

al Aleem

الْعَلِيمُ  
بِجَلَالِهِ  
مُجَلَّبًا

The practices for the seven leading names have been given by Pir Zia for the whole membership of the Sufi Order to participate in over successive lunar cycles, beginning on the new moon. These are the commentaries for the second name, al Alim – the Knower. The previous name was al Hayy – the Living.

### *The Seven Leading Names*

I would like to focus on one grouping of the 99 names, which have been highlighted by the classical Sufis as being especially important. They are the names which refer to aspects of the consciousness of God; so the Sufis have given them priority and have called them the *al asma al ayima al sabaha*, that is to say the seven leading names. There is a kind of hierarchy within the names in terms of the order of ontological precedence. Within that hierarchy these seven are considered to occupy a special position. At the Abode of the Message, we have been working with these names successively one after another for the last year. And I have composed instructions based on Murshid's teaching and Pir Vilayat's teaching and the teaching of the ancient Sufis for each of the names including practices to do relating to each of the names. I hope you will find these are names you can use in your own work. Most of them I think you will be familiar with.

*Zia Inayat Khan*

# Alim

Of the seven leading names the second is Alim, the Knower.

Eternal life occasions intelligence. Intelligence turning in on itself in love manifests the phenomenal world, *Wujud*, as a theater for witnessing, *Shahud*. So it is the consequence of the eternal life that life should become self-aware. This self-awareness is intelligence in its purest form, knowledge by presence, without intermediary, without form or concept.

But this presential knowledge opens a space for love. The knowledge which the One Being has of itself draws it into itself in love, and this manifests forth as the phenomenal world, as creation, for the purpose of witnessing. We may refer to the famous hadith of the hidden treasure: "I was a hidden treasure," God said, "and I loved to be known, so I created the world that I might be known."

You could consider the relationship then between the One and the many. One could say that the One confers upon the many a mode of being, and the many confer upon the One a mode of knowing – an extension of the primordial Divine knowledge through the instrument of our experience, which provides an additional vantage point.

*You are His nourishment as bestowing the contents of His self-knowledge, while He is yours as bestowing existence.*

*Ibn al-'Arabi*

You are his nourishment. You nourish the divine being by providing through your experience the contents of the divine self-knowledge – or, that is to say, one dimension of the divine knowledge, because the eternal dimension does not depend upon any extension.

But there is a further knowledge which is gained through manifestation, and for this our contribution is consequential. All knowledge is ultimately grounded in self-knowledge, which is the essential state of the soul. The soul is nothing other than a perpetual act of self-awareness. That is the very definition of the soul. And the relationship of the soul to God, the relationship of the soul to the One, is just as the relationship of the body to the soul. The body is to the soul as the soul is to the One. That is why it is said in the hadith, "He who knows himself knows his Lord."

This essential knowledge of the soul, presential knowledge, knowledge by presence, offers the possibility of blazing new neural pathways, so we are not dependent upon our conditioning. We need to reverse the logic of materialism, which insists that intelligence is merely the byproduct of the arbitrary rearrangement of matter, whereas the perspective of the mystics is that matter is the crystallization of intelligence, and it is intelligence that manifests through matter. In the pristine intelligence of our presential awareness we find an awareness that does not depend upon a cognitive intermediary, that is to say a concept or an image, but is innate. It is the sheer experience of the soul's own presence to itself. By accessing this dimension of knowledge we are able to reconfigure our representational knowledge as well.

*Look up first and when your eyes are once charged with Divine life, then you cast your glance on the world of facts and you will have much clearer vision, the vision of reality.*

Hazat Inayat Khan

Witnessing occurs in the confluence of acquired (conceptual) and revealed (presential) knowledge.

