* say:

"Verily Allah looks not to your outward appearances, nor to your actions, but he looks to your hearts and your intentions."

If you wanted to know the [different] states of the heart then look in the *Ihya Ulum al-din* and my other works. This science is fard 'ayn (obligatory upon every individual), and other disciplines are fard kifayah (obligatory for some individuals in the community) except to the extent that it facilitates performance of the obligatory duties enjoined by *Allah (SWT)* the Exalted, and He will give you success in achieving that knowledge.

Twenty Fourth Counsel - *Dua*

My dear son...

I have written in this chapter the answer to your request, so you should act accordingly and do not forget [to mention] me in your most righteous du'a (supplications).

As for the *dua* which you asked me to teach you, you will find it among the supplications of the Sihah (authentic collections of ahadith). Read this du'a at different times and especially after your prayer:

O *Allah (SWT)*, I ask of You complete blessings, lasting protection from sin, comprehensive mercy, acquisition of well-being [in this world and in the next], the best provision, the happiest life, the most complete favour, the most generous blessing, the sweetest grace and the closest gentleness.

O *Allah (SWT)*, be for us and not against us. O *Allah (SWT)*, seal our lives with happiness and good fortune, realise our aspirations accompanied with further increase. Combine our mornings and evenings with safety and make Your compassion our return and our last resort and pour the best of Your forgiveness over our sins and favour us with the reform of our defects. Make piety our provision and grant us interpretative judgment in Your religion, and make us depend on You and have confidence only in You.

O *Allah*, make us firm on the path of steadfastness, and safeguard us in this world from matters that will bring shame on the Day of Judgment, and lighten for us the burden of our sins, and grant us lives of the righteous and protect us from the evil of the evil ones. Save our necks and the necks of our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters from the fire of Hell by Your compassion, O Most Powerful, Most Forgiving, Most Generous, Concealing of our faults; O You Most Knowledgeable, Most Overwhelming, O *Allah (SWT)*! O *Allah (SWT)*! O *Allah (SWT)*! By Your Mercy, O Most Merciful of the mercifuls, O Thou First before the firsts, Last after the lasts, O Possessor of Strength, Everlasting, Compassionate to the destitute, Most Compassionate of those who are compassionate. There is no god but You, glory be to You, verily I am of the wrongdoers. And may Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad and all his followers and Companions. All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord and Cherishes of all the worlds.