

JIHAD AL-NAFS (FIGHTING THE EGO)

Shafi`i said, may God have mercy on him:

"Only the sincere one (mukhlis) knows hypocrisy (riya')." This means that it is impossible to know the reality of hypocrisy and see its hidden shades except for one who resolutely seeks (arada) sincerity. That one strives for a long time (yajtahidu azmanan) searching and meditating and examining at length within himself until he knows or knows something of what hypocrisy is. This does not happen for everyone. Indeed, this happens only with the special ones (al-khawass). But for a given individual to claim that he knows what hypocrisy is, this is real ignorance on his part.

I shall mention in this book a chapter, God willing, in which you will see a type of wonder that will cool your eyes. To illustrate the great extent of the concealment of hypocrisy we only need relate the following from the Teacher and Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri [the sufi shaykh], may God have mercy on him, from his 'Risala' with our isnad previously mentioned.

He said:"I heard Muhammad ibn al-Husayn say: I heard Ahmad ibn `Ali ibn Ja`far say: I heard al-Hasan ibn `Alawiyya say: Abu Yazid [al-Bistami], may God be well pleased with him, said: I was for twelve years the blacksmith of my ego (haddadu nafsi), then for five years I became the mirror of my heart (mir'atu qalbi), then for a year I looked at what lay between the two of them and I saw around me a visible belt [i.e. of kufr = the vestimentary sign of a dhimmi]. So I strove to cut it for twelve years and then looked again, and I saw around me a hidden belt. So I worked to cut it for five years, looking to see how to cut. Then it was unveiled for me (kushifa li) and I looked at creation and saw that they were all dead. So I recited the funeral prayer over them."

I say: That hypocrisy should be as inscrutable as this to the peerless master in this path [i.e. tasawwuf] is enough to show how greatly hidden it lies. His phrase: "I saw them dead" is the apex of worth and beauty, and seldom do other than the Prophet's words, Blessings and Peace be upon him, gather up such wealth of meanings. I shall touch upon its meaning briefly. It means that after he had struggled long and hard (lamma jahada hadhihi al-mujahada) and his ego had been disciplined (tahadhdhabat) and his heart illumined (istanara qalbuhu), and when he had conquered (istawla) his ego and subdued it (qaharaha) and achieved complete mastery over it (malakaha mulkan tamman), and it had subjected

himself to him totally, at that time he looked at all created beings and found that they were dead and completely powerless:

1. they cannot harm nor can they benefit;
2. they cannot give nor can they keep back;
3. they cannot give life nor can they give death;
4. they cannot convey nor can they cut off;
5. they cannot bring near nor can they take away;
6. they cannot make happy nor can they make sad;
7. they cannot bestow nor can they deprive;
8. they possess for themselves neither benefit nor harm,
9. nor death, nor life, nor resurrection.

This, then, characterizes human beings as dead: they are considered dead in all of the above respects, they are neither feared nor entreated, what they have is not coveted, they are not shown off to nor fawned upon, one does not concern oneself with them, they are not envied nor disparaged, their defects are not mentioned nor their faults pursued and exposed, one is not jealous of them nor thinks much of whatever God-given favors they have received, and they are forgiven and excused for their shortcomings, although the legal punishments (al-hudud) are applied to them according to the Law. But the application of such punishment does not preclude what we have mentioned before, nor does it preclude our endeavoring to cover up their faults without disparaging them in the least.

This then is how the dead are viewed. And if someone mentions human beings in a dishonorable manner we forbid him from entering into that subject in the same way that we would if he were going to examine a person who died. We do not do anything for their sake nor do we leave Him for them. And we no more stop ourselves from fulfilling an act of obedience to God on their account than we do on account of a dead person, and we do not over-praise them. And we neither love their own praise for us nor hate their insults, and we do not reciprocate them.

In sum, they are as it were non-existent in all the respects we have mentioned. They are under God's complete care and jurisdiction. Whoever deals with them in such a way, he has

combined the good of the next world with that of the lower world. May God the Generous grant us success towards achieving this. These few words are enough to touch upon an explanation for his [Abu Yazid al-Bistami's] saying -- May God be well pleased with him.

