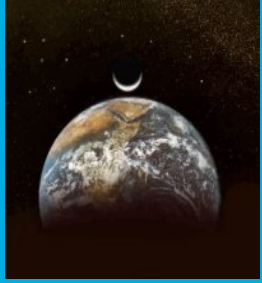




The Four Steps



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate

وَبِهِ نَسْتَعِينُ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ
وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ

And from Him do we seek help.

**All praise be to God, the Sustainer of All the Worlds,
and blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad,
and on all his Family and Companions**



This has great importance; it is beneficial for everyone

The ways leading to Almighty God are truly numerous. While all true ways are taken from the Qur'an, some are shorter, safer, and more general than others. Of these ways taken from the Qur'an is that of:

- **reflection** (tafakur)
- **impotence** (ajzu)
- **poverty** (faqru)
- **compassion** (shafaqa)

from which, with my defective understanding, I have benefited.



Indeed, like ecstatic love, **reflection** leads to the Name of All-Wise, but it is a richer, broader, and more brilliant path.

Also like ecstatic love, **impotence** is a path which, by way of worship, leads to winning God's love; but it is safer.

Poverty too leads to the Divine Name of All-Merciful.

And, like ecstatic love, **compassion** leads to the Name of All Compassionate, but is a swifter and broader path.



This path consists not of ten steps like the 'ten subtle faculties' of some of the Sufi orders (tariqat) employing silent recollection (thikr), nor of seven stages like the 'seven souls' of those practicing public recitation, but of four 'Steps'.

It is reality [haqiqat], rather than a tariqat. It is Shari'a.



However, let it not be misunderstood. It means to see one's impotence, poverty and faults before Almighty God, not to fabricate them or display them to people.

The method of this short path is to follow the Practices of the Prophet (peace be upon him), perform the religious obligations and give up serious sins. And it is especially to perform the prescribed prayers correctly and with attention, and following them to say the tesbihat.



Points to the First Step:

فَلَا تُزَكُّوْا اَنْفُسَكُمْ

Therefore, do not justify yourselves

Qur'an 53:32

Points to the Second Step:

وَلَا تَكُوْنُوْا كَالَّذِيْنَ نَسُوْا اللّٰهَ فَاَنْسِيَهُمْ اَنْفُسُهُمْ

"And be not like those who forget God, and He therefore makes them forget their own selves"

Qur'an 59:19

Points to the Third Step:

مَاۤ اَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنْ اللّٰهِ وَمَاۤ اَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ

"Whatever good happens to you is from God, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself"

Qur'an 4:79

Points to the Fourth Step:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ اِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

"Everything will perish save His countenance"

Qur'an 28:88

A brief explanation of these Four Steps is as follows:



The First Step

فَلَا تُزَكُّوْا اَنْفُسَكُمْ

"Therefore, do not justify yourselves"

Surah An-Najm 53:32



As the above verse suggests, it is to not purify the soul. For on account of his nature and innate disposition, man:

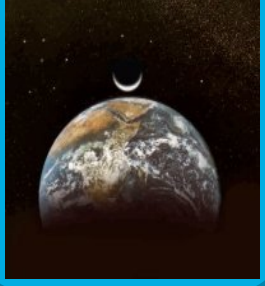
1. **Loves** himself. Indeed, he loves himself before anything else, and only himself.
2. He **sacrifices** everything other than himself to his own soul.
3. He **praises** himself in a manner befitting some object of worship.
4. He **absolves** and **exonerates** himself from faults in the same way.
5. As far as he possibly can, he does not see faults as being appropriate for him, and does not accept them.
6. He **defends** himself passionately as though worshipping himself.
7. **Uses on himself** the members and faculties given him as part of his nature in order to praise and glorify the True Object of Worship. he displays the meaning of the verse:

مَنْ اخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

Who takes as his god his own desires

Surah Al Furqan 25:43 & Surah Al Jathiyah 45:23.

