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In God is the Pure Religion – The Ship of Safety

How to Travel in the Ark of Noah, a Ship Which Crosses all the Seas: An understanding of al-islam in the light of the aspects of ash-shari'a, al-iman, al-ihsan, and al-itqan

bismi'llah ir-rahman ir-rahim

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

This is a story about a boat ride across a great sea, so great that there are within this sea, many seas. To know what is the nature, form and substance of the ship of Noah which can carry one across all the waters, it is important to quickly discover the nature of this boat, to get in it and to ride, because turbulent waters cover the face of the earth today as they did in the time of Noah, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, and on all who follow the straightness of his way.

The ship which can carry us through the stormy waters of this world to the opposite shore of God's peace and promise is the surrender to the will of God, al-islam. Islam is a jewel of holy wisdom and mercy transmitted from the most high through the agency of His prophets and messengers. Being such a jewel from on high, it bears many facets and dimensions within it. As one surrenders more and more deeply, more facets and dimensions of the jewel reveal themselves. One's perception of the nature of the ship and the water through which it passes transforms.

In the beginning, the shari'a is the chariot. It is necessary to get into this vehicle to begin to travel, but in and of itself, the exoteric law cannot carry one across all the seas. The law is, nevertheless, necessary for the protection of the surrender (al-islam). It is like the bark which protects the holy tree. Without the bark, the tree could not live, for the sap of its essence would run out and be lost.

The sap of the essence of the tree is al-iman, faith. It is the faith of believers which keeps Islam alive in every age and keeps the form of the law itself vitalized from within. The sap flows throughout the tree down to its roots, giving nourishment to every part. The tree is rooted in divine insight, al-ihsan. As one continues to travel, the knowledge derived from this insight is transformed into illuminated wisdom, al-itqan, and this is the veritable life of the tree of all the souls of the prophets and the faithful throughout eternity. By virtue of this illuminated wisdom within it, the tree is rooted in the very ground of God's being, and it rises up into the sky of grace, branching out in every direction as He wishes.

The holy tree is the boat for the family of God. This is the vehicle in which not only Noah, but all the prophets and messengers have traveled. When one begins to surrender to the law of God, the waters through which he travels, as well as the craft in which he rides, are perceived in relation to His order in everything. As the vehicle deepens and faith is awakened, both the ocean and the ship of faith reflect his faith itself. One moves by faith through an ocean of faith. Then the vehicle transforms again, when knowing is awakened by the power of faith, and one travels through a sea of knowledge. His knowledge is reflected back to him by everything he travels through. When this knowledge realizes the holy light that is hidden within it, the vehicle transforms again into al-itqan, the illuminated wisdom of Allah. In this ship, one can cross every sea and reach the opposite shore. But in truth, there is no destination for the voyager in the ship of al-itqan, because just as the shore is light, so the ocean is the light of Allah, and the ship, and the traveler himself. All are light and there is no difference between one manifestation and another because the forms are there only as a pretext. In reality everything is of the nature of the light of Allah and nothing else exists.

To travel through all of the stages of this voyage and to voyage in the ship of His law, we begin in the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Our holy master (al-mawlana), the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said, "Any person of whom Allah wishes to make good (al-khair), He will make him knowledgeable in the religion. Allah is the Giver, while I am the divider and the distributor (al-qasim)."

This nation shall be governed by the order of Allah. The family of believers who are the family of Allah (al-umma) will not be harmed by any people who act with disrespect or disregard unless the order of Allah commands it. Allah teaches whomever He wishes. He makes whomever He wants to understand and to become knowledgeable in the order, the judgment, the laws of the religion, and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. The person to whom Allah has taught the word of al-Qur'an and judgment, encompasses the good of this world and the next.

Allah leads to the light whom He wills.

Whomever Allah wishes to lift out of the turbulent water of this dark world, He picks up with His own hands and puts in the ship of surrender. This is the inner meaning of the religion, of the Qur'an, and of the judgment. If anyone is not truly prostrated before the presence of the One who gives the law, no matter how many prostrations he makes with his body, no matter how many injunctions he follows with his mind, he is not, in truth, a believer (al-mu'minin).

The literal meaning of al-fiqh is understanding. The traditional meaning is the knowledge of the principles and rules of the shari'a. The word al-fiqh simply means a knowledge of things. In the deep meaning it has come to signify the knowledge of the religion, which, with insight, leads one to the essence of the law, and raises this understanding to a higher dimension than all other sciences. A man becomes al-faqih when he embodies the fiqh. He understands the law and follows it. Traditionally al-fiqh has come to refer particularly to the knowledge of the path – al-islam, al-iman, and al-ihsan.

