

*The Spiritual Challenge of Human and Environmental Ecology:*

*Living the Trust of Allah*

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***WA ID 'AA SA-ALAKA I'BAADEE A'NNEE FA INNEE QAREEB UJEEBU DA'-  
WATADDAA-I'ID'AA DA-A'ANI FAL-YASTAJEEBOO LEE WAL YOO-MINOO  
BEE LA-A'LLAHUM YARSHUDOON***

**And when My worshippers ask you about Me, so [know that] I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.”** (*Al Baqarah: 186*)

And also in Suratu-l-Baqarah:

***Wa mina-n-naasi mañy-yu<sup>c</sup>jibuka qawluhu fi-l-hayaati-d-dunyaa wa yush-hidu-  
Llaaha <sup>c</sup>alaa maa fee qalbihi wa huwa-laddu-l-khi<sup>ṣ</sup>aaam***

***Wa'idhaa tawallaa sa<sup>c</sup>aa fi-l-'ardi liyufsidea feehaa wa yuhlika-l-hartha wa-n-nasla wa-  
Llaahu laa yu<sup>h</sup>ibbu-l-fasaad<sup>d</sup>***

**“There is the type of man whose speech about this world’s life may dazzle thee, and he calls the God (Allah) to witness about what is in his heart: yet is he the most contentious of enemies? When he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle. But Allah loves not mischief”**

(Al-Baqarah: verses 204 and 205)

An incidence occurred prior to these verses being revealed. A man named Al-Akhnas Ibn Shuriq came to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to embrace

Islam, but as he turned to leave, he happened to pass by a pasture and grazing animals. He set it alight and killed the cattle. The verses were sent down as a sign of Divine disapproval.

This incident recurs over history on a wider scale involving millions of people throughout the earth. The natural wealth deposited by Allah for the benefit of mankind has been spoiled. Selfishness and aggression has overcome mankind, as they have become corrupters of earth, the surrounding atmosphere and neighboring outer space. Allah the Almighty says:

***Dhahara-l-fasaadu fi-l-barri wa-l-bahri bima kasabat aydee-n-naasi liyudhee qahum ba<sup>c</sup>da-lladhee <sup>c</sup>amiluu la<sup>c</sup>allahum yarji<sup>c</sup>uun***

**“Mischievousness has appeared on the land and sea, because of (the need) that the hands of man have earned, that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil).”** (Ar-Rūm: verse 41)

### **The story of creation**

Once upon a time, there was a king. He had a huge kingdom. He was a very fair, good, just, kind, sweet, loving, merciful, and patient king. And all of his subjects loved him. One day, he called all of his subjects to come before him. And they came happily. From each group of creatures, a representative was chosen to stand before the king. This included not just people, but all parts of creation. The mountains chose the strongest mountain to come forward. The skies chose the strongest wind, and so on. When they arrived, the king told them that he had a task, a test, a trust, a difficult undertaking, and he wanted to see who among his subjects would undertake the task.

The task, he told them, was to journey to a faraway land known as the “Land of Forgetfulness.” Anyone who entered that land forgot who they were, where they were from, and even why they came to that land. Even though that land was also a part of his kingdom, the visible signs of the king were concealed there, so that those who entered there became so forgetful and distracted that they forgot their beloved king and that he

had sent them for a task. Only those who were able to look deep into their hearts were able to remember the king and the task that he gave them. Because the forgetfulness was so thick, it was like a fog that clouded their minds. Only those with a firm and deep love for the king were able to travel safely through the mists of this “Land of Forgetfulness” and emerge on the other side of it.

The mountains were asked if they would accept this task, and they trembled, saying that they would be happy to accept any other task, but this one was too difficult, and they could not bear the separation from the other peaks and valleys. The king asked the earth, and the sky, but the ground shook like a great earthquake and feared it would forget the king, that it might forget its own self and forget its purpose. All of the creatures refused this task... except one. The one who accepted the task was, of course, the human being. This human being, as a creation, was made up of all these elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Even to the mountains, sky, rivers, and creatures of the earth, it was a beautiful creation, but a very insignificant creation, compared to the size of the mountains. And compared to the vastness of the sky and the depth of the earth, and the power of the rivers and oceans, it was insignificant.