8. He **considers** himself,
9. He **relies** on himself,
10. He **fancies** himself.



وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ
رَبِّي إِنَّ
رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Nor do I absolve my own self of blame, *the human soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord bestows His Mercy: surely My Lord is Oft-Forgiving, Compassionate*

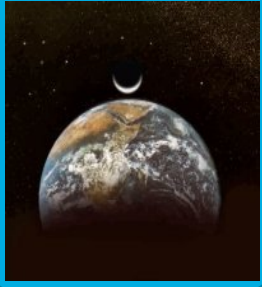
Surah Yusuf 12; 53



Your most harmful enemy is your own soul

So long as an unpurified evil-commanding soul is present in a person and he loves and fancies himself, he will not love anyone else.

Even if he apparently loves them, he will not do so sincerely. Rather, he will love for the benefits and pleasures to be gained and he will try to make himself liked and admired. He will not attribute faults to himself but will defend and exonerate himself like a lawyer.



Praising and absolving himself with exaggerations and even lies, he will quite simply worship himself, and in accordance with the degree of it will receive a slap from the verse,

مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

Who takes as his god his own desires

Surah An-Nur 24; 43



And as for his boasting and trying to make himself liked, it will attract coldness and an unsympathetic reception as a reaction.

Moreover, he will lose sincerity in the aspect of his actions that pertain to the Hereafter, he will mix hypocrisy in with them.



He will be conquered by emotions which do not consider the consequences, nor think of the results, and are addicted to the pleasure of the moment; through the 'fetwa' of feelings which have gone astray, he will languish in prison for a year, because of one hour's pleasure.

He will suffer ten years' punishment on account of one minute's arrogance or revenge.



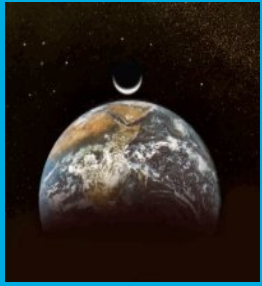
Simply like an idle child who sells his lesson book containing the last thirtieth part of the Qur'an for a single sweet, in order to gratify his senses, indulge in fancies, and satisfy his desires, he will make his good works, which are as valuable as diamonds, the means for egotistical pleasures, which resemble valueless fragments of glass; he will make a loss in what could be profitable.



اَللّٰهُمَّ اَحْفَظْنَا مِنْ شَرِّ النَّفْسِ وَالشَّيْطَانِ وَمِنْ شَرِّ الْجِنِّ وَالْاِنْسَانِ

O Allah! Preserve us from the evil of the soul and Shaytan
and from the evil of jinn and men.

Ameen



Human Soul is prone to Evil

**Self love & unpurified evil-
commanding self**

**Cannot love sincerely but for gain,
pleasure, to be liked & admired**

Result

**Self Worship
& people
reject**

**Loses
sincerity in
action**

**Ruled by his
emotions**

**Defends
himself**

**Makes loss
not profit**



The Cure

Thus, his purification and cleansing at this stage, in this step, is:

- a) Not to purify himself;
- b) Not to absolve himself.



On account of his nature man:

Loves himself

Sacrifices for himself

Praises himself

Absolves & Exonerates himself

Does not see faults as being appropriate for him

Defends himself

Worships himself

Considers himself

Relies on himself

Fancies himself

The Cure

Not to
justify himself

Not to
absolve himself



The Training of Man's Instinctual Soul (Nafs Al Amarra) in the Month of Ramadan

Training the Instinctual Soul (Nafs Al Amarra)

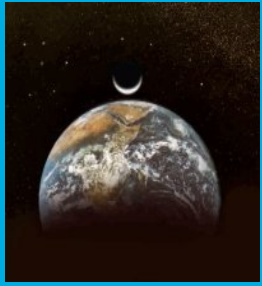
One instance of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan with respect to training the instinctual soul is as follows:



The Nafs Al Amarra wants to be free and independent, and considers itself to be thus. According to the dictates of its nature, it even desires an imaginary dominicality and to act as it pleases.

It does not want to admit that it is being sustained and trained through innumerable bounties.