*The image of perfection is complete only with knowledge of both the ephemeral and the eternal.*

Ibn al-'Arabi

# Practices

## Unlearning

Murshid always reminds us of the importance of unlearning, overcoming our conditioning. There are some fairly simple steps for doing that. First of all, simply look at situations from another person's point of view, just to remind ourselves always to step outside of our own vantage point and look at things through the eyes of another. Thus Murshid has said, "The Sufi is the one who has two points of view: one's own and another." You mustn't think that by empathizing you sacrifice your own point of view. You keep your own point of view, but also you acquire the perspective of another.

The second step is to "see the right of the wrong and the wrong of the right, the evil of the good and the good of the evil, the pain in the pleasure and the pleasure in pain, the gain in loss and the loss in gain." Murshid said the first sign of spiritual evolution is increased tolerance – that one is no longer fixed upon some preconceived notion of right and wrong, good and bad, but one can see how what appears one way from a certain perspective appears differently from a different perspective. This is the moral of the story of Moses and Khidr, in which Moses continually questioned the actions of Khidr, not seeing that there was a larger picture that was not immediately understandable.

The third stage is to identify oneself with what one is not – overcome that absolute dichotomy of self and other. Whatever you project outwardly as the other – as not you – try to identify with it; try to get inside of it.

Fourthly, free yourself from a form, and have a sense of the abstract.

These are all stages that Murshid has described in detail in his teachings.

## *Concentration. Contemplation. Meditation*

- 1. Gaze upon the object passively.*
- 2. Close the eyes, holding the image.*
- 3. Allow the visual image to dissolve into quality of essence.*
- 4. Allow the quality to dissolve into essence: awareness without content, sheer presence.*
- 5. Open the eyes, perceive the object, image, quality, and essence in unison.*

I find that a very effective practice is to work through the stages of *muraqaba*, *mushahida*, and *mu'ayana* – concentration, contemplation, meditation. First with the eyes open, gaze upon an object passively, that is, not studying the object, not scanning its surface and so on, but just passively receiving the impression visually. Then close the eyes and hold the image as it is inscribed in the mind's eye. You may find that you are able to hold it for some moments and then suddenly you've lost it. In that case you can open your eyes again and recapture it visually, and then once again close the eyes. Like all things, with practice this skill is perfected. After five minutes or so of that, let the mental image dissolve into the experience of the quality suggested by the image – how that image speaks to the heart in the language of meaning beyond form. Then, after five minutes, allow that too to dissolve into an experience of sheer presence, unqualified by form or even emotion – simple presence – awareness in its most essential form.

With each subsequent stage you are stripping off a level of cognition to get at what is most essential. At the end open your eyes and experience all four stages in unison. Perceive the object; realize the image in the mind, be sensitive to the quality, and relate in essence.

## Wazifa

There are two series of *wazaif*: One is *ya Nur, ya Alim*. The other is a series that is transmitted in the *Nizam al qulub*, the meditation manual of Shah Nizam al-Din Awrangabadi, and that is *ya Allah, ya Alim, ya Khabir, ya Mubin*. Allah – the name of God inclusive of all qualities, and *Alim* – the knower. If *Alim* corresponds to the celestial intelligence – primordial and presential – *Khabir* corresponds to *Qubr*, which means information. This mode of knowledge can only be realized in life, in the world, through experience, trial and error – the Divine knowledge as it is particularized in our knowing, and as it becomes conscious of an object. But then it is wisdom that arises in the conjunction of this primordial eternal knowledge and the ephemeral knowledge which the Divine has through our knowledge. That is what brings about clarity – clarity of vision – which is signified by the Divine name *Mubin* – the clear.

## Muhasaba

A muhasiba practice is a practice of self-analysis, or *halim*. Here is a very simple instruction – but sometimes the simplest practices are the most difficult: Say only what you know. Try that for one day. When you go to speak, check yourself and think: “Just a moment, how do I know that of which I speak?” Then you’ll have to explore the bases of your knowledge – what are the premises on which you base yourself? This is a very useful thought exercise. You may find it will teach you an appreciation of silence.



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