And on its face was the look of one who, despite its insignificance, had a deep, burning, and yearning love for the king. It stood up and said, “I will do this. I will take your command and do it.” The king said, “This task is very difficult. It is not enough that you alone agree to it. But all of the human beings have to agree to it.” He ordered all of the human beings to be brought before Him, there were rows and rows of human beings, covering the land with vast numbers. And he made a covenant with them. He asked them, “Am I not your Rabb (Lord?)” And in one voice, they said, “Yes.” The king knew the difficulty they were facing, and told them a secret before they began their journey. Then he caused them to descend into the Land of Forgetfulness, a few at a time, because their numbers were very vast. As they entered the land, it was as if they became newborn babies who didn’t remember where they came from, or why they were there, or even the fact that they had a king.

As of this date, some of these human beings have finished their journey. Some are

still on their journey in the Land of Forgetfulness. Others haven't yet entered the land. Very few of them remember the king. Most have forgotten. Some have forgotten so completely that they don't believe there ever was a king, even if someone tells them this story.

Some people who hear this story, think it is just a story. But it is history. It is our story. It is the story which begins with our birth and ends with our death. We know who the king is. The Land of Forgetfulness is the world we live in. The journey is the one from birth to death. The covenant is our *amanat*/covenant with Allah, as it says in Qur'an:

*Innaa 'aradnaa-l-'amaanata 'alaa-s-samaawaati wa-l-'ardi wa-l-jibaali fa-abayna ańy-yahmilnaaa wa ashfaq<sup>a</sup>na minhaa wa hamalahaal-'ińsaanu innahu kaana dhaluumań jahuulaa*

**“We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof. But man undertook it.”**[33:72]

Allah says, **“When the Lord drew forth from the children of Adam all their descendants and asked them to bear witness concerning themselves and their own souls, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord who cherishes and sustains you?’ And they responded, ‘Yes, to this we bear witness.’ This [lest] we will say on the Day of Return, ‘Of this, we were ignorant.’”** [7:172]

And the king's secret? **"He (Allah) is with you wherever you are."** [57:4] The king isn't absent. He is not in another part of the kingdom. He is with us, but we are blind. He speaks to us, but we don't hear. For those who fulfill the trust and who awaken within themselves the remembrance of this covenant, this trust, for them is an exalted station. Allah (swt) says, **“He loves them and they love Him. For this is Allah's face. He gives of it to whom He pleases.”** [5:54]

Allah created this earth and created us in a beautiful form, as it is said. And told us in Qur'an, ... *wa ańsiń kamaa ańsana-Llaahu ilayka...* **“Do what is beautiful, good, as**

**Allah has done what is beautiful to you.”** [28:77] He has made us beautiful in form. Because of this, we have an obligation to behave in a beautiful way in our lives, in our relationship to the world, to the planet, to one another; and by doing this, we will be acting in accordance with the form and nature that Allah (swt) created us with. When someone behaves in this way, we say they have achieved Islam. There is a harmonization with what was created, our actions, and the depths of our understanding; a harmonization of the inner and the outer; the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*.

### **We are part of the system**

Islam doesn't separate the inner from the outer; it is a total integrative system. That's why there is no separation of religion and state in Islam, why there is emphasis on the community as a whole, and repeating patterns of prayer in *jamah*, together, because we are all interconnected and interdependent. Yet when we begin to realize the essence of our relatedness, we find that we are really *intra*-connected and *intra*-related. For the one who sees and hears and understands, there is only Allah (swt)—a totally self contained system of attributes, signs, forms and dimensions of consciousness and harmony.

All the issues we are faced with today: poverty, food security, war, genocide, depletion of natural resources, exist because of an internal and external imbalance and disharmony. As we disrupt the environment, we cause harm to ourselves, as our internal states and societies become corrupted, the environment is also corrupted and destroyed. When we look at the environmental and social issues of today, what we're facing is a distortion of values. Until we correct the inner issues, any efforts we make to address the external issues will only be making a surface correction at best, giving rise to other problems, at the worst. This is not philosophy. It's the real expression of the names and attributes of Allah: it is the system that is Allah (swt). What we encounter every moment is creation responding, i.e. the response of Allah (swt) to our choices.

