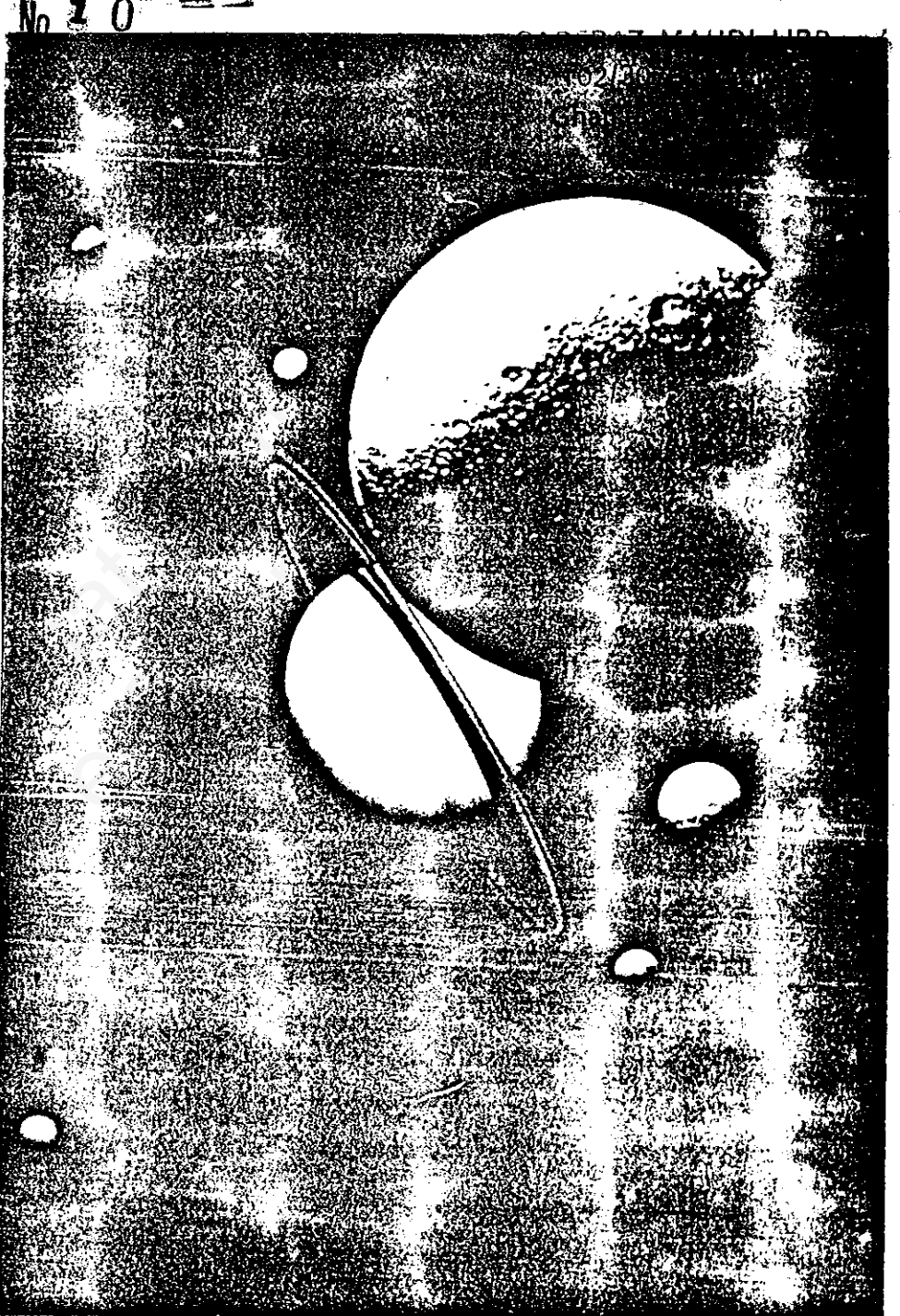


# QALABA

– THE TURNING OF THE HEART –



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# QALABA

## The Turning of the Heart

Discourse of Shaykh Fadhilalla

“Only by the dhikr of Allah is the heart made tranquil.” Dhikr is remembrance, recalling what is already present. That which is ever-present is not perpetually and spontaneously recognized and known by man, because he has been deflected by forgetfulness (ghafla). Remembrance is not meaningful unless there is its opposite, forgetfulness. It is part of the play of duality. The deeper one is in ghafla, the greater is the chance that one will return to dhikr. The night becomes darkest before the break of dawn. These are the immutable laws of reality and have nothing to do with man.