Especially if it possesses wealth and power in this world, and if heedlessness also encourages it, it will devour God's bounties like a usurping, thieving animal.



Instinctual Soul

Wants:

**To be Free &
Independent**

Desires:

**Imaginary
dominicality**

**To act as it
pleases**

**Denies it
is:**

**Sustained &
trained
through
Bounties**

**If wealth
power &
heedlessness
encourage it:**

**Takes like
thieving
animal**



Thus, in the month of Ramadan, the instinctual soul of everyone, from the richest to the poorest, may understand that it does not own itself, but is totally owned; that it is not free, but is a slave.

It understands that if it receives no command, it is unable to do the simplest and easiest thing; it cannot even stretch out its hand towards water. Its imaginary dominicality is therefore shattered; it performs its worship and begins to offer thanks, its true duty.



Fasting in Ramadan

Nafs Al Amarra of everyone from richest to poorest

Realises

Does not own itself

Totally owned

Is not free

Slave

Is not free to act

Without Command

Result

Imagined dominicality shattered

Begins to worship

Offers thanks – it's real duty



Improving the Conduct of the Nafs Al Amarra & giving up rebellious habits

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan from the point of view of improving the conduct of the instinctual soul and giving up its rebellious habits is as follows:



The human soul forgets itself through heedlessness. It cannot see the utter powerlessness, want, and deficiency within itself and it does not wish to see them.

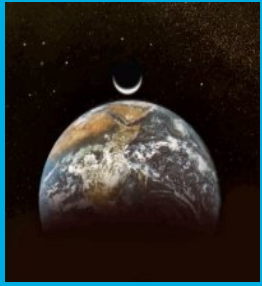
And it does not think of just how weak it is, and how subject to transience and to disasters, nor of the fact that it consists merely of flesh and bones, which quickly decline and are dispersed.



Simply, it assaults the world as though it possessed a body made of steel and imagined itself to be undying and eternal.

It hurls itself onto the world with intense greed and voracity and passionate attachment and love. It is captivated by anything that gives it pleasure or that benefits it.

Moreover, it forgets its Creator Who sustains it with perfect compassion, and it does not think of the results of its life and its life in the hereafter. Indeed, it wallows in dissipation and misconduct.



**Instinctual Souls forgets its nature
as:**

Impotent

Wanting

Deficient

Transient

Made of flesh & bone

Result

**Attacks the
world as if
indestructible**

**Forgets
Sustainer**

**Takes
what it
wants**

**Forgets
consequences
of life &
Hereafter**



However, fasting in the month of Ramadan awakens even the most heedless and obstinate to their weakness, impotence, and want.

By means of hunger, they think of their stomachs; they understand the need therein. They realize how unsound are their weak bodies, and perceive how needy they are for kindness and compassion.



So they abandon the soul's pharaoh-like despotism, and through recognizing their utter impotence and want, perceive a desire to take refuge at the Divine Court. And they prepare themselves to knock at the door of mercy with the hands of thankfulness.

So long as heedlessness has not destroyed their hearts, that is.



Ramadan

Makes the nafs

**Realise it's
impotence & want**

Understand it's need

**Realise weakness
& need of compassion &
kindness**

Result

**Gives up
injustice**

**Desires to take
refuge in
Divine court**

**Prepares to ask for
mercy with thanks**



Shattering the Imaginary Dominicality of the Nafs Al Amarra & making known it's worship through revealing it's impotence

One of the instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan with regard to shattering the instinctual soul's imaginary dominicality and making known its worship through pointing out its impotence is as follows:



The Nafs Al Amarra does not want to recognize its Sustainer; it wants its own lordship, like Pharaoh, however much torment it suffers, that character remains in it. It is however destroyed through hunger.

And so, fasting in Ramadan strikes direct blows at the soul's pharaoh-like front, shattering it. It demonstrates its impotence, weakness, and want. It makes it realize that it is a slave.



