

Glory be to Allah, the Most High, the incomparably Great.
We praise Him and send blessings on his noble Prophet, Muhammad (*sas*).
In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

THE SIX PARALLEL STAGES
OF
PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL PERFECTION
IN THE
LIGHT OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

by
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Dedication

To my children, RISHAD, SHAMSHAD NAFISSA, SURAIYYA NASEEM, my nephews and nieces and their children, as well as the junior members of the FIREBURN JAMĀ'AT and to all young people wherever they may live, in particular, my young, talented and highly-esteemed friend, Dr. MUJAHID AHMAD SAEED, of Pakistan.

“When the youths sought refuge in the CAVE, they said: Our Lord, grant us mercy from Thyself, and provide for us a right course in our affair” (Holy Qur’an 18:10).

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“And whatever good you send on before-hand for yourselves, you will find it with Allah – that is the best and greatest in reward...” (Holy Qur’an 73:20).

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In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

*Successful are the believers,
Who are humble in their prayers,
And who shun what is vain,
And who act for the sake of purity,
And who restrain their sexual passions -
Except in the presence of their mates or those whom their
right hands possess, for such surely are not blameable,
But whoever seeks to go beyond that, such are transgressors*

-
*And those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant,
And those who keep a guard on their prayers.
These are the heirs,
Who inherit Paradise. Therein they will abide.
And certainly We create man of an extract of clay,
Then We make him a small life-germ in a firm resting-place,
Then We make the life-germ a clot, then We make the clot a
lump of flesh, then We make (in) the lump of flesh bones, then
We clothe the bones with flesh, then We cause it to grow into
another creation.
So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators!*

(H.Q. 23:1-14)

INTRODUCTION

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, while writing a commentary on verses 1-14 of Ch. 23 *Al-Mu'minun* (The Believers) of the Holy Qur'an lucidly established the fact that Allah's words are supremely exalted above those of His servants. And on the basis of this exquisite exposition of spiritual truths contained therein, he challenges opponents of Islam to produce anything like this in any existing scripture or work produced by man since the beginning of time. He also states that there are six stages that a human being has to traverse before he can attain perfection and this is so physically as well as spiritually. He then goes on to elucidate from these verses that every physical stage of development is matched by a corresponding spiritual stage. The following is a free and slightly condensed translation of his exegesis taken from Supplement to *Barahin-i Ahmadiyyah*, volume 5, pages 32-84.

THE SIX STAGES

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad writes:

“In verse 14 of chapter 23, *So blessed by Allah - the Best of all creators*, Allah, Most High, tells us that for man to attain physical and spiritual perfection he has to pass through six stages of evolution. As a result, He has given us the six distinct stages and so miraculous is the exact comparison between the physical and the spiritual developmental stages that ever since the creation of man his mind has never been able to match, much less surpass, this subtle point of Divine knowledge. And if anyone should make a claim to the contrary, then the burden of proof lies on him to demonstrate in which book of human authorship there can be found so pure and exalted a philosophy. Let him remember, though, that that will prove to be an impossible task.

Thus, crystal clear is this miracle that Allah, Most High, has described in these holy verses as He makes plain

the deep, latent relationship between the physical and spiritual existence of man and their parallel states of progress towards perfection. From this it will be evident to all that both creations - physical and spiritual - are the work of one hand and that is the Hand of Allah.”

Hazrat Mirza then compares each spiritual stage with its physical counterpart as is given in the beginning of chapter 23 of the Holy Qur’an:

Comparison of the six spiritual stages with the six physical stages

Six Spiritual Stages

Stage 1

Successful are the believers, who are humble in their prayers.

Stage 2

And who shun what is vain

Stage 3

And who give their zakāh (charity) or act for the sake of purity

Stage 4

And who restrain their sexual passions, except in

Six Physical Stages

Stage 1

And certainly We create man of an extract of clay. Then We make him a small life germ in a firm resting place.

Stage 2

Then We make the life germ a clot

Stage 3

Then We make the clot a lump of flesh

Stage 4

Then We make (in) the lump of flesh bones.

Six Spiritual Stages Six Physical Stages

*the presence of their mates,
or those whom their right
hands possess, for such
surely are not blameable.
But whoever seeks to go
beyond that, such are
transgressors.*

Stage 5

*And those who are keepers
of their trusts and covenants*

Stage 5

*Then We clothe the bones
with flesh.*

Stage 6

*And those who keep a
guard on their prayers.*

Stage 6

*Then We cause it to grow into
another creation. So blessed
be Allah, the Best of all
creators*

The first stage

“As I have explained before, the first spiritual stage is given in the verses, *Successful are the believers, who are humble in their prayers*. That is, those believers who choose the path of humility and meekness in their prayers and in their *dhikr* (remembrance) of Allah, and whose hearts melt with tenderness and weeping in their remembrance of Allah, will certainly receive salvation.

This corresponds with the first physical stage of the human being as stated in the verse, *Then We will make him a small nutfah (life-germ) in a firm resting place*. Thus, Allah, Most

High, established the *nutfah* (life-germ) as the first physical state of the human form. And it is self-evident that the life-germ is such a wonderful seed that it contains in a microcosmic form all the internal and external potential, attributes and limbs of the human being and all the embellishments which are actualised in the fifth stage of development and the perfection and completion of which come into full bloom in the sixth stage.¹

We must bear in mind here that the life-germ is the most delicate and vulnerable of all the states of growth because it is just like a seed which has not yet been put into the ground or like a sperm drop which has not yet made a connection with the womb. It is quite possible that it may be destroyed in the body just as a seed sown on stony ground is often lost. Perhaps it may also contain an inherent defect and may not be able to develop and so it may not possess the capability for the womb to draw it to itself. It may thus assume the form of a lifeless person who is incapable of movement just as a rotten seed cannot receive nourishment however fertile the soil may be. Sometimes, too, because of other diseases which it is unnecessary to enumerate, the life-germ cannot connect with the womb and so remains outside of its inherent attraction just as a seed is sometimes trampled underfoot or is eaten up by the birds or suffers some other kind of destruction.