We need to think in another way. Do not think—despite the metaphor in the story I just told—that Allah (swt) is a human-like king sitting on a throne somewhere dictating orders to unseen forces that influence our lives; rather think that everything is part of an

integrative dynamic responsive system; an organized consciousness reflected over and over again in the *‘ālam ul khalq*, the world of creation. The universes that Allah (swt) is, the Rabbi ul *‘Ālamīn*, consists of the dimensions of atoms, chromosomes, genes, cells, organs and the totality of our bodies, our social structures, i.e. cultures, races, communities, villages, nations comprise our world—all reflective of the same pattern. Our planet is part of an integrative system of the solar system, which is part of a galaxy, which is part of innumerable galaxies that comprise just one infinite Universe. It is an endlessly integrated dynamic and responsive system that, even in its totality or parts, is still less than the whole. Even with all that, the Creator, Allah (swt) is greater than that, Allah Hu Akbar.

In science classes, we are taught that if you look deeply at the wall, the floor, etc. all reflect the same universal Reality. Seen in an electron microscope, the same internally consistent, ever-repeating system exists eternally. You may remember the film shown in school called “Factors of Ten.” We have to understand that the *dhāhir* and *bātin* are two aspects of the same whole. Our responsibility is to find the harmony and the balance; to affirm and fulfill our role and relationships in the system.

As we begin to understand this interconnected system in which human ecology and environmental balance are linked, we will also begin to understand that destructive human forces, environmentally and ecologically, are less a problem of resources and resource utilization than they are a result of attitude and character. Character determines will and choices, *irāda* and *niyyah*. Because we are all part of the same unified system, our attitudes effect the environment. The destruction of natural resources, through choices, whether they are war or economic exploitation, greed or short-sightedness, (selfishness) has profound results on human psychology, health, relationships, and well-being.

When we start to look from this deeper unified perspective of the human and physical ecology of the planet and environment, we begin to understand that the ecological and environmental degradation that we are experiencing in the world today has a great deal to do with human attitudes and values. And by extension (or reduction) we

can say the same thing about our own health and our own well-being, and our own responses to the environment.

### **Domination vs. Dominion**

When we look at the state of our environment, how can we see the deterioration of our environment as anything but a complete crisis in values and ethics? How can we not question the way Western civilization has manifest its development goals (if there are any articulated goals)? How can we ignore the conclusion that modern science and modern technology has placed us on a dual track of progress and self destruction? How can we not see that the capacity of this creation is reflective of the human capacity for good and evil?

The human technological *jihad* has been to “tame” and master the forces of nature. But to have dominion over creation as Allah’s *khalifas* is not the same as self-serving domination, squandering this gift of Allah (swt). The names and attributes of Allah (swt) that are exemplified in nature, that nature praises through its harmony, beauty, majesty and provisions, are our physical pathway to understanding our role in life and our relationship with our Creator.

As we sit here today we can say with authority that Western civilization has led the way in dominating and taming nature, and in developing the tools and justification for this dominance and exploitation. At the same time, Westerners are now, ironically, at the forefront of questioning the moral and ethical motivators for the ecological and environmental crises that we are facing.

Most importantly, I believe that we, as Muslims have, not only the greater moral and ethical obligation, but also the tools to seek answers to the issues we face today. We have this obligation specifically because, throughout our history and as a result of our practices, we are committed to awareness and to developing consciousness. We are committed to understanding and accepting the integral relationship between our inner state, the values of our societies, and the state of our physical world. We understand that human beings, because of the trust we have accepted from Allah (swt), have the key to

sustainability of the planet and conscious awareness of Allah. *Wa huwa-lladhee ja'alakum khalaaa'ifa-l-'ardi wa rafa'a* “**And it is He who has made you viceregents on Earth...**” [6:165] And as the Prophet (sal) said, “*The world is green and beautiful and God has appointed you as His stewards over it. He sees how you acquit yourselves.*” (Muslim)

### Walk Gently on the Earth

As Muslims and Sufis, we understand that by preserving and sustaining environmental well-being, we are also building or re-building and reinforcing a foundation for personal well-being and happiness. Preserving and conserving the resources of the planet is a means of preserving the values, standards and ethical basis for future generations. The deterioration of the latter is manifest in the deterioration and destruction of the former. Allah says in Qur'an,