Imam Hujjatul Islam Al Ghazzali (Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Ahmad Al Ghazzali, 450 – 505 H)

a) Meaning of nafs: It has two meanings. First, it means the powers of anger and sexual appetite in a human being... and this is the usage mostly found among the people of tasawwuf [sufis], who take "nafs" as the comprehensive word for all the evil attributes of a person. That is why they say: one must certainly do battle with the ego and break it (la budda min mujahadat al-nafs wa kasriha), as is referred to in the hadith: A`da `aduwuka nafsuka al-lati bayna janibayk [Your worst enemy is your nafs which lies between your flanks. Al-`Iraqi says it is in Bayhaqi on the authority of Ibn `Abbas and its chain of transmission contains Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Ghazwan, one of the forgers].

The second meaning of nafs is the soul, the human being in reality, his self and his person. However, it is described differently according to its different states. If it assumes calmness under command and has removed from itself the disturbance caused by the onslaught of passion, it is called "the satisfied soul" (al-nafs al-mutma'inna)... In its first meaning the nafs does not envisage its return to God because it has kept itself far from Him: such a nafs is from the party of shaytan. However, when it does not achieve calmness, yet sets itself against the love of passions and objects to it, it is called "the self-accusing soul" (al-nafs al-lawwama), because it rebukes its owner for his neglect in the worship of his master... If it gives up all protest and surrenders itself in total obedience to the call of passions and shaytan, it is named "the soul that enjoins evil" (al-nafs al-ammara bi al-su')... which could be taken to refer to the ego in its first meaning.

b) God has armed soldiers which He has placed in the hearts and the souls and others of His worlds, and none knows their true nature and actual number except He... [He proceeds to explain that the limbs of the body, the five senses, will, instinct, and the emotive and intellectual powers are among those soldiers.] Know that the two soldiers of anger and sexual passion can be guided by the heart completely... or on the other hand disobey and rebel against it completely, until they enslave it. Therein lies the death of the heart and the termination of its journey towards eternal happiness. The heart has other soldiers: knowledge (`ilm), wisdom (hikma) and reflection (tafakkur) whose help it seeks by right, for they are the Party of God against the other two who belong to the party of shaytan...

God says: "Have you seen the one who chooseth for his god his own lust?" (25:43) and "He followed his own lust. Therefor his likeness is as the likeness of a dog; if thou attackest him he panteth with his tongue out, and if thou leavest him he panteth with his tongue out" (7:176) and about the person who controlled the passion of his ego God says: "But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, Lo! The garden will be his home" (79:40-41).

Know that the body is like a town and the intellect of the mature human being is like a king ruling that town. All the forces of the external and internal senses he can muster are like his soldiers and his aides. The ego that enjoins evil (nafs ammara), that is, lust and anger, is like an enemy that challenges him in his kingdom and strives to slaughter his people. The body thus becomes like a garrison-town or sea-outpost, and the soul like its custodian posted in it. If he fights against his enemies and defeats them and compels them to do what he likes, he will be praised when he returns to God's presence, as God said: "Those who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives. Allah hath conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a rank above the sedentary" (4:95).

c) The thoughts that stir one's desire are of two kinds... praiseworthy, and that is called "inspiration" (ilham), and blameworthy, and that is called "whispering" (waswasa)... The heart is owned mutually by a shaytan and an angel... The angel stands for a creature which God has created for the overflowing of benefit, the bestowal of knowledge, the unveiling of truth, the promise of reward, and the ordering of the good... The shaytan stands for a creature whose business is to be against all this... Waswasa against ilham, shaytan against angel, success (tawfiq) against disappointment (khidhlan).

The Prophet (s) said: "There are two impulses in the soul, one from an angel which calls towards good and confirms truth; whoever finds this let him know it is from God and praise Him. Another impulse comes from the enemy which leads to doubt and denies truth and forbids good; whoever finds this, let him seek refuge in God from the accursed devil." Then he recited the verse: "The devil shows you fear of poverty and enjoins evil upon you" (2:268) [Tirmidhi: hasan; Nisa'i; `Iraqi did not weaken it].