In other words, he must create within his soul the feelings of tenderness and softness of the heart, and experience a sensation of yearning, restlessness and anxiety for the Almighty together with a condition of deep fear for Him as he bows down in submission according to the verse, *Successful are the believers who are humble in their prayers.*

This state of humility is the first step in the preparation of the spiritual development of man, or to put it differently, it is the first seed to be sown in the soil of love and *'ubūdiyyat* (service) to Allah. In an embryonic form, it contains all talents and capabilities, limbs, forms, beauty and elegance, features and spiritual excellences which come into fruition in the fifth and sixth stages and display their glorious and alluring manifestation. And just because, like the life-germ, it is the first spiritual stage of man, it is set down in the Qur'anic verse as the first spiritual step which is in direct comparison with the life-germ. In other words, those who ponder deeply over the Holy Qur'an will know that humility in prayer is like a life-germ for spiritual development and just like the physical life-germ it contains in a miniature and latent form all the capabilities and attributes and adornments of the spiritually perfect man. And just as the life-germ is in a precarious state as long as it does not develop a connection with the womb, so, too, this first stage of the spiritual being, that is, the state of humility, is in constant danger until it develops a bond with Allah, the *Rahim* (Merciful).

We must remember that when Allah's mercy flows directly from Him without any intermediary agency it is as a result of His attribute of *Rahmāniyyat* (blessings without effort on the part of man) as is evidenced by all that He has created freely for man in the heavens and the earth and even by the creation of man himself. All this comes from the *Rahmāniyyat* (pure grace) of Allah.

However, whenever a blessing is bestowed because of a particular action on the part of man or because of his service, striving and spiritual discipline, it is as a result of Allah's attribute of *Rahīmiyyat* (reward as a result of effort). This has

been the way of Allah since the creation of Adam (*as*). Thus, when man practises humility in his prayers and in his *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), then he qualifies himself for receiving the *Rahīmiyyat* of Allah.

So, the chief difference between the *nutfah* (life-germ) and the first step in spiritual development, that is, humility, is that the former stands in need of the mother's womb whilst the latter is dependent on Allah's *Rahīmiyyat*. And just as the life-germ is destroyed sometimes even before it can attach itself to the womb, so, too, humility, which is the initial spiritual state, is sometimes wasted even before it can form a bond with Allah, the *Rahīm* (Merciful). For example, there are many people in this first stage who weep in their *ṣalāh* (prayer) and show signs of ecstasy and shout and exhibit all kinds of frenetic behaviour in their ostensible love for Allah and who assume various forms and conditions of love. Nevertheless, because they have forged no bond with the Source of all blessings, that is, the God Who is *Rahīm*, and they have attracted nothing of His special splendour, all their weeping and heart burning and displays of humility have no substance and very often they slip from righteousness to such an extent that they end up worse than they were before.

In this regard, there are countless people who in their lifetime do experience a bit of the joy and delight of humility in their *ṣalāh* (prayer) and in their *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and they even weep and display ecstatic fervour at times. And yet such a curse befalls them that they suddenly fall prey to selfish desires and they lose everything in the pursuit of their inordinate desire and irresistible passion for the life of this world. There are many ignorant ones, too, who experience humility and religious zeal and who indulge in crying and lamentation

for a few days and then entertain the idea that they have become so spiritually exalted as to enter the domain of the saints - the *ghauths*, the *qutbs*, or the *abdāls* - of Islam. Nay, they even deceive themselves with the illusion that they have achieved union with the Almighty. It is a cause for sadness that far too many are lost in these vain conceits.

Again, we must always be conscious of the fact that the first stage of spiritual existence can be aborted by many accidents as is the case with the physical *nutfah* (life-germ). For example, in this state of humility there may be a tinge of polytheism, or a mixture of innovation or an adulteration of vanities. For instance, egoistic desires or base and impure passions are always threatening to break loose, or vile suggestions may assault the heart, or vain, mundane desires may render one's humility incapable of attaching itself to the mercy of Allah, just as a defective life-germ cannot form a connection with the womb. It is for this reason that the humility of Hindu *yogīs* (ascetics) or the meekness of Christian priests can be of no value and even if the burning and melting of their hearts should reach such a pitch that the skin is stripped from their bones, the mercy of Allah will still not be extended to them. That is because their condition of humility suffers from a natural defect.

Similar is the case of those masters of innovation in Islam, the *faqīrs* (religious mendicants) who abandon the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and engage in a million different forms of innovation, even to the extent of indulging shamelessly in drugs and intoxicants and various other kinds of immorality and transgression. That is because between their condition and Allah's mercy there is a wide gulf. Instead, in Allah's eyes all these innovations are detestable things and despite all their mani-

tations of ecstasy and rapture and poetic renditions and frenzy etc. they are, in fact, bereft of the mercy of Allah and resemble that life-germ that is burning with the disease of syphilis or leprosy and does not have the power to attach itself to the womb.

Thus it may happen that some person may experience in his *ṣalāh* (prayer) and his *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) feelings of humility and burning and suffering of the heart and may engage in weeping and lamentation, but these are no fool-proof guarantees that such a person has formed a bond with Allah.² It is possible that all these conditions may be present in an individual and yet he is not close to Allah. Clear evidence of this is that many people attend sessions of counselling and advice, or frequent preaching and memorial assemblies; some even weep profusely in the course of their *ṣalāh* and *dhikr* and exhibit signs of frantic fervour, and shout loudly and display signs of heart-melting, and tears flow down their cheeks like a flood and yet all these tears go no further than the mouth. They just hear something and as if on cue they burst into tears. But in spite of all this, they cannot desist from vanities and are dogged by a lot of vain talk and vain work and ostentatious displays which clearly prove that they have no connection with Allah and no fear nor awe of Him exists in their hearts.

Thus it is indeed a real occasion for wonder that such polluted souls can still experience the condition of humility and suffering of the heart. But there is a deep lesson in all this, and that is that humility by itself and weeping and lamentation which are not devoid of vanities are not things to be proud of, neither are they signs of closeness to Allah.

I have witnessed with my own eyes many *faqīrs* (religious mendicants) and even many other people, too, who, on reading a sorrowful poem or on witnessing a pitiful scene or on hearing a sad story, instantaneously find their eyes shedding copious tears just as sometimes in the rainy season clouds deposit their heavy drops so thick and fast that those who are sleeping outdoors do not have sufficient time to take up their mattresses and flee inside to escape the downpour.

Indeed, I proffer evidence out of personal experience that I have found many of these people to be big crooks; they are baser creatures of the earth than most. I have also discovered many to possess such evil and dishonest characteristics and such wickedness that when I see their habit of weeping and wailing and their false show of humility and meekness, I become so disgusted that I experience reluctance and feel some sort of hatred which prevents me from exhibiting such like tenderness and suffering of the heart in any assembly of that kind.