*Wa 'ibaadu-r-Rahmaani-lladheena yamshuuna 'alaa-l-'ardi hawnañw-wa'idhaa khaatabahumu-l-jaahiluuna qaaluu salaamaa*

**“The faithful servants of the Beneficent are those who tread upon the earth gently.”**  
[25:63]

How can we walk lightly upon the earth? Analogically we can walk with humility (*tawādu'*) modesty, *mutawādi*...unpretentious, simple, insignificant... We can act in a directed way, without pretension, working in apparently insignificant ways to make significant contributions to the quality of life. We can be humble, understanding that we are temporary dwellers here, that this is Allah's creation, not ours. **“It is Allah who causes the seed-grain and the fruit-kernel to split and sprout. It is He who brings forth the living from the dead, and the dead from the living. How is it, then, that you are still in a delusion?”** [6:95]

Muslims today can grasp, from a Qur'anic point of view, what many people have been trying to talk about in secular terms: reducing or lightening our ecological footprint. We understand this through principles like gentility/*latīfat* and *hilm* (dream, patience,

and mildness), and *adab*/respectful behaviour, *sakīna*/tranquility and serenity; and *khair*, emotional strength—these are the characteristics of people who walk gently upon the earth.

These characteristics also happen to be, as was planned by our Creator, the characteristics of highly spiritually advanced human beings; of those who are content, trusting in Allah (swt) and trustworthy. These are characteristics of people who are not arrogant; people who, in their humility, would never countenance or seek or permit *fasad*/spiritual desolation and destruction in the land; people who would not impose their will on others for self aggrandizing principles; people who would never presume to force their will or dominate the earth out of a sense of superiority.

Razi said it this way: *“Don’t impose yourself on the earth out of a false sense of superiority.”* Those who destroy or rape and pillage the earth are the same ones who rape and pillage people. Those who wantonly destroy are the same ones who commit genocide. The ones who rob and steal are the ones who acquire the resources of others illegally and immorally, or through economic leverage. Those who are indifferent to the state of humankind are indifferent to the state of the earth. Those who cannot restrain or account for themselves are bad accountants when it comes to the resources of this world in restraining their greed and lust for power or for the resource. They feel they need to account to no one because they have power. They don’t feel they have to account for their actions before Allah, either. And they act as if they are the owner of all the resources, no matter what the boundaries are, no matter what the results are. Allah says, ***“Inna akramakum ‘iñda-Llaahi atqaakum inna-Llaaha ‘aleemun khabeer . Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that who has At-Taqwa. Verily, Allah is All-knowing, All-Aware.”*** [49:13]

An extreme example of this kind of lack of *taqwa* can be found in a recent Newsweek article on “The Extinction Trade,” which pointed out that much of today’s the trade in endangered species sustains organized crime and genocidal militias.

Janjaweed militias, armed with AK-47s began arriving and the slaughter began.

...some 20 horse-mounted militiamen do the killing, the poachers then remove the

rhino horns, which are prized as dagger handles in the Middle East. As of last year there were two rhinos left in Garamba, a death sentence for that population... Ultimately, the blame for a wildlife trade that sustains organized crime and genocidal militias lies with the buyers (Newsweek, March 10, 2008).

### **We need look no farther than ourselves**

When we look at the state of humankind we see these kinds of critical breakdowns and breeches in mental and emotional stability; we see disconnects between values, ethics, and actions. We see a deteriorating of responsibility, compassion, patience and tolerance among so much more. Most importantly, we see a lack of humility a lack of *taqwa*. As it says in Qur'an: **“Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of the evil wrought by the hands of people, so that He may make them taste some of what they have done, [and] so they may turn back”** [30:41].

I have often said that we have come to believe (vis a vis our acts against God's creation and creatures) that we humans are the fashioners of this creation and that in fact we “create God in whatever image we wish” – instead of God creating us from His Will...*tasawwur* (idea , image ) in His image (*sūrah*).

Hence, each *sūrah* is a representation of an aspect of the Creator's imagination. Each portion of all that is created, like a hologram, contains all the information of the total picture...however...Allahu Akbar...Allah is greater than that. Allah created the universe with a single command: “Be!” **“*Yaquulu lahu kuñ fa-yakuun.* That is how God creates what He wills. When He decrees a thing, He says “Be,” and it is.”** (Al `Imran 3:47).

