

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

Last week I finished by quoting an extract from Hazrat Masih Maoud's book *Baraheen Ahmadiyya* volume 4 about the beauty of sura Al Fatiha. We should bear in mind that, at that time, in 1884, Hazrat Masih Maood (as) was addressing the scholars and not the lay man and that is why the text is filled with flowery language and seems difficult to understand. So I will summarize the same extract with some comments to make it more understandable for our friends.

In brief Hazrat Masih Maood (as) was speaking about the path that a man takes to realize the aim of his existence. We are here for a purpose. Most people think that we are here to enjoy whatever we can. But according to Islam Allah has not created us for nothing. Allah makes it clear that we have not been given existence in vain. We are here for a purpose. We read in the Holy Quran: "*Afa hasibtoum annama khalaqnaakoum abasan wa annakoum elayna laa tourja'oune*" (23:115). The word "*abasoune*" has the following meanings: that which has no purpose, which is like a game or something frivolous. So the translation of the verse is "What! Do you think that we have created you without purpose and that you will not return to us?" Others may think that we should lead our life enjoying everything that we can and be content with this life. However as a Muslim we are to enjoy all things within the limits prescribed by Allah and the *sunnah* established by His Prophet Muhammad (saw) and we are not free to do what we

want. In the extract which I read last week, Hazrat Masih Maood (as) is exposing the beauty of the first chapter of the Holy Quran, as I have said. In past sermons I have quoted extensively from his writings on this subject and I will not repeat myself. In brief what he was saying was that there are three stages of spiritual progress. First we should try to stay away from all types of evil. Second we should enjoy this deprivation and this struggle that we undertake with our own soul. Third we enter a stage where we recognize Allah in everything. Hazrat Masih Maood (as) wants us to understand that Sura Al Fatiha can help us to realize all these stages provided we are sincere in our quest. Then the Promised Messiah says:

“It should be realized here that these three stages of progress, which are the fundamental principles of all knowledge and divine insights— nay rather, the quintessence of all religion—are expressed in *Surah al-Fatihah* with the utmost beauty, pithiness, and elegance of form. Accordingly, the first [stage of] progress, which is the initial step in the field of nearness to God, has been taught in the verse where He says:

“*Ihdenas siratal moustaqeem*”. Since adopting the straight path by relinquishing every kind of perversity and error, and turning wholly towards Allah, is the steep ascent which is described in other words as *fana*—insofar as [it is] a sudden departure from habitual and customary activities, and immediate abandonment of all personal desires which have developed into habits over a lifetime, and turning straight to God by abandoning all honour, reputation, haughtiness, and

hypocrisy—deeming everything besides Allah as non-existent is, in fact, an undertaking that is tantamount to death; this death is the pivot of spiritual birth. Until a seed mingles with dust and loses its identity, it is impossible for a new plant to come into being. In the same way, the body of the spiritual birth develops from this *fana*. As the ego of man gradually breaks down and its actions, desires, and inclination towards creatures are progressively obliterated, so do the limbs of spiritual birth go on being fashioned until, when complete *fana* of self is achieved, he is granted the robe of the second being and the time comes of: “Soumma ansh’nahou khalqan aakhera”(then we developed it into another creation)

Since such a complete *fana* is not possible without the help, grace, and special attention of the All-Powerful, this prayer was taught: “*ihdenas siratal moustaqeem*”. Meaning: O Allah! Establish us along the right path and deliver us from every type of distortion and misguidance.

This perfect steadfastness and rectitude, which we are commanded to seek, is an extremely difficult undertaking and at first it appears to a devotee like the attack of a lion and a confrontation with death. But if the devotee is steadfast and accepts this death, there is no fatal death for him after that, for, God is far too Noble to expose him to this burning hell again.

In short, this perfect steadfastness is the annihilation which totally vanquishes man’s structure of life and makes him withdraw suddenly and totally from desire, lust, intention, and every single act of selfishness. This is the stage from among the stages of spiritual journey and pilgrimage where human efforts play a great

part and human striving is at the forefront. At the same stage, the struggles of the *auliya'ullah* [friends of Allah] and the devotees reach their culmination. Thereafter, special heavenly bounties follow in which human efforts are not involved; rather, a hidden vehicle and heavenly *buraq*(the heavenly mount on which the Holy Prophet (saw) ascended to heaven during *mi'raj*) is provided by God Almighty Himself for a tour of heavenly wonders.

The second [stage of ] progress, which is the next step in treading in the fields of the nearness [to God], has been taught in the verse where He says:“ *siraatallazina an'amta alayhim*”meaning that, “Guide us along the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours and bounties.”