Hasan al-Basri said: "Two thoughts roam over the soul, one from God, one from the enemy. God shows mercy on a servant who settles at the thought that comes from Him. He embraces the thought that comes from God, while he fights against the one from his enemy. To illustrate the heart's mutual attraction between these two powers the Prophet (s) said: "The heart of a believer lies between two fingers of the Merciful" [Muslim, Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah]... The fingers stand for upheaval and hesitation in the heart... If man follows the dictates of anger and appetite, the dominion of shaytan appears in him through

idle passions [hawa] and his heart becomes the nesting-place and container of shaytan, who feeds on hawa. If he does battle with his passions and does not let them dominate his nafs, imitating in this the character of the angels, at that time his heart becomes the resting-place of angels and they alight upon it...

The Prophet (s) said: "There is none among you in whom there is not a devil" They said: "Even in you, O Messenger of God?!" He said: "Even in me, but God helped me to overcome him and he has submitted to me, so he doesn't order anything except good" [Muslim]... The mutual repelling of the soldiers of the angels and the devils is constant in the battle over the heart, until the heart is conquered by one of the two sides which sets up its nation and settles there... And most hearts have been seized by the soldiers of shaytan, who fill them with the whispers that call one to love this passing world and disregard the next.

d) The Prophet (s) said: al-mujahidu man jahada nafsahu fi ta`at Allah `azza wa jall [The fighter against unbelief is he who fights against his ego in obeying God; Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hibban, Tabarani, Hakim, etc.]... Sufyan al-Thawri said: "I never dealt with anything stronger against me than my own ego; it was one time with me, and one time against me"... Yahya ibn Mu`adh al-Razi said: "Fight against your ego with the four swords of training: eat little, sleep little, speak little, and be patient when people harm you... Then the ego will walk the paths of obedience, like a fleeing horseman in the field of battle."

Imam Hakeem At Tarmidzi Abu Abdullah Muhammad Bin Ali Bin AL Hassan Bin Basyar. (born early 3rd Century H)

I. Concerning the Murid (seeker) and What Helps or Hurts Him in His Journey to God Most High, and What His First Step Ought to Be

There are two types of murid:

Those that seek God's Grace by worshipping Him, fulfilling His commands and avoiding His prohibitions, then turning to perform as many voluntary good works as they can, seeking through them salvation from the fire and attainment of the rewards He has prepared for His workers.

Others approach God in worship, fulfill His commands and avoid His prohibitions, then turn to examine their inner self, and they find in their hearts many diseases, such as love of the world (dunya), lust for power, honor, and greatness, greed, the furnace of desires (shahawat), the chatter of vain passions (hawa), ambition, envy, love of praise and compliments--all of them worldly bonds blinding the heart.

Such a heart can never find the way to God bearing those stains, because in loving the world

he parts with His Lord. He is in love with something God has removed far from Himself and despised. To ask for greatness is to compare oneself with God Most High; in the furnace of desires one faces the greatest seductions; and in the chatter of vain passions lies tyranny itself and aversion to the rights of God the Lord of Might and Majesty. That heart is veiled from wisdom and from the understanding of how God disposes His affairs.

Such a person is a prisoner of his ego (asir an-nafs). He performs obligations while attached to the world, he avoids prohibitions while attached to the world, and he generally worships God at his own convenience. This is a servant who must try to found upon sincerity every matter, every action, and every moment, by working on his ego.

Whoso desires the reward of God the Lord of Might and Majesty, let him keep to this battle, and let him be sincere in every matter in order to purify his worship.

For whoever seeks God Most High, must take pains and ask for sincerity in the secret of his heart until the door is opened for him. When the door opens and the gift is given, at that time the cost of his journey will be repaid in full. He will be strengthened and continue on his way, and the further he goes the more his gift is increased for him and he continues even further. This does not stop until he reaches God through his heart (hatta yasil ilallah qalban). At that time God appoints him according to his degree and he becomes a Friend of God (waliyyullah). He has made his heart stand still in the presence of God wherefore he received his appointment. From that point he proceeds to works with a heart strong with God's strength and rich with God's wealth, with a faultless ego free from sins and devils. He has parted ways with vain passions and the pursuit of honor and he has purified himself.

We have dealt with these topics in two books:

The Training of the Ego (Riyadat an-nafs) and The Practice of the Saints (Sirat al-awliya'), in which are found, with God's permission, cures for all who aspire to knowledge in this matter.