It was reported in the hadith of the Prophet, as related by 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, that one day a dark haired man, dressed in white, without any signs of traveling, came to the Prophet. No one knew who this person was. He came close to the Prophet and said, "O Muhammad, tell me about al-islam." The Messenger of Allah said to him, "Islam is to witness la ilaha illa'llah; Muhammadan rasulullah, to practice the salat, to pay zakat, to make hajj, if you have the means, and to fast in Ramadan." Then the man said to Muhammad, "You speak the truth." The people sitting around became amazed that this person asks and affirms. The man then asked, "Please tell me about al-iman." The Prophet answered, "Faith is to believe in the Day of Judgment and in inevitable destiny in its good and its bad." The man affirmed that saying, "You are right." Then he said, "Please teach me about al-ihsan." The Prophet said, "You worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, because if you are not seeing Him, surely Allah is seeing you." Then he said, "Inform me about when the Day of Judgment will come and about the Hour." The Prophet answered, "The person you are asking does not know more than the one asking." Then he asked the Prophet to inform him about its signs and the Prophet answered, "The slave will give birth to his master and you will see people with no shoes, the naked and the helpless who have nothing, erecting high buildings." Then the man disappeared. 'Umar, who recited this hadith stayed there for a moment, stunned. The Prophet asked him, "'Umar, do you know this person who was questioning?" 'Umar answered, "Allah and His Prophet know better." The Prophet answered, "He is Gabriel and he has come to teach you your religion."

Now, my beloved, know that the religion is a gathering of words of the way that was revealed in the presence of the Prophet by the angel Gabriel, which was reported in the hadith. Islam is surrender, to be guided in the rules and principles of knowledge from Allah, and to witness la ilaha illa'llah; Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasuluh. These are the last words from the tongue of the messenger and they encompass the entire path. We begin to travel with the understanding of the shari'a, the form of the path. Islam is the law and the path in form and in spirit, and it is the action of all those who have truly set fast on the path. It is the action of praying and the re-ordering of life which true prayer inspires. This praying is the purification of all senses and the healing of all wounds. It is governed by three principles. The first is at-tawba, the repentance, or the return to God, which becomes the second, at-taqwa, the reverence, which becomes the third, al-istiqaama, obedience, to listen to every word which comes from God and to avoid everything that is forbidden, returning to the straight way.

To purify the appearance is, when deeply understood, to purify the heart. How do you do this? First by repentance (al-tawba). You ask for forgiveness for what was not right. Then through piety (al-taqwa) and obedience (al-istiqaama), you do not do again what was forbidden. By living in obedience to every word, you become the embodiment of the order. You purify your consciousness by abstaining from wrong and by becoming perfumed by virtue. In this way you accustom your heart to the unity with Allah. By following the Messenger of Allah in his words, in his actions, and in his surroundings, like the fragrance returning to the heart of the rose, you follow the Prophet to the point where all your heart and feeling become blessed and you become enlightened in the path most dear. In this way you may become knowledgeable and a great pillar in the knowledge of the way of the chosen and elevated one (ash-shari'at al-Muhammadi al-Mustafawi). Any person who arrives at the reality, which is the Muhammadan presence, never stops doing good. The tongue of his presence says, "I hurried to You, my God, and did everything for You, so that You might accept my prayer."

Please beloved, continue the work on the path. Become persistent and I urge you not to stop. If you stop, you will be like those who start and never finish. The seer and the path and the person who is walking must continue. Please, my brother and sister, complete the way and ascend to the station of the faith of Muhammad (al-maqam al-iman al-Muhammadi), and insha'llah, your Lord will lead you to what He wants and what He accepts. Let us sail by the help of our most dear Prophet, who is in the highest place and rows our boat to the shore of al-iman.

The meaning of al-iman is to believe in the heart and to assert the laws and principles of Islam from the depth of a living faith. This is what came on the tongue of the presence of the dearest Prophet in the hadith just mentioned. Faith is the activity of the people on the path, the hidden inner path, of which the center is the heart of the Muhammadan heart. To find it you must purify all your qualities and human characteristics from the substance and quality of your personal characteristics, your personal presence, to the substance and the reality of the presence of Muhammad. By purifying your presence from the contamination of wrong, and by elevating it from the mundane world, and the lowly from its bondage to the dunya, using the light of the Prophet to illuminate a way of passage through the darkness of this world, by living in the essence of truth as he lived and loving Allah as he loved, your presence will reveal itself to be, in essence, of a spiritual nature. Here we speak of the spiritual dimensions of the way of Muhammad and this means that in the purified presence, one is courteous (al-adab) with Allah in all His dimensions.

