

THE SECRETS OF THE SOUL

The explanations Bawa Muhaiyaddeen has given about the life of the soul come in words which have their own secret life, conveying in words what can never be conveyed in words, yet they must and they do. Like a careful gardener, he cultivates the soil before dropping in the seed, he digs the ground, aerates the earth, offers the right nutrients then the seed has its best chance to take root and grow. The seed, like a point of wisdom, can draw on the properties necessary for germination, for the potential of life locked in its genetic mystery. We have our own mystery locked in the secrets of the soul, secrets which can be told, although the mystery will unfold only in revelation, the experience which comes as its own verification. Here we are not talking about anything miraculous, just the extraordinary, sometimes even the ordinary, the confirmation of what we know, what we accept as truth, sometimes a subtle intimation which makes us nod in smiling agreement, sometimes a brief presence of light connecting the eye of wisdom to the heart. Once we accept the existence of our sixth aspect, the life of light turned to its source, we do know something about the soul, however amorphous our knowledge.

This ordinary feature of truth, which nevertheless must still be identified as revelation, this can be described, or at least

accounted for, with a metaphor to make understanding conscious of understanding. Within the heart we have a mechanism which clicks into place, truth acknowledging truth, a musician tuning his violin to the right frequency, exactly, precisely, no overlap or divergence of sound, one note. There is something like a tuning fork in the heart which has the capacity to resonate perfectly together with, perfectly in tune with the truth. When a point of truth resonates perfectly with that tuning fork in the heart we know it is true and we have the right to be sure it is true. Like the musician, we cannot be deaf, nor can we expect to tune a faulty string on a faulty instrument. The ear which confirms the note is the inner ear tuned by faith to the resonance of divine wisdom, not to the world. Opening the inner ear, like the inner eye, is an obligation we owe to God and His truth on this path. When truth is hurled against falsehood, as the Qur'an proclaims, falsehood shatters, but when truth encounters truth the resonance is purity, the resonance is a sweetness holding the keys to secrets clamoring to be known.

Traditionally, Islam recognizes five essential duties or obligations which are known as the five pillars of Islam, meaning five precepts which are supposed to be the governing principles of the visible, what we see on the outside of the way we live our life, but the Islam born in faith and raised in light, a Sufi path Bawa Muhaiyaddeen often calls *iman-Islam*, this Islam, this path to purity adds six inner, invisible obligations to God. We can think of these obligations as something like requirements of the Sufi path, voluntary but necessary if we long for God and His truth. For those who take pleasure in the world,

find satisfaction in the world, these requirements remain obscure, the obsessions of another world, another age, another culture, for those of us however, who have searched the world and come up empty-handed, we must open these inner gateways to peace. That restless longing for peace, in spite of all the seductive, unfulfilling distractions of the world, that might be what finally persuades us to stop looking at what the world has to offer and start examining another way, another version of the way to live, not something many will choose, even though it is available to every open, melting heart.

We understand the injunction to look within, to turn away from the experience defined by intellect and motivated by desire — this is the place where the prayer mat, where opportunities to worship come in handy — and so now we begin to disengage the outer, one possible first step in the deliberate attempt to travel the inner routes to wisdom, to divine understanding. Let us for a moment think about the six other obligations, the six inner pathways easily accessible whenever we are ready to turn our senses inside out, washing them, purifying and refocusing, cultivating like the careful gardener. We turn within to look at secrets found at the foot of the mountain we have to climb, laneways of light to guide the exploration of essence, the inner, while we direct our attention away from creation, from all that is outer. With this perspective, knowing that the beauty and truth of God lie within, every outer thing is rejected as unwanted, even wrong, opposed to inner grace, proximity. We know that God exists everywhere, within everything, that there is no place where God is not, still, we remove ourselves from the manifest to

focus on the unseen inner, knowing that His presence alone confers life.

Now we can undertake to fulfill the requirements of five outer obligations bathed in the truth of six luminous laneways at the foot of the mountain. When we look we see not with the physical limits of an outer eye defining dimension, a spatial and temporal reference, we see instead with the inner eye which sees only light, recognizes only good, discounting as irrelevant what does not accord with light. The inner ear is similarly tuned to a frequency which comes only from God, His truth, His sound, His grace. The sounds of the world do not resonate here, they are discarded. What we taste with an inner tongue is His taste, the knowledge of Him, the experience of Him, as the taste of the world is put away, eliminated. We no longer have any appetite for the treats and delights of the world, nothing but the taste of *'ilm*, His divine knowledge, will satisfy this palate of truth. Our inner tongue has an inner voice which can speak to God, which can say only His words, refusing those syllables attached to the world.