The physical laws of creation enable us to maintain the platform of the body, which is an intricately balanced and magnificent form. These laws are discernable. But it is the subtler laws that are to be discovered and contemplated for they actually govern, and are the essences or the attributes from which the actions come. The subtler the law, the more powerful it is because it is closer to the ultimate subtle point from which everything arose. It is closer to that ultimate ocean of stillness which is like the moment of creation, or the non-creational state of absoluteness from which this apparent motion, which is ‘in time’, has taken place.

Man has been given a guidebook to discover the subtle laws governing the creation. This book, the Qur’an, is written in Arabic, which is a language whose words are interlinked through their roots. If one looks at the Arabic roots of the Qur’anic terms, one will come to see the many aspects of the word. One realizes that the full meanings of the words are lost when a translation is made. The translating function takes an aspect of a total garden-like consciousness or culture out of its context, and at best the Arabic translates into a poetic rendering, with an incomplete orchestration of meanings available to be absorbed and used.

We shall now explore a key term in the Qur’an, qalb ( قلب ), by drawing out from a dictionary its various meanings. Immediately we shall see the difficulty of trying to render Qur’anic concepts into English. To facilitate reaching the core meanings of the word, we will return back to the Qur’an. It will reveal the meanings of its own words, because the entire message of Truth is in it.

Literally, qalb means heart. It is a Mudgha ( مضغة ), a physiological unit, a lump of flesh, an organ. The Prophet, salla-llahu ‘alayhi wa alihi wa sallam, describes it as an organ in the breast of man which if it is well, the entire being is well; and if it is not, the entire being is not. By the Prophet’s indication the qalb is not just a physical organ but something like an electromagnetic energy field with its center at the heart. It is a subtler force superimposed on what we call the physical heart.

From the dictionary we find the verb qalaba ( قلب ) to mean: to turn around, turn about, turn upward, upturn; to turn, turn over; to turn face up or face down; to turn inside out or outside in; to turn upside down; to tip, to tilt over, topple over; to invert, reverse; to overturn, upset, topple; to capsize; to roll over; to subvert, overthrow; to change, alter, turn, transform, convert, transmute; to transpose; to exchange.

If we were to think of man as being a holograph or anything like that model – though man is far more complex than any model he can think of, for in fact, he is the model – we could see the meaning of some of these terms.

Man attempts to understand his nature by the facilities and faculties that are available to him. All of these are inherently limited – every system has its limitation. He tries to draw a model from existence in order to better understand his reality. All things in the creation are a model of its Creator. The best model to be constructed by man, within the limitations of systems and models of self-representation, is that of a holograph. It reflects and functions like the original model and yet it is not the original. It does not contain all the dimensions of the original.

Man appears to have the characteristics of the unlimited. He attempts to imitate the characteristics of the Unlimited, the Omnipotent and the Omnipresent, yet he is not It. He seems to contain the attributed meanings, but he is not them. He seems to have contained and inherited attributes of his Creator, but he is not the root of them because he is like a hologram. This description or model is limited, because we are only able to analyze it by means of the limited faculty of analysis.

The fact that we can talk about the limited, and describe it within limits and bounds must, out of necessity, imply that this limited situation exists within an unlimited situation. The analytical approach does not bring us any closer to understanding the entire nature of the Creator. A great deal, however, may be understood by discussing the manifestations that have arisen from the Creator.

When the heart is turning to a site it will reflect that sight. If your heart is connected with a situation, you are likely to reflect that situation. If it is set on something you are likely to attain it, given all the physical possibilities. Wherever your heart turns, it is towards a discernable thing. Its function however, its genetic code is to be ever-turning, never to be fixed upon anything. It is the scanner of objects which gives it the nature of reflectiveness. Its reality, though, is beyond that. The nature of radar and what makes it function is not what it reflects, it is not the image of the aircraft. Its operation is based on wavebands. What makes a heart a heart, a qalb a qalb, is an entity which is unique, which is Ahad, which is not related to anything that the qalb reflects and discerns.

We can make a holograph of anything, but its origin is not the thing. A heart can reflect anything or any situation, any mental image or thought, but what gives it the power to have that nature of turning, non-attachment and freedom is none of these and it is over and above that, and there is nothing like it. In other words, what is trying to be expressed is that the master of the heart is Allah. The sufferer from the heart's reflection is you and I. And that suffering is part of our endowment. There is no way out of it. It will reflect the good and the bad, the degrees of attachment and non-attachment. If we give it its due we will allow it to be a real qalb – it will turn at all times.