Allah makes at-tajjaliyat in the hearts of His creation. At-tajjaliyat, in this case, is revelation and when the beloved of Allah cleans himself completely, this is the manifestation of the revelation. The tajjaliyat in its deepest sense is the one apparent characteristic that Allah gave us. If you follow, then your senses, your consciousness, and your heart will rest from anxiety and fatigue. What remains with you is the best of manners because you sit in the presence of Allah and His Prophet. Even when you begin to travel on the path, you are worthy to sit down on the rug of happiness and comfort of the presence. And the faith (al-iman) will flow through you as if it were going through the totality of the universe. First you profess it with your tongue, then it enters your heart, and then from the heart it flows to every organ and manifests through every action. Your hands and your ears do not refuse any order issuing forth from the faith within your heart. The faith circulates from your heart to every part of your body until your being is permeated with faith, and you live in the garden of faith. You become calm and full of trust, trusting yourself, your money, and your family; and your faith cannot be shaken by false accusations.

If your faith becomes complete and your consciousness becomes true, this means that your belief is coming from the light of Allah, because in this dimension your faith is the image of the faith of the messengers. In this faith is proof beyond reason and science in accordance with the knowledge of the companions of the prophets, who witnessed the belief of the Prophet and the power of the revelation which spoke through him as a consummate proof of the truth of his message. What was revealed to the prophets and the companions was proof from Allah made visible only through the eye of their faith and this proof infinitely transcends the boundaries of human logic and rationalization. It is the same with all who follow in the way of Muhammad. They become immediate witnesses to the truth from Allah because He becomes the eye through which they see and the ear through which they hear. As the prophets are immersed in the unity of Allah, walking in His way because that is their order, it is our order to follow their footsteps in the way.

This is to explain that every person has a station and a rank where he stands at every moment in his journey. For example, one who lives in the station of unity (al-wahid) encompasses the totality of numbers as well as the parts. He is the source from which the branches and the fruit of the tree come. We cannot speak about the quality of faith which arises out of each station of realization, because it is a thing alive in the chest which the mind cannot articulate or define. "One must eat the fruit to taste it!" According to the sunna, that which judges the faith of a person is the depth of his belief and surrender. These are the two keys which open the door to knowledge and the things to be known – belief and surrender. And these are embedded in the heart of the servant by means of the fitra, the innate purity of every being as he was created in the image of God. When one returns to his original nature before it was contaminated by the world, when it was pure as in the pure vision of the Creator as He made it, he finds in the truth of his natural state, the truth of his Creator and of himself. This is the meaning of al-fitra. In the undistorted mirror of creation, in the pure Adam, all the qualities of Allah are made manifest. Search about your fitra, then you will walk in the way of the prophets. See the fitra in the behavior (ad-din) of Ibrahim. It is the essence of the unity (at-tawhid). The pure nature of man is the pure nature of God.

And know beloved that if anyone discovers the true essence of the faith, he doesn't look to the right or to the left. He cannot do anything except with God, because there is no he, and his work is the work of God. Avoid arrogance and pride and depending upon your own behavior or your own activity or any condition of your situation. Do not depend upon your own power or capabilities, but depend upon God, on your Lord saying, "O Beloved, give us peace, and this peace is You. You are the teacher. Please guide me, and open the door of Your blessing and by Your counsel and by Your harmony, lead me to the spring of Your guidance. Make my steps strong in the direction of Your path, the straight way to the presence of the complete guide, who has inherited the way of the truth of Muhammad who is my master. All of the truth is in Your hand. Please don't place me in the realm of choice. But if You give me a choice, I choose what You want from me, my Beloved, my Lord, as You have said, because Your Word is righteousness. If You had wanted, You would have made all humankind a single nation, but until now they are differing, except those whom You have blessed." Know that no person has ever entered paradise, the paradise of belief in God, by his own individual action, but he enters by the blessing of Allah, from Him and His generosity.

Beloved, walk with me to the path of the highest good. Hear my voice and follow it to the presence of God, because life at this time is like the ocean at the time of Noah. When you travel in the boat of Noah, this boat is faith and you see that the ocean around you is like the spring of your faith, but you need to travel to change your boat from the boat of faith to the boat of knowing, the deep divine insight (al-ihsan).

The ocean of truth is the station of al-ihsan, the essence of the way of Muhammad forever, beyond time. Al-ihsan is the experience of the sincerity of the truth of Muhammad in everything that you do. When you pray, truly to pray; and when you know, truly to know. And when any person invokes the spirit of the truth of Muhammad in his worship, in all his life he understands what the scripture means when it says, "Our God is a living God." The spirits of His messengers also do not die, but live forever in Him. Everything is from this spring and there is no life without this spring. You can only understand the true at-taqwa (reverence) when you drink, yourself, from this holy water.

The source and the meaning of at-taqwa, the highest good or the deepest respect, is that you know in Whose presence you sit. You sit like one who serves in the court of his Beloved, a perfect king. At-taqwa is like the deepest sensitivity, because of the fear of being separated from the Beloved even for a moment, because without the Beloved there is no life. But this reverence, fear and awe are drawn from the well of the deep secret love.