It should be remembered here that those who are the recipients of divine favours and receive the overt and covert bounties of God are not exempt from suffering. On the contrary, in this realm of trials, they are afflicted with such hardships and difficulties that if someone else were afflicted with them, the foundation of his faith would have shattered. They have been named *mun'am 'alaihim* [the recipients of divine favours] on account of their overwhelming love [of Allah] they consider pains as favours, and from every pain or comfort which comes to them from the True Friend, they derive pleasure, on account of their being intoxicated with [Allah's] love. Thus, this is the second type of progress in nearness [to Him], in which everything that proceeds from the Beloved is a source of delight and whatever is granted from Him is counted as pure bounty.

The real reason that brings about this condition is the perfect love and sincere bond which is acquired with the Beloved. It is a special gift which has nothing to do with design and planning; rather, it is granted by God alone. When it is received, the devotee is totally transformed and is relieved of all of his burdens and every pain is perceived as a favour, and no trace of complaints remains. This state is akin to a man being revived after death, because he is relieved from all tribulations which he was experiencing in the first stage, whereby he seemed to be facing death at all times, but now [in this condition] he encounters favours from every direction. From this very perspective, it was appropriate that he should have been called *mun'am 'alaih*. This condition, in other words, is called *baqa*, inasmuch as in this condition the devotee feels that he was dead and he has been given life. He experiences a great felicity and cheerfulness in him and all his corporal constraints are dissolved and the fostering light of the Divine pours down on him like favours. In this very stage, the door of every favour is opened to the devotee and divine favours are addressed to him in their perfection. This stage is also called *sair fillah* [the sojourn in Allah] inasmuch as in this stage the wonders of *rububiyyat* are revealed to the devotee and he sojourns into the divine favours which are hidden from others. He is favoured with true visions, honoured with the Word of the One True God, informed of the delicate mysteries of the Hereafter, and given an abundance of knowledge and insights. In short, he becomes the recipient of many overt and covert bounties, so much so that he arrives at that stage of perfect certainty as if

he sees the True Planner with his own eyes. Such perfect knowledge of heavenly mysteries that is granted to him is called *sair fillah*. This is the stage in which divine love is bestowed on man, yet it is not established in him as part of his nature; that is to say, it has not yet become a part of his nature, rather, it only dwells in it securely.

The third [stage of ] progress, which is the highest step in treading the fields of nearness [to God] has been taught in the verse in which He says

‘Those who have not incurred displeasure and those who have not gone astray’

This is the stage when the love of God and the enmity to all besides Him penetrate into man’s nature and are established in him as his temperament. The one who attains this stage loves the divine qualities as naturally as they are dear to the One True God, and the personal love of the Benevolent God so grips his heart that it becomes impossible to be driven out of it. If his heart and soul were crushed and wrung in the machinery of severe tests and trials, nothing but the love for God emerges from them. He seeks pleasure in pining for Him alone and regards Him alone as the Real and True Beloved of his heart. This is the stage when all progress of nearness culminates into its end and man attains the ultimate climax for which human nature was ordained.”

Then the Promised Messiah makes a comment about the spiritual effects of this sura. He says :

“Accordingly, one of these lofty spiritual characteristics of *Surah al-Fatihah* is that reciting it in one’s prayers with full attention and establishing its teaching in one’s heart, believing it to be really true, plays a major role in the illumination of one’s soul. That is to say, that by it one’s bosom is opened, the darkness of human nature is dispelled, the grace of the Holy Source of grace starts descending upon man, and he is encircled by the light of the acceptance of God until, by making continuous progress, he is honoured by the converse of God and derives immense benefits from true visions and clear revelations. He joins the rank of those who are close to the Divine and such wonders of inspirations of the unseen, the Indubitable Word, acceptance of prayers, the disclosure of hidden matters, and support of the Reliever of all needs are manifested by him, the like of which cannot be found among others. And if the opponents deny it, and they likely will, then [take note that] the proof of it has been set out in this book. And my humble self is ready to satisfy every seeker after truth, not only from among our opponents, but also those who agree with me nominally and superficially and who are Muslims on the outside but are covered with veils [of disbelief ] and are bodies without souls. In this dark age they do not have certainty of faith in heavenly Signs and regard the revelation of the One True God as impossible and assign it to the category of illusions and evil inspirations. They have formed a very narrow and constricted concept of human progress which is confined to intellectual conjectures and flights of fancy. Moreover, they consider God Almighty to be extremely weak and powerless. My humble self submits

respectfully to all these gentlemen that if they still deny the Quranic effectiveness and are adamant to hold on to their old ignorance, then this is a good opportunity in that this most humble servant [of God] can fully satisfy every denier from my personal experiences.