It is true that there was a time when these were genuine signs of righteous servants of the Almighty, but today, these have become the cloaks of many tricksters and charlatans. For example, these are some of their idiosyncrasies: green apparel, long hair, *tasbīh* (chain of beads) ever present in hand, constant shedding of tears, perpetual movement of the lips as if the tongue is engaged continually in remembering Allah, together with an assortment of other innovations. In fact, through these signs, they betray their inner poverty and indigence (as if these are indisputable signs of spirituality) but their hearts are leprous and are devoid of the love of Allah, except if Allah pleases, for in this writing, I make a distinction between those whose actions spring from enthusiasm and sincerity and those

who are given to show and mere lip-profession.

In any case, it is a fact that weeping and wailing, humility and lowliness are not necessarily definite signs of righteousness in people but are in fact inborn instincts that reside within man and can come into play opportunely or inopportunely, or in other words, in season or out of season. For example, very often a person may be reading a work of fiction and knows very well that it is a fictitious story (like a novel) and yet when he reaches an especially sad part of the story he loses control of his emotions and tears involuntarily begin to flow without restraint from his eyes. Such is the powerful influence of a touching story that often a man begins to narrate a mournful tale and in the course of it he reaches a very sad event. Now, he himself finds his eyes full of tears and tears gush from his eyes and he begins to savour a sort of sweet pleasure that is an essential part of weeping. And all this even though he is fully aware that the cause of his tears is unsound for it derives from an imaginary story.

Thus the question arises: What is the reason for this occurrence? The reason is that the inherent faculty of softness of the heart, of weeping and crying that exists in man does not depend upon a false or genuine cause but instead when there come into being such conditions that excite this latent and inherent faculty, then that instinct is involuntarily triggered off and consequently a feeling of happiness and rapture comes over the individual regardless of whether he is an unbeliever or a believer. That is why in *haram* (illegal) assemblies which abound with all kinds of innovations you will find such unrestrained people parading in the garb of *faqīrs* who begin to dance and exhibit feelings of fervour, and cry and shout when they hear the recitation of poems, or the strains of the *sarod*

(musical instrument), all the time deriving pleasure from their frenetic exertions and deluding themselves with the belief that they have found Allah. But that pleasure is similar to the pleasure that an adulterer has with an adulteress.”

The second stage

The second spiritual stage is stated in the verse, *And those who shun what is vain*. That is, those who eschew all vain talk, work, actions, assemblies, friends and connections that give rise to vanities. This corresponds with the second physical stage which is called ‘*alaq* (clot) in the verse, *Then We make the nutfah (life-germ) into an ‘alaq* (clot), that is, ‘We preserved it from being destroyed by becoming useless and caused it to be drawn to the womb and to cling to it.’

Before this, it was in an indeterminate position, unsure of being transformed into a human being or being wasted. However, after clinging to the womb it moved into a position of security and a change then overtook it. It is now transformed into a congealed clot of blood and its form becomes stronger. And as it attaches itself to the womb it is called ‘*alaq* (clot) (from ‘*alaqa* meaning, to cling) and any woman in such a stage can be deservedly regarded as being pregnant. In addition, because of this attachment, it now begins to be fed and nourished and guarded by the womb. However, at this stage, the life-germ has not achieved any sort of cleanliness or firm attachment to the womb. It is still a congealed drop of blood and it is saved from annihilation only because of its connection to the womb. Indeed, this clot is still tainted with hidden impurities or frailties. Were it not for its attachment to the womb, it is quite possible that the life-germ could have entered the vaginal tract and flowed out of it without finding a

safe haven in the womb. But the commanding power of the womb has attracted it like a magnet and has protected and changed it into the form of a congealed drop of blood which is called '*alaq* (clot). Before this, the womb had not exercised its influence over it, but now it is this very influence which prevents it from destruction and by this same power the life-germ does not remain weak and delicate but now becomes strong to a certain extent.

In direct juxtaposition to this second physical stage is the spiritual stage described in the verse, *And those who shun what is vain*. That is, successful are those who avoid all kinds of idle promptings, useless and empty activities and gatherings and whose faith has become so strong that avoiding frivolities has become easy for them. That is because they have grown in faith and have formed a similar connection with Allah, the *Rahīm* (Merciful), that the *nutfah* (life-germ) forms with the womb and thus finds a sanctuary instead of just flowing out or becoming destroyed in some way or the other.

So the second spiritual stage of development is the connection with Allah, the *Rahīm* (Merciful), just as the second physical stage is that of the '*alaq*, or clinging to the womb. And just as before this second spiritual manifestation it is impossible to avoid frivolous connections and activities and in the first stage of development, that is, of humility, meekness and lowliness, many are destroyed and end up in perdition, so, too, is the case with the life-germ before it becomes an '*alaq* (clot). Thus, when Allah wills that the life-germ should be saved from becoming useless, He gives permission for it to become a clot.

In other words, the second spiritual stage, which demands

freedom from all kinds of vanities, cannot be achieved until a firm bond is made with Allah, the Merciful, because this connection is the mechanism which imbues a person with strength and power to cut off all other liaisons and to obtain safety from destruction. For although one can achieve humility in prayer, yet freedom from absurdities is impossible unless a strong connection is made with Allah, Most High.

Thus, when Allah, Most High, says, *And those who shun what is vain*, He means that the true believers are those who keep themselves aloof from all kinds of vain connections for the sole purpose of forming a union with Him.³ In other words, they keep their hearts free from vanities in order that Allah may inhabit their hearts, for man has been created for perpetual worship, and love for Allah is embedded by nature in his heart. This is why the soul of man has a connection with Allah from the very inception of creation as is borne out by the verse of the Holy Qur'an, *And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Rabb (Lord)? They said: Yes; we bear witness...* (7:172).

And the first step in that connection which man obtains through the splendour of Allah's attribute of *Rahim* (reward for effort), for example, through his worship of Allah, is that man should have deep faith in Allah and avoid all conceivable kinds of vanities, either of word, deed or association. This is part and parcel of that original instinct which he has inherited and is not something new.

And as I have already explained, the first spiritual stage of man, which is humility in prayer, together with tenderness and

softness of heart in the remembrance of Allah, has only the status of a natural condition. That is, for the heart to experience humility, it is not mandatory that a person must first avoid vanities or, more than that, that he should possess excellent moral qualities or true religious conduct. It is quite possible that such a person may be very humble in his prayer and may exhibit overt signs of tenderness and may even weep and cry even to the extent of affecting the emotions of others. Yet his heart may not be purified of vain and egoistic suggestions and he may still maintain idle connections and alliances, and may not yet have attained deliverance from transgression.