The person who is drawing forth the hadrat al-Muhammadi while he is worshipping and surrendering to do what the Prophet Muhammad taught, every movement of that person, every step, every humbleness, every word, every action and every dimension of his presence is from Allah, by the power and the grace of Allah. And if he continues in this way, all his life is lost and found in witnessing (al-mushahhada) that there is no reality but Him. He gives up his own existence, and his self has no authority over him. The shaitan has ceased to tempt him because this shaitan has surrendered to him. Iblis can no longer order him except toward goodness and cannot prevent him from anything except to not do wrong. The purity of his taqwa lifts the veil from the eye of his heart to reveal to him where he sits and where he stands and where he travels. He is in the paradise of the presence of his love.

Any person fearing Allah, reverent of the station of his Lord, and forbidding himself to go astray, paradise is his home. That person arrives at the station of the servants of God, who when they ask, receive. God gives them what they want because there is no separation between them and Him, and the giving is from God to God. This person comes from those who are unlimitedly blessed – the prophets, the righteous, the witnesses, and the comrades of Allah. The station of al-ihsan is to be witnessing Him, to purify one's inside secrets by watching, by seeing, and by knowing the true knowledge, the knowledge of righteousness, so that your spirit ascends from its true station to its true station.

This is the work of the people of the end, though there is no end. In the science of the presence of essence, the essence is pure vision, and one's body becomes as the eye of God. All of the pictures within and without are seen in the light of reality. You are Adam when God says to you, "I created Adam in My image." Therefore, you are the image, the picture of your Lord, but there is no picture and no limit, because there is no limit to your God, the Supreme.

Understand, because you have achieved the truth without how or where, without above or below, and without right or left. You are the truth of righteousness in the direct perception of Him (al-ihsanuka). You are therefore more devoted to Him (al-mawla), and deeply in love with Him, as He is the deep loving within you. You came with the Good, you arrived by the Good, you brought the Good, and what you see you don't see except with His eye and He becomes the tongue of your being. Allah says, "Wherever you face, there is My face. You are the qibla. And wherever you are in the night, take Me as Your protector." After that, try to row in the boat of al-itqan, the perfection and the illuminated wisdom. In this station, fear and supplication (praise) are one. Fear is inspired by witnessing the Majesty, the Wrath, and the Power of God in the Severity of His judgment (al-jalal). Supplication, the song of praise is inspired by witnessing the Infinite Beauty (al-jamal) of God Himself. In this station, all the polarities are merged in oneness and nothing but the reality of the One continues to exist. This is a station of deep silence. It is the peace and silence of the deepest love. When one has been parted from his Beloved for a long time and finally returns to His presence there is nothing to say. As was previously said about those who are immersed in the ocean of al-badt, the love is so much absorbed in drinking the milk flowing from the lips of the Beloved that there is not a moment to spare in which to speak or even to remember the Beloved with his voice, but Allah remembers Himself through His slave. The slave, completely immersed in the presence of God, is the light of the essence of the jewel, once the jewel has been broken open and its facets returned to the source. He is reborn in the source of the essence of the jewel. Through the power of the depth of the holy consuming love (al-ishq), the soul in the station of al-itqan returns to the first world before the creation of individual existence. Finally, please know beloved that Allah created us. He has guided you and me. There is nothing that accompanies the unity (al-tawhid). The mind cannot be brought up or down by raising any kind of doubt. There is no objection that can accompany Islam, the surrender to the will of God, and nothing that can accompany the true iman to tempt it from the straight way, and nothing that can accompany iman except the deep courtesy, and nothing that can accompany the deep knowledge (al-ma'rifa) with accusation. The truth (al-haqiqa) and the law (ash-shari'a) are the two balances of a scale, and you are its heart. If you leave to go to the side of the shari'a, you become of the shari'a and you lose the inner truth of al-islam. If you go to the truth and abandon the law, you may break the law and this law is from God. Know that you are the driver of the ship and God asks you about the ship – how it moves through the sea. For this reason, hold both of the reins in your hands. Do not look to the right or to the left. Be the Noah of your time.

And know beloved, that while you are in this station you need to pray for yourself and be careful with yourself. Do not be careless with the grace of proximity. Be aware of the truth of the nearness of the unseen, like the man who sits and serves in the court of a perfect king. In the presence of the king, do not profess yourself to have knowledge because this knowledge is ignorance, and do not profess yourself to be humble because this humility is arrogance and vanity. Realize that the witness of closeness is greater than the knowledge of closeness. Be silent and realize where you stand. The true religion is to witness God, the Great, by Himself and not by you. Understand.

