

denied yourself the *akhira*. No one could be more extreme in their doing without than this."

Normally, however, when we speak of *zuhud* we mean that we deny ourselves some of the pleasures of this world rather than those of the next world. However it is only possible to abstain from things to which you have access. This is why Ibn al-Mubarak said, when someone said to him, "O *Zahid!*", "The real *zahid* is Umar ibn Abdal-Aziz, for he rejected the tremendous pleasures and riches of this world that were placed at his feet, whereas I have very little to give up."

Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "I have known people and kept company with groups who neither rejoiced when the things of this world came to them, nor grieved when they lost anything in this world. The life of this world was more insignificant to them than dust. One of them might live for a year or for sixty years without ever having a garment that would entirely cover him, and without ever having anything that would come between him and the ground, and without ever having any food that he could ask to be prepared for him in his own home.

"When night came, they would be on their feet, with their foreheads flat against the earth, tears rolling down their cheeks, secretly calling on Allah to save them on the Day of Judgement. If they did something good, they never stopped being grateful for it, and were always asking Allah to accept it. If they did something bad, they would be saddened by it, and would keep on asking Allah to forgive them for it. By Allah, they were not safe from wrong actions, and were saved only by their constant turning in repentance. May Allah be pleased with them and grant them His mercy."

There are three stages of *zuhud*:

The **first** stage is to withdraw from the life of this world, even though you may still have a great desire for it and your heart is still drawn towards it. The self is still pre-occupied with the world, even though you struggle with it and restrain it.

The **second** stage is to acquire detachment from this world and to do without in it, in order to obtain your reward for avoiding it. Here, it is your doing without which preoccupies you. This is the state of the person who gives away a *dirham* in order to obtain two.

The **third** stage is that of the one who willingly puts the world to one side without even a thought for what he has abandoned. This is the one who has exchanged a fragment of broken pottery for a jewel.

Or it is like someone who, seeking to gain entrance to see the King, may be prevented by a dog at the gate. By throwing the dog a scrap it is distracted, and this makes it possible for him to gain entrance to the King's audience chamber. *Shaytan* is like that dog, standing at the gates of Allah. He tries to prevent people from entering them, even though the gates are wide open and the world is just a scrap which you can toss aside without a second thought.

Notes

1. Hasan, Ibn Ma'jah, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 2/1373.
2. Muslim, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 18/93.
3. Muslim, *Kitab al-Jannatu wa Na'imuha*, 17/191.
4. *Sahih gharib*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 6/611.

TWELVE

THE STATES OF THE SELF

There is agreement amongst those who seek Allah, despite their different schools and practices, that the self stands between the heart and reaching Him. Only the silencing of the self – by turning away from it and ignoring its whims and overcoming it – can lead you into the domain of Allah and make it possible to reach Him.

There are two kinds of people: one kind are those whose *nafs* have overcome them and led them to ruin because they yielded to them and obeyed their impulses. The other kind are those who have overcome their *nafs* and made them obey their commands.

Some of those who know have said, “The journey of those who seek Allah ends with them overcoming their selves, because whoever triumphs over his self succeeds and wins, and whoever has his self triumph over him loses.”

Allah, the Exalted, says:

◀ Then as for whoever exceeded the limits and preferred the life of this world, surely his abode will be the Fire; and as for whoever feared to stand before his Lord and restrained the desires of his self, surely his abode will be the Garden. (79:37-40) ▶

The self urges you to wrong actions, and to preferring this life to the next life; while Allah tells his servants to fear Him, and to restrain the self from following its im-

pulses. The heart is torn between these two. It listens to one caller one moment and to the other caller the next. Here lies the source of affliction, and a challenge.

In the Qur'an, Allah has described three states of the self: the self at peace, the reproachful self, and the self that urges evil. Accordingly, people have varied in their views as to whether a servant has one self, of which these three states are attributes, or three selves.

The first view is that of the people of knowledge and explanation, while the second has been attributed to the Sufis. The truth of the matter is that there is no contradiction between the two. The self is a single entity as far as its essence is concerned, and is one of three main types, depending on what attributes it has.

The Self at Peace

When the self can rest at peace in the Presence of Allah, and is made tranquil when His Name is invoked, and always relates all matters to Him, and often turns to Him, and is impatient to meet Him, and experiences the intimacy of His nearness, then this is a soul at peace. It is the soul to whom it is said at the time of death:

﴿ O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well pleased and well-pleasing. Enter with My servants, enter into My Garden. (89:27-30) ﴾

Ibn al-Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "It is the tranquil and believing soul."

Qatada said, "It is the soul of the believer, made calm by what Allah has promised. Its owner is at complete rest and content with his knowledge of Allah's Names and Attributes, and with what He has said about Himself and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and

with what He has said about what awaits the soul after death – about the departure of the soul, the life in the *barzakh*, and the events of the Day of Resurrection which will follow – so much so that a believer such as this can almost see them with his own eyes. So he submits to the will of Allah and surrenders to Him contentedly, never dissatisfied or complaining, and with his faith never wavering. He does not rejoice at his gains, nor do his afflictions make him despair, for he knows that they were decreed long before they happened to him, even before he was created, for Allah says:

◀ No calamity occurs without the permission of Allah; and whoever trusts in Allah, He guides his heart; and Allah knows all things. (64:11) ▶”

Many of our predecessors have said that such a soul belongs to the servant who, when afflicted by misfortune, knows that it is from Allah and accepts it and submits to His will.

The peace that comes with *ihsan* springs from a reassuring familiarity with the decree of Allah, which is reflected in submission, sincerity and worship. No desire, or will, or force of habit, can be given precedence over His will and command; there can be no attraction to anything that contradicts any of His Attributes; and there can be no desire that opposes His decree – and if ever such a thing does happen to such a person, then he simply dismisses it as the whispering of *shaytan*. Indeed he would rather fall from the sky than give reality to such a thing within himself.