When we search for the cause of all this degradation of the environment and of society's values we need look no farther than ourselves. As we have been able to disregard ethics and morals in our treatment to each other, why should we not realize that we have also totally disregarded our responsibilities to the environment and ecological harmony of the world that we live in and need to sustain us?

We have to look at how modern-day economics fuels the addictions and corruptions of our society, not just to drugs or alcohol, but to forms of entertainment and pastimes that are fairly senseless. We have to look at how people drug themselves with the rhythms of modern society, whether it's in a club until 3:00 in the morning or some other mindless club like sitting in front of a television set or computer, hour upon hour in submission to interconnected faces, relationships that have little if any meaning or sustainability. Empty words, empty friendships, empty talk... We look at our society and see people who are so "dumbed down" that they walk around as if they have already died—and I don't mean in a spiritual sense of "die before you die."

With various justifications, science and technology become the driving force for exploitation of resources and choices that reflect greed and torpor, ease and luxury; with wanton disregard for moral responsibility. As counter intuitive as it is to destroy the very basis of ones survival, it is, never the less, the pattern today. As counter productive as it is to uses resources for more and more personal gain (i.e. better fuel and mileage means more and more cars on more and more highways heavier footprint) it is part of today's 'dominance' theory; or shall I say theology? **“Do they not learn a lesson from the chronicles of history; and see they not how many a nation We have made extinct in the past? They were people whom We had established on the earth even with more power and prosperity than We have established you. We had showered on them celestial bliss and earthy affluence. Yet, when they became iniquitous, We toppled them down and raised new civilizations in their wake. [6:6]**

What is most disturbing for us, as Muslims, is that Islam has never been an advocate or guide for such action. As Muslims, we should know better. Qur'an says: **“Oh Children of Adam! Beautify yourselves [for worship] in every place of prostration and eat and drink but do not be extravagant. Surely He does not love the extravagant.” [7:31]** There are over thousands of references to nature and creation in the Qur'an, and over 6,000 admonitions and guidance's concerning our relationship with nature, creation, and each other. But when we look at the social and ethical realities of today, we see an attitude of entitlements, arrogance, and domination of people and

resources. There is a philosophy of forced submission to a scientific and technological paradigm that promulgates endless greed and exclusivity. This degradation reaches down into every element of society and virtually every family—just as pollutants in the water system effect everyone.

Everything we see outwardly is reflected inwardly. As we can become more and more aware of the environmental and ecological crises it has to become obvious to us, and the people of the world, that we are looking at internal degradation and moral and ethical crises. As we work very hard to overcome the environmental and global issues, we must work to overcome the inner issues that drive the selfish, egoistic, self-aggrandizing and ethically corrupt inner choices.

It is true that we will go to our graves not seeing the end of either process, but we must remember that Allah is merciful and that effort to change is something the System can respond to. Allah's response can be a major paradigm shift in consciousness and in social welfare, truly 'green' technology. The *greening of the planet* is the *spiritual greening of our soul*.

### **The Sanctity of nature in Islam**

The sanctity of nature is emphasized again and again in the Qur'an and Hadith. The Prophet (sal) is reported to have said, "***All creatures are God's dependants and the most beloved to God among them is he who does good to God's dependents.***" (Kashf al-Khafa')

The history of environmental concern and conservation is noteworthy. Muslim scholars have developed legislation regarding animal rights, bodies of water, forests, wildlife, land use, city growth, overgrazing and other aspects of earth's finite resources and their management. Islamic law requires the establishment of areas within which development is prohibited to safeguard natural resources. These areas could border canals, wells, rivers, to protect aquifers and water from pollution. Most forests are designated as wilderness areas where trees cannot be logged. Responsible

grazing is fundamental to Islamic environmental law. Pasture woodland, wildlife and forest cannot be privately owned or monopolized. They are public property, to be managed by the state for the common good of all. (Sillur Rahim, Hasan. *Ecology in Islam: protection of the Web of Life a duty for Muslims*. October 2001, p65)

Today, in our gathering here, we find that as some *are* coming back to recognizing the sanctity of creation and the sanctity of human life, as it is expressed in Islam. As we begin to uncover, not only the problems, but also the solutions, *insh'Allah*, we will begin again to awaken to the one Truth, Allah (swt), the *Tawhid* that is the real Reality, today. We must learn to remember, in the Land of Forgetfulness, so that we can begin to see the signs and remember who and where we are, and why.