Among the narrations of Hadith is the following:

GodAlmighty said to the instinctual soul: 'What am I and what are you?' The soul replied: 'I am myself and You are Yourself.' So He punished it and cast it into Hell, then asked it again. Again it replied: 'I am myself and You are Yourself.' However He punished it, it did not give up its egoism. Finally He punished it with hunger. That is, He left it hungry. Then again He asked it: 'Who am I and who are you?' And the soul replied: 'You are my Compassionate Sustainer and I am your impotent slave.'



In Short:

The Nafs Al Amarra:

1. Does not want to recognize its Sustainer
2. Wants Lordship and this quality stays in it however it suffers

During fasting:

1. The above qualities are destroyed through hunger.
2. Hunger strikes the Nafs' Pharaoh-like front



Fasting shows the lower self it is:

- Impotent
- Weak
- Wanting
- A slave



Second Step

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ

***“And be not like those who forget God, and
He therefore makes them forget their own selves”***

Surah Al Hashr 59:19



As the verse,

"And be not like those who forget God, and He therefore makes them forget their own selves"

teaches, man is:

1. He is **oblivious** of himself, and is not aware of himself.
2. If he thinks of death, it is in relation to others.
3. If he sees transience and decline, he does not attribute them to himself.
4. His evil-commanding soul demands that when it comes to inconvenience and service of others, he forgets himself.
5. When it comes to receiving his recompense, and to benefits and enjoyment, he thinks of himself, and takes his own part fervently.



The Cure

His purification, cleansing, and training at this stage is the reverse of this state. That is to say,

- a) When oblivious of himself, it is not to be oblivious.
- b) To forget himself when it comes to pleasure, and ambition and greed.
- c) To think of himself when it comes to death and service of others.



Man is:

Oblivious of himself

Thinks of death for others

Sees transience and decline only in others

Forgets self in service to others

Thinks of itself in pleasure

Cure

Become Aware of self

Think of death for self

See transience and decline in self

Remember self in service to others

Forget itself in pleasure



Third Step

مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ

“Whatever good happens to you is from God, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself”

Surah An-Nisa 4:79



As the above verse teaches, the nature of the evil-commanding soul demands that:

- * It always considers goodness to be from itself and becomes vain and conceited.**



Thus, in this Step, a person:

1. Sees only faults, defects, impotence, and poverty in himself.
2. Understands that all his good qualities and perfections are bounties bestowed on him by the All Glorious Creator.
3. He gives thanks instead of being conceited, and
4. Offers praise instead of boasting.

According to the meaning of the verse,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا

"Truly he succeeds who purifies it"

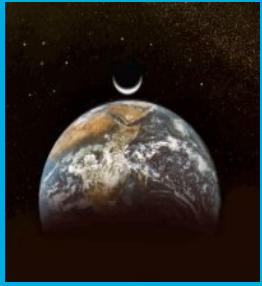
Surah Ash-Shams 91:9



The Cure

His purification at this stage is to know:

- a) His perfection to lie in imperfection.
- b) His power in impotence.
- c) His wealth in poverty.

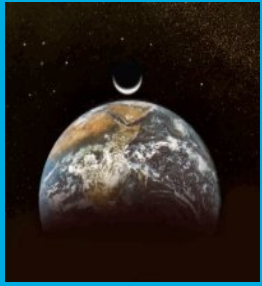


The Evil Commanding Soul

Considers goodness to be from itself

Result

Becomes vain & conceited



At this step man begins to:

Sees faults in itself

Sees good qualities as bounties

Gives thanks

Offers Praises

Cure – To see:

Perfection in
Imperfection

Power in
Impotence

Wealth in Poverty



Fourth Step

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

“Everything will perish save His countenance”

Qur'an 28:88



As the verse above teaches, the evil-commanding soul:

1. Considers itself to be free and independent.
2. That it exists of itself.
3. Because of this, man claims to possess a sort of dominicality.
4. He harbors a hostile rebelliousness towards his True Object of Worship.



Thus, through understanding the following fact, he is saved from this. The fact is this:

According to the apparent meaning of things, which looks to each thing itself, everything is **transitory, lacking, accidental, non-existent**. But according to the meaning that **signifies something other than itself** and in respect of each thing being a **mirror** to the All-Glorious Maker's Names and **charged** with various duties, each is a **witness**, it is **witnessed**, it gives existence and it is **existent**.