Translating what we have been saying into an existential recipe, if we allow the qalb to be a turning qalb, then existentially we will be secure. Allah owns the heart. We inherit the bad of it if we do not abandon and let it be its nature.

By pulling out some examples from the Qur'an itself, we can deepen our understanding of various uses of the verb qalaba. For example:

وَالِيهِ تُقَلَّبُونَ

And to Him you will turn. (29:21)

وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ

We turned them about to the right and to the left. (18:18)

يُنْقَلِبُ اللَّهُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ

Allah turns over the night and the day. (24:44)

يَوْمَ تُقَلَّبُ وُجُوهُهُمْ

A day their faces will have turned. (33:66)

Their faces were turned towards something else in distraction, but on that day, on that change of level of consciousness, at the reckoning, there will be no possibility for man to be distracted, their faces will have invariably turned to another state. The people who do not believe in the reality which Allah describes, "fear the day in which the hearts and sights will have turned

(suddenly)," realizing that what they perceived as real, is no longer.

فَأَنقَلَبُوا بِنِعْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ

So they turned by a favor from Allah. (3:174)

These people were in discord, confusion or ignorance, and a favor came from Allah causing a turning to occur as a waveband or as an energy-band, called a grace or angel. In the Qur'an one can almost say that angels are specifically directed, constricted and defined wavebands or energies, which contain the characteristics of light, having both its specificity, its quantum aspect, as well as its waveband aspect.

وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ

And he who turns back upon his heels. (3:144)

إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا مُنْقَلِبُونَ

Surely to our Lord we are overthrown. (26:50)

وَنُقَلِّبُ أَقْفَادَهُمْ وَأَبْصُرُهُمْ

And We turn their hearts and their sights. (6:110)

We had read from a dictionary the entries under the verb qalaba, now, let us see what there is listed for the noun qalb. It says: reversal, inversion; overturn, upheaval; conversion, transformation, transmutation; transposition, metathesis; perversion, change, alteration; overthrow (of government); heart; middle, center; core, gist, essence; marrow, medulla, pith; the best or choicest part; mind, soul, spirit.

As man moves on in his search for happiness, progressing towards a balance between his desires and their satisfaction, discriminatingly filtering what comes to him from the outside, he is bound to reach a conclusion that there is no end to the attempt of trying to match the individual, the microcosm with the macrocosm of the world. Man will not be successful in balancing the opposites because as soon as he controls one factor, another factor appears.

Man has imposed upon himself conditions that have nothing to do with the thing itself, originally. In other words, happiness is one's own nature, but unhappiness has been superimposed upon it by placing conditions upon happiness. We say, "I will not be content unless I have this or that." Because these conditions differ from one person to another and are constantly changing through the evolution of time, they cannot be the causes for the inner states of happiness. As a child, you may impose the condition upon yourself that to be happy you have to have a bicycle. But when you are a man this same condition is out of place and silly. The conditions are variable and therefore, unacceptable, because we want to get to the common denominator, the fundamental condition.

I have chosen to plunge into the meanings of the word qalb because it is

Munib is from anaba which is repent, return or turn back.

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكْرًا لِمَن كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ

*Most surely there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart. (50:37)*

It does not mean that there are people who do not have heart, but the description in Arabic and in the Qur'an is that their hearts have been blinded or covered.

وَلَا تُطِيعَنَّ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ

*Do not obey and follow he whose heart We have made to be in ghafla (deflected from the source). (18:28)*

The diseased heart is described in many different ways in the Qur'an:

فَيَطْمَعُ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ

*So he who in his heart is sick would be greedy. (33:32)*

Greed is one attribute of a sick heart. A man of heart will not have greed because he has trust.

Guidance also comes from the same faculty, the heart:

وَمَن يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ قَلْبَهُ

*And whoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart. (64:11)*

And if one does not believe:

كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ الْكَافِرِينَ

*Like that Allah sets a seal over the hearts of the disbelievers. (7:101)*

He who denies this one and only infinite situation from which the finite has come, has his heart enclosed:

كَذَٰلِكَ نَسُكُّهُ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

*Like that We make it to enter into the hearts of the guilty. (15:12)*

Such is the way Allah strings the condition of kufr into the hearts of those who are criminals, who commit a crime against themselves. By being deflected, their qalb does not perform its function, it is not turning to what really matters. But when it turns back:

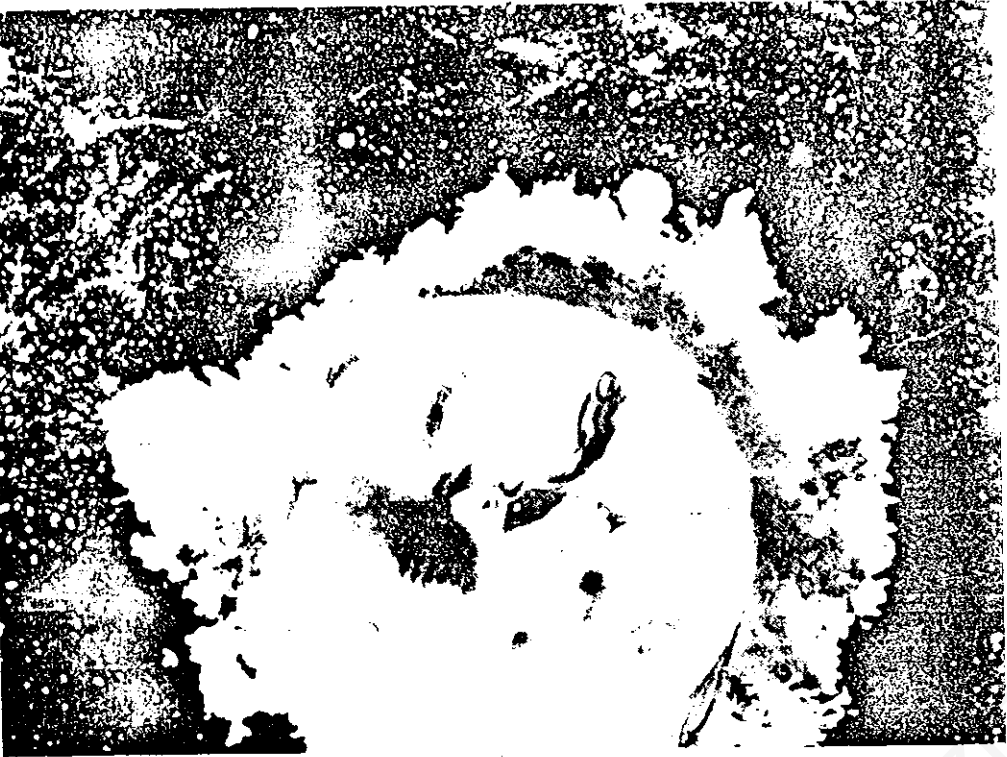
فَتَكُونُ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ

*They have hearts with which to understand. (22:46)*

When the qalb functions properly then:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

*He sends down peace into the hearts of the believers. (48:4)*



the key concept in turning one's life to a realization that what one is pursuing, what one has invested in: an ambience, a profession, a friendship or a bank account, can only bring about a superficial and perishing situation. That which man is really seeking is happiness: moments of happiness when the mind is brought to a standstill.

Mind, in Arabic, does not exist, and there is no specific translation for it. What is used is the word 'aql. Ultimately, you use your 'aql by your heart, as the Qur'an describes it. Your faculty of reason is in the heart, not in the head. The head is, according to the Qur'anic tradition, a convenient measuring device. It is to be used to obtain existential conveniences.

I would like now to mention a few ayat in which the noun qalb appears. We are talking about that which is the core. The Qur'an repeats several times that knowledge and ultimate happiness or ultimate winning lie in the seeker's coming to Allah with a sound heart ( *قلب سليم* ). The ayat of the Qur'an which contain the word qalb are more than one hundred. Qalb and those words related to it through its root are mentioned within more than two hundred ayat.

وَجَاءَ بِقَلْبٍ مُنِيبٍ

*And he came with a repentant heart. (50:33)*

Another attribute of disconnectedness, of not being in tawhid, is expressed by:

يَقُولُونَ بِأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ مَا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ

*They say by their tongues what is not in their hearts. (48:11)*

This is also a definition of hypocrisy. Munafiq ( منافق , hypocrite) is rooted in the verb nafaqa. Nafaq ( نفق ), which is from the same three-letter root, is a tunnel. The one who tunnels, his nafs cannot be caught. As soon as it goes into one hole, it comes out another, and therefore, does not have the opportunity to turn. The heart of the munafiq is not pulled out of distraction, leading to:

وَلَكِنَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ

*But their hearts hardened. (6:43)*

The hearts of the munafiqun are as hard as stone, but Allah says, even from stone, waters may spring forth.