Why the Islamic world, up to now, has remained mostly silent on this subject could be a book, let alone a series of lectures. The rise of tyrants, the allurements of Westernization, the inability to redirect science and technology toward the true service of Allah (swt) and His creation, are but a few of the chapters this “book” might include.

Islam stands in the historical line of Judaism and Christianity, but it is far different, theologically and philosophically, with regard to our role and purpose vis a vis the creation. It's clear that, from an Islamic point of view, *spiritual* awareness must be at the core of environmental efforts. As Muslims, our relationship with creation is at the core of our spiritual journey. Everything in Islam is interconnected and inter dependent and inter related—quite different than the biblical world view. In Islam our body is a physical manifestation of the elements of creation, as our soul is of the world of command. We have to interact with nature as guardians, in a way that is worthy of our capability and intelligence and not be satisfied with just responding according to our desires and needs. We are created with emotions and sense of right (*fitra*) so that we may feel the responsibility, the burden, the weight of the trust we have been given.

People can feel the weight of responsibility of poor animals in cages in experimental laboratories, or people can feel responsibility for the glaciers, whales or dolphins; or for global warming. *Alhamdulillah*; but we have to equally feel the

responsibility for what's happening with our *nafs ammāra*, internally. We can't just substitute care and concern for the outer as a replacement for attentiveness, integrity of the inner environment, of our human spiritual ecology. [They] are inextricably linked. Because Allah gave us this knowledge, intelligence, and self-awareness, we should act as befits the station we were created to fill.

If we do that, then Allah (swt) will increase His *fadl*, and *na'ima*; and give us the *rizq* we need to live a fulfilled and fulfilling life. If we feel motivated by what we see concerning the environment then we should ask our self why we do not feel equally motivated about what we would see if we turned our attention inward to our own habits, thoughts, actions, words. If we truly desire the harmony that is inherent in the system, the balance that Allah created all this creation out of, the grace and the blessing of life here and hereafter, then we must maintain a balanced life.

For this to happen we must seek and find within ourselves the buried resources of the names and attributes of Allah (swt) and utilize them; for they, if utilized with sincerity and humility, in the service of others, *fi sabil illah*, are *truly* renewable resources—the resource of the names of Allah amplified in us as they are expressed by us. *More* than a renewable resource, the attributes are increased within us.

### **Humility and Consciousness are the keys the open the door**

As I come toward my conclusion, I wish to draw your attention to the key to addressing the inner and outer, the spiritual and the ecological crises we are faced with.

Humility and being conscious and aware of the Divine presence are the real keys that open the door of the *na'ima* of Allah and the *fadl* of Allah. This is the key that balances the inner and repairs the outer: humility, and awareness of our significance and insignificance in the system that is Creation.

Let us not forget our place in creation, as it says in Qur'an.

***Lakhalqu-s-samaawaati wa-l-'ardi akbaru min khalqi-n-naasi wa laakinna akthara-n-naasi laa ya'lamuun***

**“Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of people, but most of the people do not know.” (40:57)**

There is a reflection of this lesson in humility in nature: have you ever noticed that the heaviest and most beautiful and best developed fruit is the humblest fruit? It pulls the branches down so the tree itself bends in humility to the Creator that gave it the ability to bear that fruit.

Allah talks in Qur’an about the opposite of that humility in Sura Ya Seen, **“And of those who turn away, We have put yokes around their necks right up to their chins so that their heads are forced up.”** Lack of humility binds a person to their own weaknesses and faults and makes a person someone who cannot correct their own hearts, someone who doesn’t have *shukr*/gratitude for the mercy of Allah.

How does one develop humility? The root of being humble lies in the awareness of the majesty and the beauty of Allah (swt), and the absolute purity of his attributes. It lies in our realization of our covenant with Allah (swt) as the *khalifas* of the *amanat*. We can see this majesty and beauty every day in the creation, in nature, even in each other.