The Cure

The purification and cleansing of a person at this stage is as follows:

In his existence he is non-existent, and in his non existence he has existence.



That is to say, if he:

- Values himself and attributes existence to himself, he is in a darkness of non-existence as great as the universe.
- Relies on his individual existence and is unmindful of the True Giver of Existence then he has an individual light of existence like that of a fire-fly and is submerged in an endless darkness of non-existence and separation.



But if he:

- Gives up egotism and
- Sees that he is a mirror of the manifestations of the True Giver of Existence

Then he gains all beings and an infinite existence. For he who finds the Necessary Existent One, the manifestation of Whose Names all beings manifest, finds everything.



The evil-commanding soul

Considers, thinks about carefully and deeply,
judges itself to be free and independent and existing of itself

Result

Man claims dominicality & rebels against Allah

Saved through knowing:

According to Apparent Meaning
signifying itself

Everything is:

Transitory, **lacking, accidental, non-existent**

According to the Meaning
signifying other than itself

Everything is:

**Mirror to Names, has duties & is a witness is
witnessed, gives existence & is existent**



Cure

In his existence he is non-existent, and
in his non-existence he has existence

Meaning if he:

Values & gives existence
to himself

Relies on himself
forgetting Allah

Result

Darkness of non-existence
& separation

Gives up egotism

Sees he is a mirror of
manifestations of Allah

Result

Gains all beings & an infinite
existence



Conclusion

Indeed, this path is shorter, because it consists of four steps. When impotence removes the hand from the soul, it gives it directly to the All-Powerful One of Glory.

Whereas, when the way of ecstatic love, the swiftest way, takes the hand away from the soul, it attaches it to the metaphorical beloved. Only after the beloved is found to be impermanent does it go to the True Beloved.



Also, this path is much safer, because the ravings and high-flown claims of the soul are not present on it.

For, apart from impotence, poverty, and defect, the soul possesses nothing so that it oversteps its mark.



Also, this path is much broader and more universal. For, in order to attain to a constant awareness of God's presence, a person is not compelled to imagine the universe to be condemned to non-existence and to declare:

"There is no existent but He,"

like those who believe in 'the unity of existence,' nor to suppose the universe to be condemned to imprisonment in absolute oblivion and to say,

"There is nothing witnessed but He,"

like those who believe in 'the unity of witnessing.'



Rather, since the Qur'an has most explicit pardoned the universe and released it from execution and imprisonment, one on this path disregards the above, and dismissing beings from working on their own account and employing them on account of the All-Glorious Creator, and in the duty of manifesting the Most Beautiful Names and being mirrors to them, he considers them from the point of view of signifying something other than themselves; and being saved from absolute heedlessness, he enters the Divine presence permanently; he finds a way leading to the Almighty God in everything.



In short....

Dismissing beings from working on account of other beings, this way is to not look at them as signifying themselves.

Man's Self

Looks to itself
(to evil and non-existence)

Looks to other than itself
(to good and existence)

Completely looks to itself

Begins to realize it's state

Justifies itself, does not take, embrace and
rejects responsibility
frees itself from blame

Stops justifying itself,, takes, e
mbraces and accepts
responsibility, stops excusing itself,.

Is not aware of himself, does not think
About Allah, death or service to others

Becomes aware of himself,
Thinks about Allah, death and service to others

Although praising, thanking, seeing bounties of
God & its own faults still attributes them
to itself and becomes vain

Realizes that power, wealth
& perfection lie in their opposites
as a mirror to His Attributes

Looks to the apparent
meaning of things

Looks to the meaning
signifying something else

Sees everything as transitory,
lacking, accidental, non-existent

Sees everything as a mirror, witness,
witnessed gives existence & is existent

Gives himself existence, relies
on himself & forgets Allah

Gives up egotism &
sees that He is a mirror of manifestations

Result

Result

Darkness, non-existence & separation

Gains all beings & an infinite existence