The heart of the munafiq is described in various ways:

وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً

*We put upon their hearts covers. (6:25)*

لَاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ

*Their hearts are full of foolishness. (21:3)*

أَزَاعَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ

*Allah turned away their hearts. (61:5)*

Zagha ( زاغ ) is to turn aside; to depart, deviate (from); to swerve, to turn away (from), turn one's back (on); to wander, stray, roam (eyes); to cause something to deviate.

رَأْنَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ

*Rust is upon their hearts. (83:14)*

The opposites of the illnesses of the heart are as Allah mentions:

أَلَقَّتْ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ

*He brings their hearts together. (8:63)*

سَأَلْنَا فِي قُلُوبِ

*In order to fortify your hearts. (8:11)*

Elsewhere in the Qur'an Allah says:

مَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِرَجُلٍ مِّنْ قَلْبَيْنِ فِي جَوْفِهِ

*Allah has not made for any man two hearts within him. (33:4)*

If one continually seeks material security, one will end up destitute of the other values. Two arrows cannot be shot from the same bow at the same time. You can shoot one after the other, but often we stop after the first. First, we want a proper material situation: environment, friendship, wife, in order that we may satisfy the gross and immediate needs, the human parts; then we may move into the divine domain of this journey.

You will find the great masters following in the footsteps of the Prophets, 'alayhim-us-salam, and their followers, the Imams, because what is real, is real forever and does not change with time. What may change is the outer manifestation. You may have different colors or forms of dress, but a dress is a dress. A house is a house, a room is a room, a filled stomach is a filled stomach which may have been filled for days or weeks with one, two or five hundred varieties of food. What matters is the ultimate state of the situations.

If we look at the lives of the Prophets and their followers we will find one thing in common and that is revolution, that is qalb. They had hearts which turned against what they considered to be futile. Each one of them, in his own way, at a certain time in his life, discovered the same thing.

The five great Prophets, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, 'Isa and Muhammad, 'alayhim-us-salam, and many of the others whom we do not know enough about, turned the history of mankind. It was not necessarily that they renounced the house in which they were raised or their mothers or wives, it was that they recognized what they considered to be essential for them to reach the state which would give them full security and fulfillment, unconditioned by these relationships and the values which they represented. They simply turned away from the relationships which were keeping them from their goal.

If your heart has turned away from something, eventually your face also will turn away. This existence is one unified field. Eventually, the body's electromagnetic field will physicalize into a movement of muscles and limbs away from what is futile. When Musa, 'alayhi-s-salam, came to the pharonic state and found the people taken in by despotism aided by magic, he could not accept it. He advocated instead the worship of the one and only Reality. He then moved away from the oppression, taking his people with him. The Prophet 'Isa, 'alayhi-s-salam, came to revive what Musa had brought, and he also turned away, revolting against the dominant values.

Man wants longevity and has invested in cultural habits and traditions which oppose the imposition of the prophetic message. The message is bound to be opposed. In fact, the first opposition to every spiritual seeker occurs at the nearest place to him – his mother, or his wife. The opposition begins at home, at the closest quarters, because it has begun at the closest possible part of him, which is his heart.

Revolution is an essential meaning of qalb. If however, we do not leave the state of foolishness and indiscriminateness, we will equate revolution with



an outer havoc not based upon an inner reality. If the revolution is a real one, it will not cause outer havoc. The revolutions of the Prophets and the awliya were the most peaceful revolutions. Muhammad, *salla-llahu 'alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*, did not wage war, he only defended himself as a last resort.

If there is a turning away from that which has not been conducive, which has not brought us nearer to that state of complete bliss and fulfillment, by first recognizing that we have been looking in the wrong direction, then there will be no revolution and no turning of the heart. Once there is a turning of the heart, the most devastating peaceful revolution has been brought about. Once you have recognized that your happiness is not dependent upon the dominant *kufir* system of behavior, your turning away from it is the biggest threat to the system, far greater than reacting against it because you have defied the entire situation. You have demonstrated that your happiness does not lie with an increased rate of interest in the bank.

The situation of the awakening heart is that, by the shaking, by the turning, by the afflictions, by the fact that it has not yet reached a point

of *istiqrar*, a point of tranquility and stability, it will move to awaken. That awakening is the 'turning away from'.

The definition of the path is *sirat-al-ladhina an 'amta 'alayhim*, the path of those who have received the *ni'ma*, the blessedness; *ghayri-l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa la dallin*, and of those who are not alienated. It follows that alienation is a proof that the heart has not focused on what matters and is distracted.

