

The Garden of the Gnostics



**The Garden of
the Gnostics
(Bustān al-‘Ārifīn)**

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Contents

Preface	3
Chapter One: Sincerity (<i>ikhhlās</i>) and having a conscious intention in all actions, inward and outward	9
Chapter Two: The Reality of Sincerity (<i>Ikhhlās</i>) and Truthfulness (<i>Sidq</i>)	34
Chapter Three: The Importance of Intention	38
Chapter Four:	40
Chapter Five: Transmitted Gems	47
Chapter Six: The Miracles and Gifts of the <i>Awliyā'</i>	64
Section 1	72
Section 2	78
Chapter Seven: Some Excellent Stories	85
Glossary	91
Biographical Notes	96



Preface

May Allah bless our master Muhammad and his family and Companions and grant them peace

Praise belongs to Allah, the One, the Conqueror, the Almighty, the Ever-Forgiving, the Determiner of decrees, the Manager of affairs, He who makes the night enfold the day as an enlightenment for those who possess eyes and hearts. He is the One who awakens whomever He chooses among His creation and then makes them enter the ranks of the righteous. He grants success to whomever He chooses among His slaves, then places them among the people of right conduct. As for those He loves, He gives them insight into the realities so that they become abstinent (*zāhid*) in this world. They strive to please Him and prepare themselves for the Abode of Permanence. They avoid whatever angers Him and constantly safeguard themselves against the punishment of the Fire.

I praise Allah abundantly for all His blessings, and I ask Him for increase from His bounty and generosity. I testify that there is no god but Allah. I affirm His oneness and bear witness that all creation must submit to His Lordship. I testify that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger and His beloved, chosen from His creation. The Prophet is the most noble of His creatures from the first to the last. He is the most noble of all the creation, the most perfect, the one with the greatest gnosis of Allah, the most fearing, the one with the greatest knowledge of Allah. He is the one with the most fear of Allah (*taqwā*), the most tirelessly energetic in striving, performing acts of worship and going-without. He has greatest character and highest degree of compassion and kindness to the believers. May the blessings of Allah and His peace be upon him, and upon all the Prophets, his entire family, and all his Companions and their followers until the Day of Judgement,

whenever those who remember Him remember Him and those who are heedless forget Him.

This world is the one which dwindles away, not the one which will endure forever. It is the abode through which we pass, not the abode of lasting delight.¹ It is the abode of annihilation, not the abode of going-on. It is the abode that will pass away, not the abode that lasts forever. Traditions and sound intellects provide decisive proofs which are in complete agreement with what we have said. Elite and common, rich and poor all equally possess this knowledge. Both minds and eyes focus on it so that it could not be made any clearer than it already is:

When the clear day stands in need of a proof,
nothing the ears hear is valid.

This is the true state of this world. We are warned about it in the Qur'an. We are cautioned to be constantly on our guard against relying on the world, allowing ourselves to be deluded by it or trusting in it. The same warning has come down to us in Prophetic *hadīths* and wise sayings. This is why the most cognisant of its people are the slaves of Allah, and the most intelligent of its people are those who do-without (*zuhhād*).²

1. Editor (Muḥammad Munir ad-Dimishqī, 1348) Not all of his notes are included. Notes about linguistics or grammar and some poems are omitted.

"Lasting delight" or *hubār* means "blessing and ease of life." Part of what it signifies is found in the words of Allah, "*You and your wives, delighting in your joy (taḥburuna)*" (43:70) which is to say, "Allah has generously bestowed on you an easy life." Not everyone in His path can reach the stage where nothing stands between him and obtaining his goal except to cross over the bridge of this short life, which is the prelude to eternal life. But the one who crosses over the bridge of life while his Lord is pleased with him obtains it. That is why this world is compared to an abode through which one passes, since the believer truly knows that this world is not the abode of an untroubled life. So he is not anxious or downhearted when things are difficult for him, or when his endeavours do not bring him the fruits he desires.

2. *Zāhid*, plural *zuhhād*. This refers to people whose hearts have no inclination for this world. They are not compelled by a desire to harm people, steal any of their property, or to illegally infringe their rights in any way. This is how the greatest Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and his noble

The poet described it very well when he said:

Look at the ruins and how they have changed
now their inhabitants have departed.
Look! They are beyond recognition!