We must always bear in mind that humility in prayer is one thing, whilst purification of the inner self is quite another matter. And even though the humility and meekness and heart-melting of a striver in the path of Allah may be free from any mixture of innovation and infidelity, yet such a person whose spiritual development has not yet reached the second stage is like one who has only signalled his intention to turn towards the *qiblah* (direction) of spirituality. He is still wandering on the path which is beset with all kinds of difficulties - he has to traverse the wilds and the deserts and overcome thorny and mountainous ascents, cross tumultuous seas and stand up to ravenous beasts and confront enemies of his faith at every step until such time as he arrives at the second spiritual stage of his destination.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that the condition of humility and meekness and supplication does not necessarily mean that a person has formed an unbreakable bond with Allah, Most High. Indeed, there are occasions when even evil people, after witnessing a particular sign of Allah's power, are overcome by humility even though they have no closeness to

Allah and have not yet achieved liberation from vain occupations. Take for example, the earthquake of 4 April 1905. When it struck, it created such feelings of humility and softness in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people that they could do nothing but weep as they invoked the name of Allah. So deep was the effect that even atheists forgot their atheism. Yet, after the danger had passed and stability returned to the land, that stage of humility vanished without a trace, so much so that I heard with my own ears the following words from the mouths of many atheists who, in the time of peril, had accepted the existence of Allah and who now shamelessly said: 'We made a mistake. It is the earthquake we were afraid of, not God.'

In short, the condition of humility can be tinged with a lot of impurities in spite of the fact that it is like a seed that contains the potential for all future spiritual excellences. But to consider it as the final and perfect stage is to delude one's self. For, after this, there is another stage which the believer must reach and he must not rest nor become lazy, but should persevere until he attains it and that is the stage which Allah has designated in His Own words in the verse, *And those who shun what is vain.*

In other words, true and successful believers are not like those who limit themselves to humility in prayer and softening of the heart, but they proceed further and avoid attaching themselves to any kind of vanity that may vitiate their condition of humility. In fact, it becomes second nature for them to avoid all kinds of inanities and to develop a feeling of disgust in their hearts for frivolous activities thus proving that they have forged some kind of bond with the Almighty, for man can avert his gaze from something only when he turns his face in another

direction.

Thus, man's heart can become cold to all species of vanity only when he forms a union with Allah and his heart is overwhelmed by Divine majesty and awe. In the same way, too, the *nutfah* (life-germ) is saved from being wasted when it is attached to the womb and succumbs to its attraction and reaches the stage called '*alaq* (clinging to the womb).

Thus, the second stage of spiritual existence, that of avoiding trivialities, is akin to that of the '*alaq* (clot), for at this stage the fear and the glory of Allah enter the heart of the believer and expel all traces of egoism forever. This avoidance of vanities is regarded, in other words, as having a connection with Allah, Most High.

However, let us be warned that that connection with Allah which is formed only on the basis of abstaining from idleness and vanity is a tenuous one for, at this stage, the believer has only severed his association from vain things. However, the natural desires of his inner self and such trappings which form an essential part of his luxurious livelihood still exist in his heart. For this reason, some kind of impurity still resides within him.

This is why Allah, Most High, has likened this spiritual stage to the '*alaq* (clot) which is congealed blood, and because it is blood, it naturally contains a bit of uncleanness. So, at this second stage of spiritual development a kind of blemish still exists and this prevents such people from firmly establishing in their hearts true fear of Allah, the Mighty, the Lord of Glory and Honour.

Therefore, they are only able to avoid idle things and nothing further. So, unfortunately, such is the impurity that remains in this defective stage that they can only form a weak alliance with Allah by merely avoiding vanities. However, they cannot yet withdraw themselves from those pursuits, the dislodging of which weighs heavily on their spirit. In other words, they cannot relinquish for the sake of Allah all those sensual pleasures which form the life-blood of their animal passions.

It is clear, therefore, from this explanation, that merely avoiding vanities is not a matter to be unduly proud of, for the believer is still at a low stage of development even though it ranks higher than humility in the spiritual hierarchy.

The third stage

The third physical stage of development is mentioned in the verse, *Then We make the clot into a mudghah (lump of flesh)*. This is the stage where man's physical being is cleansed of impurities and it becomes stronger and sturdier than before, for both the *nutfah* (life-germ) and the congealed drop of blood, called the '*alaq* or clot, contain a bit of uncleanness or infirmity and, in comparison with the lump of flesh, they are soft and delicate. But the *mudghah*, which is a piece of flesh, creates a condition of cleanliness within itself and its constitution is to some degree stronger than that of the life-germ and the clot.

This correlates with the third spiritual stage of man's being as is expressed in the verse, *And those who pay the zakāh (poor-rate) or those who act for the sake of zakāh (purity)*.

The meaning of this verse is that the believer who advances

beyond the first two stages is not only saved from vain and useless activities, but more than that, in order to expel the impurity of niggardliness which is inherent in man, he now begins to pay the poor-rate, that is, he spends a part of his wealth in the way of Allah. The name *zakah* (meaning poor-rate or purity) is used because when man fulfils this obligation, that is, when he gives away his wealth, which is very dear to him, for the sake of Allah, he becomes purified of the pollution of stinginess. And when the uncleanness of avarice to which man has a strong natural affinity is expunged from his system, he becomes much cleaner and forms a resultant relation with Allah Who is Pure in essence.

Whoever falls in love with this Lord of Purity,
Will find Him only if he purifies his own self.

This rank is not found in the first two conditions, for humility, meekness and supplication, as well as abstinence from frivolities, can exist in a person in whom the taint of avarice is also present. But when he parts with the wealth he loves only for the sake of Allah - the wealth upon which his livelihood depends and for which he labours to the fullest - only then will the impurity of meanness be expelled from him. In addition, his faith grows and increases in strength and those two conditions (of *nutfah* and *'alaq*) which preceded this stage cannot give birth to cleanliness for they both contain a degree of impurity within themselves.

The wisdom behind this is that to abstain from vanities is merely to withhold one's self from evil, but evil is not a compelling necessity of life and its continuity, neither is it something that is difficult for the inner self of man to eschew.

However, to give away one's hard-earned wealth solely for the pleasure of Allah amounts to an acquisition of great goodness which purifies the heart of man from the worst of all impurities, that is, of avarice. Therefore, this is the third stage of faith which is nobler and more excellent than the two previous ones. In comparison with this stage is the *mudghah* (lump of flesh) which is the third stage in the growth of the human form. This stage exceeds in quality the first two stages of the life-germ and the clot and it also embodies the quality of purity for, in both the life-germ and the clot, there inheres a measure of impurity. However, the *mudghah* (lump of flesh) enjoys a purified condition and just as in the womb it is a higher form of development than the life-germ and the clot and clings more strongly to the womb than the first two and is stronger and firmer in constitution, this condition is designated as the third spiritual stage of man's existence which Allah describes thus in the verse, *And those who pay the zakāh (poor-rate or those who act for the sake of zakāh (purity))*. That is, the true believers are those who, in order to cleanse themselves of the impurity of stinginess, spend their wealth which is so dear to them in the way of Allah, and more so, they choose to do this willingly and cheerfully.