The nature of existence is in fact the nature of the *qalb*. Everything in this existence depends on the *qalb*. The health of a child in the womb depends on its turning. The nature of any health, physical, mental, economic, or otherwise, is based on its turning around. If you want to be mentally healthy and alert, able to think beyond what you are trying to solve, you must go beyond it and be willing to face any change. Heart attacks occur because the heart becomes fixed in a specific direction. It can only be attacked if it is positioned or visible. If it is *qalb*, constantly turning, how can it be attacked? Where can it be gotten hold of and afflicted? Why should the heart be disappointed?

If someone has a heart which is willing to turn, and you were to come up to him saying, "I am sorry, but all that you had owned is destroyed," he would recognize or remember the day when he had nothing and put himself in that state. He would say, "There was a time when there was nothing, a time when I did not even exist. So what is all this fuss about?" The attainment of this state is not a foolish technique of saving one's physical heart from a heart attack, but is a reality that recognizes a time when there was no problem. Someone with a turning heart remembers his afflictions, how they disappeared; and he remembers the only member of this existence inferred and deduced by experience, which is God.

Man will move towards this goal faster when the environment in which he surrounds himself becomes more spiritually conducive. In order to do that he must attempt to leave all other distractions behind, creating an energy wave situation which is more conducive. As a group, those seeking the dynamic state of the heart do not inflict their boring biographies upon each other. They are all the same, with the same problems, whose function is by nature to turn the hearts to where it matters.

Within this environment of the world, the teaching of truth becomes real. Unless you physically see your attachment to your children, wife or country being genuinely, directly and subjectively confronted, this teaching remains a superstitious religiosity. It is a useless prescription or *mepu* which is without the benefit of the nutriments that would be taken from the meal itself.

Man is born in order to learn to reach the state of tranquility. By getting closer to the state of tranquility without the aid of outside stimulants, man gets more and more access to that medical cupboard within himself, directly and instantly. By closing his eyes, and having no thoughts, he will be able to enter into an unending ocean of non-description. This is the heritage of man.

It is diving into the state of pre-creation, which all men will taste at the moment of death. This is the message of the Qur'an, and all the Prophets of true religions, and of all men who have attained various degrees of awakening. Their messages have been nothing other than a reflection of the truth.

We often hear that all paths lead to the same end, but are we on a path? If you are not specifically on a path which you are certain has been trodden, and which you know within your heart gets you to the desired goal, it is of no use. It will lead you to continue discussing the fact that all paths, all religions are the same. So what? What about you and I? Have you been in the workshop that will teach you how to manufacture the key to your inner bliss, which is the key to the garden? This life is the workshop in which we clumsily fool around with the toys of day to day living, until the time when we know exactly where to put the key, and how to turn it. Then instantly you are able to return to that ocean of non-description, revived beyond revival.

This is the message of the Qur'an. It can only be unified with if the courtesy of the Qur'an is taken on, which is the courtesy of that culture and that language. The Arabic language, along with Aramaic, Sanskrit and several other ancient languages, many of which have already disappeared, are able to communicate beyond the humanly communicable. A point is reached at which man is at the edge of an inner silence, beyond reason. Reason is only given its nourishment and meaning because it is based upon that "beyond".

The Qur'an describes the Prophet Muhammad, *salla-llahu 'alayhi wa alihi wa sallam*, as *rahmatan lil-'alamin*, as a mercy for all the worlds, visible and invisible, for all time. It is part of the mercy of the Ever-Merciful Creator Who created only out of love. If man does not begin upon that foundation, whether he builds cities or civilizations, his actions will not be nourished by the inner fountain which keeps his heart throbbing. His efforts will be cast aside, unused — a reminder of his inadequacies.

The sincere men of knowledge gather together simply to sing the one and only song which they have learned from the beyond and before time. When other lesser songs stop, the heart sings what it has known from before time, which is the message of the Qur'an. The rest of their actions function as an outer containment in order to corner them into a final point of abandonment. From abandonment comes the awakening, the safe conduct in this world. And from it, eventually, man ends up reaching his full spiritual evolution. He is promised by Allah that it will take place.

Just as it appears that man is evolving along this thing called time, biologically, so he appears to be evolving spiritually. The Qur'an promises that the earth will be inherited by the men of knowledge. A time will come when everyone who is walking on this earth will be like a saint. What we witness of upheavals and so on, are of no significance. If we want to find their significance, we will find their meaning in our hearts.