

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

A Paradox: The Defiant Muslim and Spiritual Growth

By Qazi Fazlullah

In the battlefield of our consciousness rages the ultimate battle that we as humans must face. Conquest of the Nafs is our greatest victory in this finite existence. Yet many of us Muslims are weak and demoralized. We desire to attain closeness to Allah (SWT), yet we remain trapped in the clutches of our worldly desires. Our feeble efforts don't seem to provide us with the spiritual contentment that comes from attaining this closeness to Allah (SWT). Deep down inside our souls long for this closeness but we find ourselves unable to transcend this barrier. So we regulate ourselves to a ritualistic following of the tenants of our religion, never attaining the spiritual connection that provides us the much needed nourishment to our souls. How do we overcome this barrier? How do we attain spiritual growth? How can we purify our souls? How can we attain closeness to Allah (SWT)? The answers to these questions are simple, but the effort required is quite daunting. Most of us are subconsciously unwilling to make this effort. The greatest tragedy is that many of us yearning for closeness to Allah (SWT) will die, never having achieved it.

Most human beings have aspirations of material wealth, fame and recognition. They struggle incessantly their entire lives to realize these allusive dreams, and yet most people die never having their dreams fulfilled. There is little correlation between their efforts and the ultimate outcome because it is the Will of Allah (SWT) that determines the outcome. We all receive whatever is pre-ordained for us by Allah (SWT). However, when it comes to our aspirations for spiritual growth and our desire for closeness to Allah (SWT), the outcome is indeed heavily dependent upon efforts and when we fail, as many of us will undoubtedly fail in ever achieving this closeness,

we will have no one to blame but ourselves. Why do so many Muslims fail in this one all-important struggle? The answer is simple. It is because we are unwilling to submit ourselves to the Will of Allah (SWT). We are all too quick to compromise on the Commandments of Allah (SWT). Our priority is our material life where we are mesmerized by the glitter of this material existence. We cannot let go of our love for money, our egos, and our worldly pleasures. We are so consumed and distracted by life's little problems. Our intentions are dishonest, our efforts are half-hearted and our belief in the Promise of Allah (SWT) is pathetically weak. We compensate by looking for short-cuts; some quick "wazifa", a visit to a Pir Sahib, or an occasional high-profile charity to do the trick. Do we think we are going to fool Allah (SWT)? Attaining closeness to Allah (SWT) is the greatest gift and the ultimate accomplishment a human soul can ever achieve. There is no quick trick, or scam or shortcut that is going to get us there. It takes a lifetime of effort, a lifetime of sacrifice fortified by an unwavering belief, purity in intention and complete submission to the Will of Allah (SWT).

Many Muslims have a genuine desire to be closer to Allah (SWT). They admire the qualities, practices and habits of pious, mutaqi Muslims. What are some of these attributes of the muttaqeen Muslims that attain closeness to Allah (SWT)? First of all they have taqwah, the love of Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAS). Their lives are in accordance with the Commandments of Allah (SWT) and they embody the practices of His Beloved Prophet (SAS). They are the ones who have humility down to the core of their hearts. And the source of their humility is the firm knowledge that all events, circumstances are by the Order of Allah (SWT). They are patient in times of difficulty

and yet steadfast in their commitment to their Deen. Their every thought, dream, aspiration and action is solely to seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT). They struggle for the Deen of Allah (SWT) day and night with their life, money and time. Their every breath is spent in the Zikr of Allah(SWT). They emulate the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed (SAS) in their actions, thoughts and all aspects of their daily lives. They pray the prayers of the Beloved Prophet (SAS). They spend their nights in Prayer, alone, in front of their Creator, begging for His Mercy, and they read the Kalam of Allah (SWT) incessantly. Their Salaat is always with Jama'at and their personality is kind and loving towards their Muslim brothers. Their honesty is legendary, beyond reproach and their generosity is infectious.