Thus, in this third stage of spiritual development are to be found those three excellences which are present in the third physical stage, that is, the lump of flesh. In other words, the spending of one's hard-earned and precious wealth only for the sake of Allah in order to purify one's self of the stain of avarice is a superior achievement than just abstaining from vanities. This creates a stronger bond with Allah, the Merciful, and consolidates and further strengthens one's faith, for the greater the sacrifice, the greater the reward from Allah, Most High.

The fourth stage

We now come to the fourth spiritual stage which Allah mentions in the verse, *And those who guard their chastity*. That is, higher than the third stage is the believer who saves himself from sensual passions and forbidden desires. This is superior in rank than the third stage in which the believer merely spends out of his wealth, which is dear and precious to him, only in the path of Allah. However, at this fourth stage of advancement the believer sacrifices those things which he loves and adores more than even his wealth, and those are his sexual passions which man cherishes to such a degree that to satisfy them he spends his cherished riches like water and wastes thousands of dollars in his madness to satisfy his lust. In fact, in this pursuit, money is like nothing to him. Indeed, it is a common sight to observe mean and filthy-minded people who, in their niggardliness, can never give a dollar to a poor, naked person, yet, driven by passion, they become prodigal in lavishing thousands of dollars on prostitutes to the detriment of their own household and they care not a whit. From this we can see that the flood of lust is so ragingly tempestuous that even avarice, which is so filthy, is caught up in the current and itself begins to flow.

Thus, it is a self-evident fact that in comparison with the power of faith by means of which man drives away stinginess and spends his dear and beloved riches for Allah's sake, this power, which gives man the strength to save himself from the storm of carnal lusts, is much stronger and is more durable and powerful in confronting Satan. This is because the work of this spiritual power is to trample under its feet that old serpent - the soul that commands evil, whilst the rigidity of avarice can be released through man's passion to gratify his lustful de-

sires, or in his urge sometimes to do things for show or for vanity.

However, this storm which rises from the power of the sexual passions is so powerful, compelling and persistent that it cannot be conquered except through the mercy of Allah. And, just as in the physical human body, the bone is the strongest and most durable part of all his limbs, similarly, the spiritual power to quell this storm of passion is most powerful and permanent. This is to enable man to wage a long war against this enemy, that is, lust, before he can finally overpower it, and this cannot be quelled without the mercy of the One Supreme God.

This is why Prophet Joseph (*as*) had to say: *And I call not myself sinless; surely man's self is wont to command evil, except those on whom my Lord has mercy. Surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful* (12:53).

It is interesting to note that in this verse the same clause, *except those on whom my Lord has mercy*, was also used when referring to the flood in the time of the Prophet Noah (*as*) as the verse, *There is none safe today from Allah's command except him on whom Allah has mercy* (11:43), attests.

In this, there is an indication that in its awesome power the flood of sexual passions is similar to the flood in the time of Prophet Noah (*as*).

In comparison with this fourth spiritual stage we have the fourth physical stage which is described in the verse, *Then We made (in) the lump of flesh, bones*. It is clear that in the bones there is greater strength and stability and in comparison with

the lump of flesh the bones are more durable and remains of them can last for thousands of years.

Thus, the comparison between the fourth spiritual and the fourth physical stage is crystal clear for, in the fourth spiritual stage, the power and firmness of faith is far greater than in the third stage and here, too, the connection with Allah, the Merciful, is also more binding.

Similarly, because of the creation of bones, the fourth physical stage is much more solid and powerful than that of the lump of flesh and, in addition, the attachment to the womb is stronger.

The fifth stage

We now turn our attention to the fifth stage which is described in the verse, *And those who are keepers of their trusts and covenants.*

This stage supersedes the fourth stage in that at that stage the believer had only gained mastery over his carnal desires and had scored a signal victory over them; but here the believer has advanced and now he observes his obligations to his Creator and also to His creation to the limit of his capacity in every conceivable way; even more, he tries to walk along the narrowest paths of righteousness and does so to the limit of his power and strength. The covenant of Allah refers to those obligations of faith which are taken from a person at the time of his *bai 'at* (pledge) and his confession of faith in Allah, things, for example, like not ascribing a partner to Allah, nor taking life unlawfully, etc.

The word *ra'ūn* which is used in this verse and which means 'to show kindness or attention to', is employed in Arabic terminology to refer to a person who chooses to walk along the narrowest path of any affair and to fulfil the subtlest and even the most trifling particulars of that matter to the point of not leaving any aspect of it in abeyance.

In short, the meaning of this verse is that the believers at this fifth stage of development walk steadfastly along the most exacting paths of *taqwā* (righteousness) as far as is humanly possible and with all the strength available to them. They try their best not to neglect any aspect of their obligations regarding faithfulness to covenants and are scrupulous to a fault in paying due regard to them. In fact, they are not satisfied with just being faithful and true to their covenants in major matters of faith, but instead, they are always afraid lest there may be some small, hidden or unconscious form of unfaithfulness in their dealings. Thus, they meticulously scrutinise all their affairs with all the powers available to them so as to prevent any blemish or defect from infiltrating their personality. This type of circumspect behaviour is called, in other words, *taqwā* or righteousness.

In a nutshell, the believers at this fifth stage of spiritual development do not behave carelessly in their duties to Allah and to their fellow human beings, but instead, they are constantly examining their actions and their motives to see that they are in line with the requirements of *taqwā* (righteousness), for they are always in fear lest there is some hidden defect in the fulfilment of their trusts and covenants, for above everything, they do not want to incur the displeasure of Allah.

Thus, whatever Allah has entrusted them with, like all their

talents and capabilities, their limbs, their lives, their wealth, their honour, etc. they use to the limit of their ability according to the demands of righteousness and they always employ them on the proper occasion with the greatest of vigilance. In addition, whenever they perform their duties of faith to Allah, they try to do so with all their might and with perfect sincerity.

Similarly, they fulfil all their duties they owe to their fellow men and whatever they hold in trust for them they repay to the best of their ability with strict observance to the demand of righteousness. In fact, if a dispute arises, then they judge or arbitrate according to the tenets of righteousness and justice even though they may suffer a personal loss because of their ruling.