A light rain has fallen on their tracks.
Their stones have tumbled down and shattered.

Their people have all gone
and with them all news of them.
Unknown.

When I look and reflect on their houses
tears overflow and pour down my face.

If I had had more wisdom
when I pulled myself together after weeping,
what my eye saw when it looked
would have sufficed.

Trivial beauty is what this world decks out
to deceive us.¹

Its treachery never ceases.

Companions behaved. *Zāhid* does not mean a hermit who flees from the world and cuts himself off from it completely until he becomes like a wild beast, or someone who is content to remain secluded in his house or his *zawiyya*, his eye and heart awaiting charity from the dregs of people. The Messenger of Allah said, "The upper hand is better than the lower hand." The giver is someone who goes without because he has been open-handed with *sadaqa* even when he has little property. It is not about taking avariciously. The *din* of Islam is one of action, not one of laziness. Allah says, "*Man will have nothing but what he strives for,*" (53:39) and He says, "*Our Lord, give us good in this world, and good in the Next World, and safeguard us from the punishment of the Fire!*" (2:201) What has come down to us about safeguarding oneself against relying on this world is addressed to the heart in order to put the actions of people in order, since by that one purifies his heart and cuts off greed. Greed is the source of injustice and tyranny.

1. This world should not really deceive us because the glittering ornament it shows us in lasts only an instant and then vanishes. Our forefathers were deceived before us, and we have been deceived many times, yet we continue to deceive ourselves by neglecting our intellects with which Allah endowed us to allow us to

Such is it
that we are not even permitted to taste it
unless its taste turns bitter.

When its ravishing beauty comes forward
it deceives
and when it suddenly turns back,
it vanishes -

It is a giver who strips away the gifts it has given,
out to ruin what it first made flourish.

When it constructs something grand for a rich man
it builds its parapet against him to destroy him.

Someone else said:

When someone praises this world for his life of ease,
by my life! he will blame it when there is only little.

When it slips away, man grieves.
When it comes forward to meet him,
it brings many cares with it.¹

discriminate between sound and unsound matters. We did not pay any real attention to our forefathers nor to ourselves. If we were to understand the reality of this world, it would have no allure because it lasts only a moment. It does not remember the past at all. It is as if it were saying to you in an eloquent tongue, "Cheat yourself by turning to the ephemeral and by turning away from what is lasting. Put your intellect aside and do not turn to what is prescribed. If you do turn to it, then you will see the words of the greatest Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, 'The believer is not bitten from the same rock twice.' And yet this world has deceived you many times!"

1. That is when it overwhelms the heart. When someone recognises the true value of this world and knows that it was created simply as a field of action for the Next World and a means to it, and knows that what he accumulates of the stuff of this world is actually only a trial and a test for him, then he must use it as the original community (*Salaf*) did. Then there is no doubt that his mind will be at rest in this world, and that he will be fortunate in the Next World since he will receive a great reward and acquire much benefit by his help of the poor. Allah says: "If you make a generous loan to Allah He will multiply it for you and forgive you." (64:17) This is what the Prophet Sulayman and the wealthy noble Companions did, may Allah be pleased with all of them."

When a man has knowledge of what I have mentioned and affirms what I have described, then he must travel the Path of the men of intellect and join the school of the people of insight. We ask Allah the Generous, the All-Merciful, All-Compassionate, to bestow that gift on us and to guide us on the path of the rightly-guided!

The purpose of this book is to make clear to you how to travel this Path. It will show you how to take on the excellent qualities I have described. Allah willing, I will mention some of the pearls and realities of gnosis. It will be composed in such a way so as not to bore the reader and so as to render its subject matter easy to remember. Allah willing, I will quote some of the uplifting sayings of the *Salaf*, the meaning of certain inspiring stories and some beautiful poems. In most cases it will be demonstrated whether the *ḥadīths* are sound or excellent, and their chains of transmission will be clearly set down. Whatever is obscure or hidden in them will be made clear. I will provide necessary definitions in order to avoid distortion and to shun alteration or twisting the meaning.