The inner nostril which declines the stench of the world is alive to His fragrance alone, to the radiant scent of roses where none are in bloom, living proof of His secret, He is with us, we are with Him. Finally, within the heart there is a tiny atom of flesh where everything in existence, everywhere, including the saints, angels and heavenly beings, all radiate the pure light of prayer to God. These are the six inner pathways of light taking us from outer to inner, defining His kingdom, teaching us the

beginning, what we must learn at the foot of the mountain if we have the longing to ascend and learn more; because there is always more, so much to learn, so urgent, so little time. In no sense is this what we learn out there, the knowledge of science, this is inner knowledge, the gnostic wisdom of saints and holy beings within our reach when we make the deliberate effort to look. This does take effort, we cannot merely lie back and wait for the revelation to come, although it could happen this way if God so determines, yet generally speaking, we need to honor our side of the equation, trust in God but tie up the camel.

Our effort is the camel, we have to commit to surrender, concentration, balance and wisdom, one of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen's four part prescriptions for moving from outer to inner. How do we do this, turn from outer to inner, what is the deliberate effort we need to make? We have already taken our first steps on this path, we have made the declaration for God, we chose Him and not the deceptively disappointing world, we have already discovered the staggering immensity lying between His perfection and our own imperfection, a discovery which brought us face-to-face with the recognition of a need to change. We need to change our qualities for His, to go within we must discard every imperfect quality we have, make a clear place of worship. In this clear place we can begin to learn His truth, learn the duty to that truth which will bind us to it. Our next step then, is a combination of steps lining the intention to change our qualities, deepen our wisdom and strengthen our faith. The Qur'an tells us to go all the way to China, to the ends of the earth if we must, for wisdom. Since that is the ardor

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we need for our search, in pursuit of wisdom we discard old habits and attitudes which oppose the beauty of His qualities, we adopt new habits, new postures of prayer to increase our faith.

Examining the first of the four prescriptions taking us from outer to inner, we have a few questions to ask ourself. What is surrender, who surrenders to whom, what does surrender have to do with our qualities, our wisdom and our faith? If we are to surrender who we are to who He is, we begin with a continuing process of self-examination. We have to ransack a closet full of the bad qualities we have accidentally or deliberately preserved, examine anger to the bone, learn with great determination how to discard the reckless responses of unthinking years, until even our physiology is altered. This requires a commitment over time, habits which are automatic responses, built by now right into our mental pathways and nerve endings, these are difficult to eradicate without unflagging persistence, but we must know, have the faith it can be done. The wisdom which accompanies this commitment will look at the arrogance, the ego of selfhood giving rise to so much imperfection, not necessarily on the grand scale, the perversions of hatred, prejudice, theft and murder, it will look at the lesser failures, our failure to love, an inability to love, to be patient, a disinclination to be compassionate and merciful on any scale. Wisdom in the sanctified presence of the *Qutb* can show us how to rectify the dark corners of that closet, not with the intellectual jargon of psychology, which probably has other uses for some, but with the immaculate purity of God's qualities.

This love within love, this patience within patience, the gratitude within gratitude, the compassion within compassion, all the divine attributes become lamps of truth illuminating the wisdom we have been separated from by attachments to the world, to everything proffered by mind and desire, what we accepted in ignorance, not knowing who we are, not knowing God. Wisdom lit by the light of truth can see how imperfect our patience is, how frustration disguises itself with blinding inability, uncertainty, it sees how limited our gratitude and contentment are, especially when we are in trouble. Wisdom teaches us how our tolerance stops short of accepting what we cannot recognize or identify ourselves with. O that's not our way, we think, then dismiss whatever or whoever it might be. This is one aspect of surrender, allowing our limited version of a quality to be immersed in His, responding to the finite with the match of the infinite to burn the house down, a house built on limits and restrictions. With God's qualities we build a house in His kingdom where we live in the radiant bliss of His friends.