This stage is higher than the fourth stage for it requires the believers to walk constantly along the narrowest paths of righteousness in all their actions and to do so with all the power available to them. But at the fourth stage there is only one major moral principle to observe and that is to shun the evil of fornication. Every human being knows that fornication is an act of great shamelessness and blinded by passions man commits this crime which casts impurity on the bond of lawful human relationships and brings destruction to the society. That is why the *Sharī'ah* (Law) considers it such a heinous act that the legal limit of punishment for such a person is prescribed in the Holy Qur'an. So it is clear that for man to achieve perfection, to abstain from fornication is not sufficient, even though this sin is the act of a wicked and shameless mind and it is such a grievous sin that even the most ignorant person considers it as such. And, besides denial of God, it ranks as the greatest sin. Yet, avoiding this sin of fornication is a common

act of nobility and not a matter of perfection. On the other hand, however, in order to attain complete spiritual beauty, man must walk steadily along the most stringent paths of righteousness⁴ for this confers on him the subtlest charms and embellishments of spiritual splendour.

It is clear, therefore, that to fulfil to the best of our ability the trusts and covenants we own to Allah, ⁵ and from head to toe, to employ to the fullest of our ability, and according to the exigencies of the occasion, whatever external faculties and limbs, like our eyes, ears, hands, feet etc. and also our inner endowments like our heart and other talents and aptitudes only for the sake of Allah; and to avoid illegal places and to guard against hidden internal assaults of Satan; and in addition to this, to respect the rights of others, is to choose the path upon which depends every spiritual excellence of ours. This is what Allah, Most High, has called the *garment of righteousness* in the Holy Qur'an, that is, *libās ut-taqwā* (7:27), thus indicating that spiritual beauty and spiritual adornment are born from *taqwā* (righteousness), that is, fulfilling to the fullest our trusts and covenants both to Allah and to His creation.

In direct conformity with this fifth spiritual stage is the fifth stage of physical growth which is mentioned in the verse of the Holy Qur'an, *Then We clothe the bones with flesh* (and how well We have imparted beauty to the human form!). This is indeed a marvellous parallelism in that just as Allah has established righteousness as the garment of the soul in one instance, in the other He has made the flesh a garment for the bones in order to beautify the physical human frame with this apparel. The word *kasaunā* (We clothed) from *kiswah* (robe) is used in relation to the physical dress of man and both words,

libās and *kiswah*, serve to prove that just as *taqwā* is the garment of spirituality, so, too, the flesh is the robe of physical beauty for the bones. In the first case, the word *libās* (garment) is used and in the second *kiswah* (robe) is employed, for both words bear the same meaning, that is, 'dress' or 'garment' or 'robe'.

Indeed, the Holy Qur'an has made it extremely clear that the purpose in both cases is that of adornment for, just as a person becomes spiritually ugly if his garment of righteousness is removed, so, too, if the flesh and skin with which the All-wise God has clothed the bones are removed, the human form becomes repulsive to the sight.

However, the fifth stage, whether physical or spiritual, is not one of perfect beauty for man has not yet been blessed with the gift of the spirit. It is indeed a highly conspicuous fact that however handsome a man may be, when he dies and his soul is taken from his body, immediately a great transformation comes over the body with which the Lord of all creation had blessed him. Although all his limbs are present and all the physical features of beauty still exist, yet by the mere removal of the soul, the house of the frame becomes a place of desolation and ruin and no sign of its former glory and dignity survives.

This is the condition at the fifth spiritual stage for it is highly evident that if Allah does not impart the gift of the spirit to man, (a grace which is bestowed only at the sixth stage and which confers on the believer super-human strength and power), then that believer cannot fully render his trust to Allah in the proper manner, neither can he perform his obligation to Allah and to his fellow men with sincerity, nor is there engendered in him the resplendence of *taqwā* (righteousness)

which attracts hearts with its lustre and beauty and fulfilment of every branch of which appears to be supernatural and miraculous.

However, before this gift of the spirit is bestowed, man's righteousness is tainted with a mixture of formality and pretence for at this time he has not yet been blessed with the spirit which alone can manifest the scintillating dignity of spiritual beauty. It is indeed an incontestable fact that no believer who is bereft of this spirituality can ever be established firmly on the path of piety. And just as a gust of wind can shake the limbs of a dead person and when the wind subsides the corpse reverts to its motionless state, so, too, is the condition of the spirit of man at the fifth stage of development, for here, too, a puff of the wind of Allah's mercy initiates a temporary performance of goodness in man and so righteous works emanate from him. However, the spirit has not yet taken deep root within him and thus there has not yet come into being the permanent beauty of good behaviour which manifests itself only when the spirit has entered into his being.

In short, the fifth spiritual stage, although somewhat defective, still acquires some of the beauty of righteousness. However, the perfection of the spiritual being becomes manifest only at the sixth stage when Allah's personal love becomes like a spirit or soul for the spiritual being of man and it descends on his heart and guards it against all blemishes. We must be reminded again that man can never become perfect on the strength of his own capabilities. Indeed, he is totally dependent on the descent of the spirit from Allah. Only then can he attain perfection.

The sixth and final stage

The sixth spiritual stage is mentioned in the verse, *And those who keep a guard over their prayers*. That is, they stand in need of no admonition or reminder. Instead, such is the strength of their connection with Allah, Most High, and so personal and innate to them is the remembrance of Allah, and so much is it the source of their life and their tranquillity that they guard and treasure every moment of this remembrance. In fact, every second of their lives is devoted to the remembrance of Allah and they try their utmost not to be forgetful of Him even for the twinkling of an eye.

It is, indeed, a fact that man will try his best to guard and preserve continuously, something upon which the very existence of his life depends. Take the example of a traveller who has to traverse a waterless desert and who has no hope of getting food or water for hundreds of miles. Look at how carefully he will guard whatever food and water he is taking with him. He will consider his sustenance equal to his life for he knows for sure that the loss of his provisions will result in a swift death for him.

Thus, similar to that traveller are those believers who keep a close watch over their *ṣalāh* (prayer). Even if they suffer a loss in wealth or in honour, or sometimes feel that *ṣalāh* (prayer) is a somewhat irksome task, yet they never abandon it and are always in a state of great anguish that their prayer may be wasted, and they even writhe as if in the agonies of death for they do not want to be separated from Allah for even a second.

In fact, they regard prayer and the remembrance of Allah as

the indispensable sustenance of their lives. This condition comes into being only when Allah loves them, for then a burning flame from His personal love, which is like a *rūh* (soul) for the spiritual sustenance of man, descends on their hearts and infuses them with another life and that spirit suffuses the whole of their spiritual being with light and power.