Wouldn't we all want to be like that? Of course deep down inside we all would, but we can't, or can we? The reason being that attaining this heightened level of spirituality and purification is a reward of Allah (SWT), for a lifetime of struggle and commitment. It is a status that is earned and we are certainly not worthy of it. Our souls are burdened with sin, our hearts are callous by remorseless violations of the Commandments of Allah (SWT). So it should come as no great surprise that we are unable to adapt the behavior of pious Muslims. We want to emulate the Sunnah of our Beloved Prophet (SAS) but we are unable to do so. Instead we go around with our clean-shaven faces, looking like non-Muslims, perhaps because we are not worthy of even resembling the Holy Prophet (SAS), even in appearance. We know we must offer our Salat with Jama'at, we even try to, but circumstances make it impossible for us because we do not deserve the reward that is reserved for those who do.

It might prove to be worthwhile to examine the process of spiritual growth. Let us see if we the defiant Muslims can glean any insight as to how we can begin to make meaningful progress in terms of purifying our souls. Interestingly enough the process of spiritual growth and attaining closeness to Allah (SWT) is amazingly self-regulatory. It automatically weeds out the defiant Muslims like us. Those who violate the Direct Commandments of Allah (SWT) and those who ignore the Sunnah of His Beloved Prophet (SAS). There is no defiance that is little. Each defiance makes it harder and harder to achieve closeness to Allah (SWT). So we the defiant Muslims go about our daily lives in a state of denial. Spinning our wheel, but never getting anywhere. Wondering why it is so difficult for us to completely submit to the Will of Allah (SWT). Longing for the closeness to Allah (SWT) and the spiritual contentment that comes from it.

The process of achieving meaningful spiritual growth is also wonderfully complex and intertwined with a fascinating array of balancing parameters and characteristics. Some obvious and quantifiable and others that are very subtle and elusive. One needs purity of heart, body and mind. Honest and pure intentions. One needs to develop qualities of determination, resolve, strength of purpose and courage. One needs to be patient and humble. One must possess an infallible faith in Allah (SWT) and wholeheartedly submit to the Will of Allah (SWT) with humility that permeates down to the core of one's being. Love of Allah (SWT) must permeate throughout ones heart and

soul. The Love of Prophet Mohammed (SAS) must be more than one's own family or even themselves. Out of love for the Prophet (SAS) one then emulates his Sunnah.

The first step in the process of attaining spiritual growth is to purify one's soul. There is one important aspect that we must understand. Our souls are a reflection of our Aamal and our beliefs. Many of us have burdened their souls with countless sins. We violate the direct Commandments of Allah (SWT) with impunity and little remorse. Even our better deeds are corrupted with impure intentions. Many a times we desire fame, or recognition even for what little good that we might do. Sometimes we instinctively do good deeds, but without the singular purpose of seeking the pleasure of Allah (SWT). It just becomes an afterthought. Our Ibaadah become more of a ritual rather than a supplication to Allah (SWT). Hence if one is serious about attaining closeness to Allah (SWT) then they must first seek true forgiveness from Allah (SWT) for their past wrongs. And in order to gain forgiveness one needs "Taubat-un-Nassuh" whereby one must undo the wrongs committed unto others and seek their forgiveness as well as the forgiveness of Allah (SWT). As a necessary part of true repentance one must make a commitment to never repeat these kinds of sins again. One must make a resolve to never deliberately violate the direct Commandments of Allah (SWT). Where we find ourselves weak and unable to follow the Commandments of Allah (SWT), instead of trying to justify ourselves, we should constantly ask Allah (SWT) for forgiveness and help for the courage and patience required to extricate ourselves from those circumstances. For example many of us lack the taqwah to stop dealing in interest; albeit mortgage or bonds. Similarly many Muslim women find it extremely