This, as the Prophet ﷺ said, is clear and true faith.¹ By it he is saved from the worry that accompanies wrong actions and from any anxiety about them, thanks to the peace and sweetness that come with turning to Him.

If he comes to rest in firm belief after having doubted, or in knowledge after ignorance, or in remembrance after being forgetful, or in repentance after rebellion, or in sincerity after showing off, or in truthfulness after deceit, or in clarity after confusion, or in the humility of intimacy after the impetuosity of desire, or in modesty after boastfulness, then his soul is at peace.

All this is due to the awareness that frees the heart from idle sleep and lights up the palaces of the Garden ahead of him – as when a man cried out:

O soul, watch out! Help me with your striving
in the darkness of the nights,
so that on the Day of Resurrection
you will win a good life on those heights!

He recognised, by the light of this awakening, what he had been created for, and what he would encounter, from the moment he died to the moment he entered the abode that lasts for ever (i.e. the Garden or the Fire). He realised how swiftly this world passes, and how unreliable it is for its children, and how it destroys whoever loves it. So he arose in this light, full of determination and said:

◀ Ah, woe is me, that I was forgetful of Allah! (39:56) ▶

So he sets out on a fresh start in his life, making up for what he has missed and bringing back to life what had died. Now he faces the pitfalls that he encountered before head-on, and seizes the moment with his newly discovered capacity, which, when it passed him by before, caused him to miss all good.

Then he realises, in the light of this awakening and in the light of Allah's gifts to him, that he is incapable of measuring and counting Allah's blessings, or of repaying

his debt. With this realisation, he recognises his shortcomings and faults, his wrong actions and all the bad things he has done, all of his disobedience and the neglect of so many rights and duties. His self is broken and his body is humbled and he approaches Allah with his head down. He recognises Allah's generosity and sees his own misdeeds and faults both at the same time.

He also sees, in the light of this awakening, how precious his time is, and how important it is. He realises that it is the capital of his future well-being which must not be wasted, and he becomes so thrifty with it that he only spends it in actions and deeds which will bring him nearer to Allah – for wasting time is the seed of failure and regret, and being careful with it is the root of success and joy.

These then, are the consequences of being aware and what increase it. These are the first steps of the soul at peace on its journey to Allah and the *akhira*.

The Reproachful Self

It has been said that this kind of self is the one which cannot rest in any one state. It often changes and alters, remembers and forgets, submits and evades, loves and hates, rejoices and becomes sad, accepts and rejects, obeys and rebels.

It has also been said that it is the self of the believer. Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "You always see the believer reproaching himself and saying things like: 'Did I want this? Why did I do that? Was this better than that?'"

It has also been said that the self blames itself on the Day of Resurrection: every one blames himself for his actions, either for his bad deeds, if he was one who had many wrong actions, or for his short comings, if he was one who did good deeds.

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim says that all of this is accurate.

There are two types of reproachful self: one that is blameworthy and one that is not blameworthy. The blameworthy self is the ignorant, disobedient self that Allah and His angels blame. The self that is not blameworthy is the self that blames its owner for his own shortcomings in obeying Allah, in spite of all his efforts in that direction. This self is not really blameworthy.

The most praiseworthy selves are the ones that blame themselves because of their shortcomings in obeying Allah. This is the self that endures criticism from others in its quest to please Him, so that no one can find fault with it as regards his worship of Him. This one has escaped being blamed by Allah.

As for the self which accepts its actions as they are, without self-criticism, and which does not have to endure the criticisms of others – which means that it cannot be being sincerely obedient to Allah – this is the self that Allah blames.

The Self that Urges Evil

This is the self that brings punishment on itself. By its very nature it directs its owner towards every wrong action. No one can be rid of its evil without help from Allah. As Allah says of the wife of al-Aziz, in the story of Yusuf:

◀ And I do not say that my self is free from blame: surely the self urges evil, unless my Lord is Merciful; surely my Lord is Forgiving, Compassionate. (12:53) ▶

Allah also says:

◀ And had it not been for the grace of Allah and His Mercy on you, not one of you would ever have been

pure; but Allah purifies whomever He wishes, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing. (24:21) ▶

We have been taught the *du'a*, "All praise is for Allah, we praise Him and seek His help and His pardon. We seek refuge in Him from the evil in our selves and from the evil of our deeds." 2

Evil lies hiding in the self, and it is this that leads it on to do wrong. If Allah were to leave the servant alone with his self, the servant would be destroyed between its evil and the evil that it craves; but if Allah grants him success and help, then he will survive. We seek refuge in Allah the Almighty, both from the evil of our selves and from the evil of our deeds.

So the self is a single entity, although its state may change: from the self that urges evil, *an-nafs al-ammara*, to the reproachful self, *an-nafs al-lawwama*, to the self at peace, *an-nafs al-mutma'inna*, which is the final aim of perfection.

The self at peace has an angel to help it, who assists and guides it. The angel casts good into the self, so that it desires what is good and is aware of the excellence of good actions. The angel also keeps the self away from wrong action and shows it the ugliness of bad deeds. All in all, whatever is for Allah and by Him, always comes from the soul which is at peace.

The self which urges evil has *shaytan* as its ally. He promises it great rewards and gains, but casts falsehood into it. He invites it and entices it to do evil. He leads it on with hope after hope and presents falsehood to it in a form that it will accept and admire.

The *nafs al-mutma'inna*, the self at peace, and its angel require the following: unwavering belief in Allah, the One, without any partner; moral excellence; good behaviour to-