They then engage in the remembrance of Allah without the slightest trace of show or pretence. On the other hand, Allah, Who has made man's physical life dependent on food and water, has made His remembrance the nourishment of their spiritual life which they love so much that they give precedence to this sustenance over their physical food and water, and live in constant fear of suffering any loss in it. The power of this *rūh* (spirit) is like that of a flame of fire which is infused in them and gives rise to a stage of perfect intoxication in the love of Allah. That is why they do not want to be away from Him even for the twinkling of an eye. Therefore, they endure all the slings and arrows of life but they never wish to leave Him even for the briefest moment and care little for their inner desires at all times. Thus, they carefully guard their prayer which in fact becomes naturally ingrained in them for indeed Allah has made His loving remembrance, which is called in other words *ṣalāh* (prayer), the essential ingredient of their spiritual ration. His personal love irradiates them through and through and He makes His remembrance a heart-ravishing delight for them.

That is why remembrance of Allah becomes dearer to them than their own lives. Allah's personal love is a new *rūh* (spirit) which falls on their hearts like a flame which transforms their prayer and their remembrance of Allah into a kind of sustenance. Thus, they are certain that their life is not sustained by

physical food and water but by prayer and Divine remembrance.

In short, the remembrance of Allah which is filled with love is called *ṣalah* (prayer) which becomes a sustenance without which true believers cannot survive and which they studiously guard just as a traveller in the desert will guard his water in his water-bag as he will defend his life.

The munificent Lord has reserved a special stage for the spiritual progress of man. This is the final stage in the triumph and predominance of personal love. Indeed, at this juncture, the remembrance of Allah with perfect love, which in the terminology of the Law is called *ṣalah* (prayer), acts as sustenance for man. However, for his physical existence, he still has to continue to provide food without which he cannot live just as a fish cannot survive without water. At the same time, he considers it a death to forget Allah even for a single moment. As a matter of fact, his soul is always making prostration at the Divine threshold and Allah becomes the Source of all his peace and comfort, and he is a hundred percent certain that to be separated from the remembrance of Allah for even the wink of an eye is synonymous with death. And just as food reinvigorates the body, and gives strength and vitality to the eyes and the ears and other organs, and the limbs, similarly, at this stage, the remembrance of Allah which is brimming with love and affection, strengthens and intensifies the spiritual powers of the believer. That is, his eye is invested with the pure and subtle power of seeing visions, his ears begin to hear the words of Allah and from his tongue flow the sweetest, purest and most luminous words; he begins to receive in abundance true dreams that appear as clearly as the break of dawn and, by virtue of that relation of pure love with the Lord of Honour, he receives a full share of prophetic dreams. This is

the stage where the believer feels that Allah's love is like food and water for him. A new creation comes into being at this time when the original spiritual constitution is fully completed and then that *rūh* (spirit), which is a flame of Allah's personal love, falls on the heart of the fortunate believer and transports him way beyond the realms of humanity.

This is the stage which in spiritual terms is called *khalqan ākhar*, that is, a new creation, at which stage a burning flame of Allah's personal love, which in other words is called the *rūh* (spirit or soul), descends on the heart of the true believer and dispels all darkness and removes all traces of pollution and weakness. With the infusion of this new spirit, that beauty which was latent in the lowest stage of growth now attains perfection and a spiritual splendour is born and all the impurities of an unclean life are totally swept away.

The believer now begins to feel that a new spirit, which he did not have before, has entered his being. After receiving this spirit, a wonderful sensation of peace and calmness comes over him and innate love gushes out of him as from a spring, and irrigates the tender plant of devotion and '*ubūdiyyat* (servitude). That fire which was previously just lukewarm now reaches the height of a blazing inferno which burns away all the rubbish of human existence and confers on it the power of Divinity. Then, like a stone which is heated in a blaze of extreme intensity to such a degree that it becomes red-hot and takes on the colour of the fire, this believer now begins to manifest the signs and characteristics of the Divine just as the hot iron reveals the signs and features of the fire. However, this does not mean that he has become God but such is the peculiar nature of Divine love that it manifests its colours physically whilst spirituality is the result of extreme servitude and

devotion.

At this stage, Allah, Himself, is the food upon which his life depends and the water which he drinks to save himself from death, and Allah also is his cool, refreshing breeze which brings peace and tranquillity to his heart. Here, it will not be an exaggeration if it is said that, figuratively speaking, at this point Allah enters the inner sanctum of the believer and penetrates his every vein and fibre and makes his heart the seat of His Throne. Now, the believer no longer sees by his own light, but by the spirit of Allah, and he hears and speaks and walks and fights his enemy by this very spirit, for this is the station of complete self-extinction and self-annihilation. Here Allah's spirit illuminates him with its resplendence and endows him with a second life and in a spiritual manner he now fulfils the verse, *Then We cause it to grow into another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators (23:14).*

Both the sixth spiritual stage described above and its counterpart, the birth of the sixth physical stage, find expression in the verse quoted above (23:14) which mean: 'And when We have finished one creation of man We give birth to another one.'

The use of the word 'and' is to emphasise the fact that that creation is so miraculous that it greatly transcends the intellect and comprehension of man. In other words, that *rūh* (spirit) which is placed in the body of man after the necessary preparation is something which Allah has given in both a physical and spiritual measure. It is a mysterious substance which has raised consternation and puzzlement in the minds of all the philosophers and all the disciples of materialism as they vainly try to solve the riddle of this secret essence. And since they

have not attained the path of truth and certainty, they have all judged the matter in the light of their own conjecture: some deny outright the existence of the *rūḥ* (soul) whilst others consider it as something eternal and uncreated. Thus, Allah has clearly affirmed that the *rūḥ* (soul) has been created by Him but this secret is beyond man's deficient power of understanding (17:85). And just as the philosophers of the world are ignorant of the *rūḥ* (soul) which Allah beneficently places in the physical body of man at the sixth stage of development, so, too, are they unaware of the *rūḥ* (soul) which Allah breathes into the true believer at the sixth stage of spiritual development. Thus, they take divergent paths in their understanding and explanation of the nature of the soul.

However, an intelligent person can quickly grasp the point that as man is the noblest of all creation, and Allah has elevated him above all the beasts and birds on earth, and has made everything subservient to him, and has blessed him with intellectual powers, and has made him thirsty for the love of the Divine, and has given all indications that man has been created for the purpose of worshipping and serving his Creator, then how can one deny that man can reach that lofty and sublime point of personal and natural love for his Creator and that in return his Creator's love falls on his love like a spirit which banishes all human frailties from him? Further, as Allah has designated the sixth stage of spiritual advancement in the verse, *And those who keep a guard over their prayer*, then how can one doubt that man can live perpetually in the presence of Allah and can serve Him with tenderness of heart and thus fulfil the ultimate purpose of his creation which Allah, Himself, has established in the verse of the Holy Qur'an, *And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should worship Me* (51:56)?