difficult to follow Allah (SWT)'s Commandments of Hijab. No amount of justification on our part of our continual flagrant violations can remove these stains from our souls, and these stains will remain an impediment to our spiritual growth. As one purifies their soul, their Ibadah becomes more fulfilling, more intense and more spiritually satisfying. Salat with Jama'at becomes effortless, daily recitation of the Quran becomes easier and one's comprehension improves. As we grow closer to Allah (SWT) we find ourselves waking up at night and it is this night time prayer that brings us closest to Allah (SWT). The basis of spiritual growth is to instill Taqwah. One must develop a profound sense of God-consciousness and the Fear of Allah (SWT). When every thought that crosses ones mind is tempered with the Will of Allah (SWT), and every action is motivated solely to seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT), and when one has the affirmed belief that every passing moment brings us closer to the day of accountability in front of Allah (SWT). The day that we would be accountable and answerable for the very minutest of our deeds. Perhaps the most important aspect of developing God-Consciousness is recognizing the Greatness of Allah (SWT). Many of us say Allahu Akbar as many as 265 times a day during our daily Salat, but with little regard to the depth of this Kalima. We modern day Muslims tend to take Allah (SWT) for granted. Reflecting upon the Greatness of Allah (SWT) brings humility to oneself. The more knowledge one has the broader ones outlook in terms of science and technology, the better appreciation one develops for the Greatness of Allah (SWT). The Creation of Allah (SWT) spans the infinite vastness of the invisible and the visible universe. The dimensions of space and time in the physical world and the infinite dimensions of the spiritual world. The countless trillions of stars, black holes, Super

Nova and heavenly bodies, some of which man has inkling about and the vast majority of which remain undiscovered, and may always remain beyond the approach of the human mind. And then we look inward and we see an entire universe inside each and every atom and sub-atomic particle with a vastness and complexity that rivals that of the external universe. And in all of Allah (SWT)'s Creations we see a perfect balance, a harmony, artistry and a beauty that leaves us breathless. And when we look at our own bodies we find a creation of mind-boggling complexity, our genetic make-up remains a baffling mystery to scientists. And Allah (SWT) in His infinite mercy has bestowed upon us countless favors that we cannot begin to comprehend. Allah (SWT) is the one who controls the spinning orbit of each and every electron in every single atom in our bodies. He is the one that provides nourishment to each and every living cell; maintaining a healthy balance that lets us breathe in fresh oxygen, take in nourishment from the foods we eat, meanwhile excreting toxins. On our own we do not even possess the power to defend ourselves against a single organism that can wreak havoc on our bodies. And yet we give little thanks to our Creator. And little we fear defying the Master of the Universe. And yet is it not so ironic that we are in awe of the Doctor who can write us a prescription or the lawyer who can prepare a legal brief. Yet we forget that all power in this Universe belongs to Allah (SWT) without whose Knowledge and Command not a single leaf can fall to the ground, or without His order we would not be able to take a second breath on our own. Our egos tell us to put faith in ourselves and our efforts, and in our bosses and the Government, but we do not realize that Allah (SWT) is the true source of all Power. There is no existence other than what is granted by Allah (SWT) and nothing will last except the Entity of Allah

(SWT). And once the Greatness of Allah (SWT) sinks into our hearts we can begin to feel Taqwah, and with Taqwah comes humility. The mark of a true believer is a profound sense of humility. The kind of humility that pervades the core of our very being. And in conjunction with this humility one must develop a firm belief in the insignificance of our worldly life, and all material things. Whoever can successfully conquer these two elements is indeed at a much higher plane. But unfortunately it is easy to talk about developing humility, but our egos always win as they are gigantic and they keep our humility in reign. It is easy to talk about having little interest in material things but our love for money and wealth consumes us and we are helpless to break this grip. The above mentioned attributes are imperative to begin the process of attaining closeness to Allah (SWT), however there is one key element that many of us modern day Muslims ignore and that is the significance of following the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (SAS). It is ironic that on one hand we desire to be close to Allah (SWT) and on the other hand we refuse to emulate the one Ultimate Human Being, who is at the pinnacle of closeness to Allah (SWT). We refuse to emulate His behavior, His habits, His ways and His Sunnah. We forget the fact that what make us Muslims is being the followers of Prophet Mohammed (SAS), and yet we ignore His teachings. Instead we allow our egos to tell us that we are modern men, and we do not really have to live like a person from the 6th century. We listen to our egos that tell us that we are intelligent and educated and we can figure out our own path, set our own terms, and chart our own course to Allah (SWT), but our egos lead us straight into this vicious trap, and this is exactly the reason why humility is so important. Our disregard of the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed (SAS) is not just in issues that we may consider being