But surrender clearly entails so much more on so many levels, there is to start with the question of intention and outcome. Intention is something like throwing our hat into the ring, this is my target, my destination. When we examine what determines the choices we make now, what determined the choices we made in the past, we learn certain coalescing points governing what we expected in the past and what we search for now. Once we have the intention for God, as Bawa Muhaiyaddeen would put it, every other consideration fades away. We used to think that if we chose to do a thing, made

a decent effort with vigor, there was every possibility we could do what we intended to do, but where was God in this, where was the understanding that our effort was one thing, yet God had the deciding input? Surrender includes the understanding the effort is ours, the outcome is His. We make a maximum effort, yet we do what we do surrendering the outcome to Him because He alone knows the beginning, middle and end of the story, He alone knows the appropriate outcome. We think we know how a situation began, we think we know what is going on right now, we do admit to a little ignorance of what will happen next, but the truth is we are involved in such a multidimensional apparatus of human and technical relations it is impossible for us to know, to be confident of before and during, let alone after. By acknowledging that Allah has the final word in any enterprise, however large or small, we bypass expectation, we avoid anxiety and eliminate stress.

When I found myself at the heart of a major hurricane some years ago, I did everything to protect myself and the two others with me, although my outstanding recollection of that event is the almost absurd happiness I felt in the experience of divine protection and proximity. Later, one of them said I behaved as if I didn't care whether I lived or died, and that was true enough in one sense, I was so alive in the surrender to His determination of outcome that I knew safety in His hands, no matter what happened, life or death. Sometimes an extreme example offers guidelines for the more ordinary, the routine situations we deal with on a regular basis. Having the intention for God means the surrender, both casual and deliberate, of the things which bind

us to the world, of the world itself. This is easy enough to talk about, clearly most comfortable in retrospect. In that deadly hurricane situation, once wisdom was satisfied that every outer step had been taken, the concern for the safety of others had been responsibly fulfilled, then the faith which lines the core of existence was all that remained, and therefore the great happiness at such an odd time. This total surrender enveloped me with proximity, His presence, and that proximity placed me in a state of consciousness which the word happiness only dimly represents.

Having a moment of critical awareness like my hurricane encounter was a profoundly useful instruction, teaching me how easy it can be, even in a difficulty with life and death implications, to give up the world, to surrender continuity in this world to whatever God determines. The more mystical implications of surrender, the surrender we are to think of as a muscular state of exertion, not the passive acquiescence of that's it, I give up, although something like that comes in too, this has to do with our sense of ego, the conscious identification of selfhood as something separate from the totality, the One. Here of course, we also have to deal with our specific glorification of individualism, the insistence on separating the special individual from the crowd, the individual who is always ourself. Are we perhaps the hero who wins the battle against all odds, the champion who saves the nation by slaying the dragon, are we the personification of ideas and ideals, a great leader? We have to exchange this fictitious picture for a more subtle image, the pervasive drop returning to the sea, the snowflake in an

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avalanche of snow, existent but merged with the totality, a union altering the character and quality of existence in every conceivable way.

There is another important point, we should stop thinking and worrying about what I can do to surrender: as long as there is someone occupying that space of the I there is no surrender, there is only the thought of surrender, a different matter entirely. Surrender is finished when there is no one left to surrender. This means we surrender what we see, we surrender what we hear, taste, smell or touch, everything arriving at the threshold of the body. We also surrender everything arriving at the threshold of the mind, everything pushed there by desire, our thoughts, our emotions, ideas, our joys and sorrows. With all this wiped away our wisdom can turn to Him, can be face-to-face with Him in the light of the heart. When we surrender the body enmeshed in hunger, disease, old age and death, the body we have to give up at the end anyhow, and when we surrender the shadow bodies of thought and emotion which darken our days, we will know purity. If we are ready to put these things away in a death before death, we can live with God in His kingdom now, we can be the drop returning to the sea.

The easiest surrender of all is the surrender in love, no thought, no preparation necessary, it is on automatic, selfhood drops away in absolute love, at least temporarily, the mother looking at her baby, the lover seeing the face of the beloved, contemplating or longing for the beloved, the disciple in the presence of the *Qutb*, the true devotee in love, a longing for God

so intense nothing else intervenes. We do know the taste of this, a state of absolute surrender, what we have to learn is the station of absolute, unconditional surrender, being there, staying there, remembering with every breath that nothing exists but God, living the truth of no permanence, no reality but God. All the rest is a dream, a shadow projected by a nonexistent form, a shadow projected by desire, a false idea, an impure emotion. Living the truth of God's qualities, living the active truth of His actions, immersed especially in the pure waters of love, His love, the love within love, this is the actuated state of surrender, this is the truth and meaning of the surrender which can save us all. This is waking up from the dream of the world and entering the reality of His truth, the divine reality of wisdom, the grace which comes from Him alone, with His permission alone.