However, we should always bear in mind that this worship and this standing in utmost humility constantly in the presence of Allah, the Lord of Glory and Honour, cannot be achieved without intense personal love. Let it be emphasised, too, that this love is not a transient one. Instead, it refers to both aspects of love - the love of the Creator for His creation and *vice versa*. Just as a flash of lightning falls on a person and kills him, so, too, does the Creator's love strike exactly at the time when man's love is reaching out from within him and all impurities are burned away. The two loves coalesce and so exert total control over man's spiritual being.

There is one important distinction to be made here between the fifth and sixth stages of spiritual development. At both stages man fulfils all his trusts and obligations to Allah and to his fellow human beings. However, at the fifth stage this is done only in accordance with the requirements of *taqwā* (righteousness), but at the sixth stage, where both loves have combined and the *rūh* (spirit) has descended on man, these duties are now performed in a natural, spontaneous and effortless manner. Thus, the physical beauty of the sixth stage is now matched by spiritual beauty and, as everyone knows, the inert beauty of the dead is nothing compared with the magnificent splendour of the living."

CONCLUSION

Later on in the book, Hazrat Mirza recapitulates the six spiritual stages and explains how a believer is led by Allah from one stage to another, that is, when He wishes to save a person from destruction, He brings about a change of circumstances in his life or visits him with a dreadful calamity which jolts him out of his indifference and makes him aware of Allah's power,

glory and majesty. This helps him to give up his lower attachments, for a new love is given at every stage in order to enable him to overpower and discard his ill-directed lower love. His faith is thereby strengthened and he is weaned away from dependence on worldly pleasures and crutches for he is now locked on to a higher spiritual delight.

For example, at the first stage, man loves to live in a state of heedlessness. He is far from Allah and his self is coloured with a kind of *kufir* (infidelity) which drags him towards hard-heartedness and pride without a semblance of humility, meekness or lowliness. But when Allah gives him a sign of His power and majesty he quickly develops a love for humility and tenderness of heart and experiences very little discomfort in giving up his former love for a care-free existence, just as a suckling babe gives up his mother's breast once he develops love for another kind of nutrition (although before that it was difficult for him to abstain from it) and afterwards even if the breast is offered to him, he rejects it with disdain.

This progression advances to the fifth stage where human effort reaches its maximum with the believer returning his trusts to Allah in every detail, and fulfilling even his most minor obligations to his fellow human beings.

At the sixth level Allah's grace takes over: the fire of the believer's personal love is met with the fire of his Creator's personal love and every atom of his being is ignited with the fire of the love for Allah and he does good naturally as the Holy Qur'an says, ... *So whoever does good spontaneously it is better for him...* (2:184).

This is also the fulfilment of the verse, *Say: My prayer and my*

sacrifice, my living and my dying are surely for Allah, the Lord of the worlds (6:163).

At this stage no fear comes over the believer nor does he grieve and he becomes a *khalīfā* (vicegerent) of Allah.

It is our hope and prayer that young people, in particular, become sensitised to the stages they have to traverse and the challenges they have to overcome in their striving for all-round perfection. The young are singled out for they have their entire life in front of them and so time is on their side. We also pray that this booklet may assist them to achieve success in the Islamic way. May Allah bless them every inch of the way and may He guard them with His loving power. May He also shower His choicest blessings on us all, regardless of our respective ages.

Āmīn.

Footnotes

¹ (p.4) These stages refer to those that have just been mentioned. The fifth stage is the one where the Creator competes and purifies the human form in the womb of the mother and dresses the bones with a beautiful clothing of flesh.

The sixth stage is the one in which life is invested in the human form. And as has already been mentioned, the first step in the physical ascension of man is that of humility, meekness, supplication and tenderness of heart. In fact, this stage embodies in a microcosmic form all the qualities that will later become clearly manifest in man's spiritual life.

² (p.8) The first condition of humility and softness of heart can be attended by a host of vain things. For example, the habit of crying is present in a child and as he is afraid of everything he displays humility and meekness. Nevertheless, the period of childhood is the time when man is naturally caught up in all kinds of ostentatious activities and more that anything else he derives great pleasure from vain words and actions and many take delight in showy displays, jumping boastfully and showing off to the extent that he may often injure himself in the process. Thus, it is clear that in the journey through life, man is naturally attracted first to egoistic pursuits and if this stage is not negotiated successfully, he cannot proceed to the next stage. Thus the first natural rung in climbing the ladder from childhood to puberty is to avoid vanities. This proves the point that by natural disposition, man's first attachment is to vain things.

³ (p.13) The purpose behind the attachment to Allah in order to avoid frivolities is that Allah has used the word *aflaha* (successful) in the above verses in relation to His promise that whoever labours in his search for the Almighty will meet Him according to the degree of his striving and effort.

Therefore, anyone who disdains pretensions in his attempt to acquire union with Allah will develop a delicate sort of connection with Him in accordance with the promise contained in the word *aflaha* (successful), for the action he performs is not a weighty one but just the severing of a weak attachment to vanities. We must bear in mind that just as the word 'successful' is used in the first verse, that is, *Successful are the believers who are humble in their prayers*, it is also connected to all the later verses and extends to them also as an implicit promise. Thus, the full meaning of the verse, *And those who shun vanities*, is '(Successful) are those who shun vanities'. Thus,

the word 'successful' contains a special meaning at every stage of faith and embodies the promise of a special kind of connection.

⁴ (p.25) In regard to faith, humility can be likened to a seed. In shunning vanity, faith, like a seed, sends out its soft and tender greenery; giving away wealth by means of *zakāh* (charity) brings out the branches in the tree of faith and this strengthens it; controlling the sexual passions causes the branches to become stouter and more powerful; observing every branch of one's trusts and covenants causes the tree of faith to stand firmly on its own trunk, and at the time of bearing fruit it is blessed with additional strength for without this power the tree will not have the capacity to blossom nor to bear fruit. The creation of this spiritual power in the sixth stage is what is called *khalqan ākhar* (another creation). It is at this stage that the flower and the fruit of human perfection begin to appear and the spiritual branches of the human tree not only become full-grown but also bear fruit.

⁵ (p.25) By the covenants of faith are meant those obligations to which man agrees at the time when he is taking the *bai'at* (pledge) or when he is taking the *shahādah* (affirmation of faith on entering the fold of Islam): swearing, for example, that he will not commit murder, nor steal, nor give false evidence, nor set up a partner with Allah. Instead, he commits his life to the service of Islam and to the discipleship of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*).