We are not perfect, so of course arrogance and mistakes will be there. But we have to make the intention to have humility. By making that intention and having the will, humility comes. Strength of will is developed by your piety. And humility is developed by a great desire to be free of selfish desires and the selfish aspects of willfulness.

So Allah places us in this world, and we are tested with difficulties and we are tested with blessings. We are tested with failures and we are tested with successes. Every one of those tests is a teaching that, *insh’Allah*, will bring out, the best in us. Each one is a blessing that will help us understand our role and our purpose. In a way, you can see that our existence is a continuum of trials and blessings, followed by a promise of endless happiness and contentment.

Allah’s presence can be thought of as this dynamic system of balance and harmony; of blessings, tests, and trials; of gifts, of peace, and of vengeance. Those who keep their attention focused and are careful with their relationship with Allah (swt)

discover that He will pour out His blessings from the earth and from the heavens to such people.

To walk on the *siratal mustaqim* means to really cultivate a consciousness of Allah that is based on humility. [It means] to guard that humility and simplicity; that attitude, so that when we act, we act automatically in that way; and our actions are indicative of a person who is humble and sincere.

### **Change ourselves and we can change the world**

In conclusion, I will say this: the Sufi knows that the way to change the world and to change ourselves is to make the internal character of the human being the primary concern of life—not the rules and the laws of success and ambitions, but make your character the focus of your life. If you do that, and you understand how to change your character, then you'll be changing the character and values of your society also, and by so doing, addressing the internal and external environment we all live in.

We know that one way of becoming aware of our internal state is to see the effect of our actions externally. So we have this amazing and blessed opportunity to approach Allah (swt) from both directions: as the *khalifa* of His creation and as the seeker of inner peace and truth.

This is not something that happens over night, or something you can see or taste the rewards of easily or quickly, though some people do get that kind of response. But the slow, persevering process of change reflects the slow, clear, and well-planned out creation we are a part of. Yet we see that nature is also very flexible and very forgiving. That's part of the slow developmental process, too. Nature is not impetuous. Plant an acorn and it will not be a giant, shade-giving oak tree tomorrow; you will not be able to see the movement of its growth, and you may not live to see its maturity, but slowly and gradually it is persevering toward the sun. If you go step by step, moving along at the proper rate, not stopping, then the character gets changed and the environment is renewed.

How difficult is this task? It is a lifelong task, but it is the task given to us by Allah, the task we accepted before we came to the Land of Forgetfulness. And it is a task in which patience and perseverance are rewarded. As the Prophet (sal) said: ***“Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded.”***

Ali ibn Abi Talib once said, *“Rise up from here and go to the Garden of Faith. Enter and take some roots from the tree of sorrow, a few leaves from the tree of contemplation with seeds of humility and the fruits of understanding, a small measure of the branches of certainty and the kernels of sincerity with the bark of strenuous effort, with some of the stems of turning away from wrong action, with the strong medicine of modesty. Blend it with the sense, with a heart full of concentration and understanding filled by the fingers of confirmation and the palms of success. Pour it in the basin of inquiry and wash it with the water of your tears. Then take it all and put it into the kettle of hope, bring it to a boil with the fire of your longing to the point that the superficial, superfluous elements and the dregs and sediment might be separated. Then you obtain the juice and cream of wisdom. Then put it in the plate of contentment and submission, blow on it with the gentle breeze of your supplication for His forgiveness, cool it so that it will not be spoiled, so that this elixir might be made wholesome. Then drink it in a place where no man can be found and where only Allah can see you (Haeri, p.117).”*

**RABBANAA MAA KHALAOTA HAAD’AA BAAT’TILAA SUBH’AANAKA**

**O our lord, You have not created (all) this in vain. Glory be to You**

**WA NUNAZZILU MINAL QUR-AANI MAA HUWA SHIFAA-UNW WA**

**RAH’MATUL LILMOOMINEENA WA LAA YAZEEDUZ’ Z’AALIMEENA**

**ILLAA KHASAARAA**

**O my Allah, You (always) bestow benefits on me. You give me (many) grants, so O my Allah, now give me Your grant today again, for verily You are the most capable and all powerful.**