Certain things may be mentioned and then the chain of transmission stated so that it might take firm hold in the reader. The *isnād* of transmission may be condensed and shortened to avoid lengthiness. This book is meant for people who worship and for people who are not in need of the science of *isnāds* and may even rather dislike them. Most of what will be quoted - by the praise and bounty of Allah - has an *isnād* which is already famous in well-known books. Should there be a difficult phrase or name in a *ḥadīth* or story, it will be defined and concisely explained. I will not write a lengthy commentary on it because any elucidation of it could well give rise to error concerning its true meaning.

This book contains various sciences of the *Sharī'a*, some of the subtleties of *ḥadīth*, the science of *fiqh* and the manners (*adab*) of the *dīn*. It also contains some of the science of *ḥadīth* and some fine points of hidden *fiqh*. It contains important points concerning

belief and some gems of principle. It includes subtle marvels which stimulate remembrance of Allah, which should be mentioned in gatherings. It deals with gnosis of the hearts, their sicknesses and their treatment and cure. Should something arise which would require an explanation beyond the scope of this book, what is meant by it will be explained succinctly, or you will be referred to its full explanation found in one of the books of those scholars who possess insight and true understanding. I may refer to a book I myself have written, but by the will of Allah, I do not intend any self-glorification by that nor would I be trying to show off my own books. Rather, I mean to guide to what is good and to point it out and clarify where it may be found.

I have brought these fine points to your attention because I see there are people who find fault with anyone who acts in this way. This is only because of their ignorance, bad opinion, perversity, envy, incapacity, and overall pigheadedness. I want to establish this meaning for the reader and cleanse him of false opinion and reproach.

I ask Allah the Generous for success by my good intention and for help in all manner of obedience. I ask Him to make acts of obedience easy for me and to always guide me to increase in them until the day I die. I ask Him for this for all those who love Him and for those who love me for the sake of Allah, and for all the Muslims, men and women. I ask Him to join us together in the Abode of His generosity in the Highest Station, and to provide us with His pleasure and all aspects of good. I have clung to Allah, seeking His protection. I have sought the help of Allah. I have relied on Allah. There is no power nor strength except by Allah, the High, the Immense in Splendour. Allah is enough for us, and He is the best Guardian. O Allah, I ask You by every means and plead with You by every intercessor, to help me, those I love, and all the Muslims by means of this book. You Who are capable of everything, no matter is too great or too difficult for You!

Chapter One

Sincerity (*ikhhlās*) and having a conscious intention in all actions, inward and outward

Allah says, *'They were only ordered to worship Allah, making their dīn sincerely His as people of pure natural belief (ḥunafā)',¹ and to establish the prayer and pay zakāt – that is the dīn of uprightness. (dīn al-qayyima).*" (98:5) This means the straight (*mustaqīm*) system of worship. It is also said that it means "based on the truth" (*al-qā'imatu bi'l-ḥaqq*). Allah knows best.

1. *Ḥunafā'*, plural of *ḥanīf*. This is a Muslim who inclines away from false religions and inclines to the truth. He does not turn aside in his path because the *ḥanīf* is straight. Worship is defined with sincerity, which depends on the heart. A *ḥanīf* is someone whose outward straightness is a sign reflecting what is inside him. That is the necessary principle because it is not within the power of man to split the heart open to read what is in it. *"Allah does not impose on any self any more than it can stand."* (2:286) It may be possible that a person in a good state may commit wrong actions, but the person who abandons the commands of Allah does not have any of the *dīn* of Islam. The possibility that he will be accepted by Allah is a claim that schemers make to remove their self-doubt. Our *Sharī'a* limits the state of righteousness and the gaining of *wilāya* to someone who has fear of Allah, does what he is commanded to do and refrains from what he is forbidden to do. For this reason, Allah says: *"Establish the prayer and pay the zakāt."*

Claiming to be Muslim without acting in accordance with its rules is mocking the *dīn*, making light of the *Sharī'a*, and belittling the Muslims. It is not conceivable that Allah should accept any rebellion against Him. How can someone like this be one of His *awliyā'* when He has promised the rebels the punishment of the Fire?

"As for him who disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he will have the Fire of Hell, remaining in it timelessly, for ever and ever." (72:23)

Karāma, *wilāya* and acceptance belong to someone who safeguards himself with fear of Allah by following Allah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions:

"But as for him who feared the Station of his Lord and forbade the lower self its appetites, the Garden will be his refuge." (79:40)