obscure or irrelevant, but our defiance of His Sunnah is the most obvious and easily adaptable things. For example most of us do not cover our heads during Salat, when in fact the Prophet Mohammed (SAS) never offered His Salat with His head uncovered. Every morning we commit an act of defiance by shaving our faces, because for us resembling the appearance of Rasoolullah (SAS) means nothing to us. When we defy Prophet Mohammed (SAS) we defy Allah (SWT). When we defy the Sunnah of the Rasoolullah (SAS) we ruin our chances of attaining closeness to Allah (SWT). When we defy the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed (SAS) in little things it makes it a lot easier to defy the Sunnah in bigger things. Hence if we have an ounce of sincerity in our desire to attain closeness to Allah (SWT) it is incumbent upon us to try to follow each and every Sunnah of our beloved Prophet (SAS). And we should try to memorize as many of the special Dua's and Prayers that Prophet Mohammed (SAS) used for His daily activities. For example at the time of waking up in the morning, or prior to going to sleep at night, before beginning an activity, before and after a meal, while entering or exiting the home or Masjid etc. There are hundreds of such prayers and supplications used by our Beloved Prophet (SAS), and they have a tremendous cumulative healing effect on the soul. So next time when we pick up that razor to shave in the morning, this gesture alone can tell us volumes about our Iman. It is a symbolic act of defiance. We are defying the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed (SAS), which means we are defying Allah (SWT). We are choosing to alter our appearance so we do not resemble a Muslim, which can only mean that we are embarrassed to be a Muslim or perhaps subconsciously we wish that we were not Muslim. Perhaps we kid ourselves into thinking we have an Uzr or an excuse. Perhaps we feel that our boss or management

would comment on our beard, so we fear for our jobs. So does this imply that our fear of losing our job or the fear of our boss is more important to us than our Deen. And by thinking that we can immediately see what little faith we have in Allah (SWT) as our provider. So are we not treading the waters of shirk? Maybe we have other reasons why we so meticulously choose to remove all outward traces of being Muslim from our faces every morning. Perhaps we detest the “mulla-type” look and prefer to look like non-believers. Or perhaps we shave because our wives would object to our appearance with a beard. So now does this mean that appeasing our wives is more important to us than following the Sunnah of our Prophet (SAS)? Or is it that we prefer the look of non-believers rather than that of pious, muttaqeen Muslims. The focus on shaving is just symbolic. It is just as applicable to rejection of Hijab by Muslim women. These simple examples illustrates how each and every seemingly minor defiance of the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed (SAS) and as in the latter case, the direct Commandments of Allah (SWT) can give us valuable insight about the state of our Iman. They are symbolic of the callousness of our hearts and the depravity of our souls. Anyway we look at it we can break down each and every one of our seemingly trivial defiance's and out emerges from it a vivid picture of our spiritual bankruptcy. No wonder we Muslims, individually as well collectively are spiritually and morally bankrupt. We are a downtrodden people, helpless, ineffective, weak and defenseless. And we will remain so until we each take individual responsibility for changing ourselves. We have to let go of this hypocrisy and submit to the Will of Allah (SWT), completely, unequivocally and without exceptions. And all our hoopla about Islam is just lip service. Who are we trying to fool? We go around building Masaajids,

attending Islamic conferences, building Islamic Schools, and yet our own personal lives remain a paragon of defiance of the Commandments of Allah (SWT) and the Sunnah of our Prophet (SAS). We are quick to criticize others, point out their deficiencies, when in fact our own actions and deeds are despicable. We have a rotten core and yet we want to improve everything around us. Let us each first make a commitment to changing ourselves. Then perhaps we will get somewhere with the rest of the world.