



## Assalamu Alaykum

Dear Students,

I hope this letter reaches you with the best of health and Iman. Just sending a reflection.


Over the past few months, I have been sending notes about four sacred spaces in our Tradition. Those were the human heart, the mosque, and the moment. The fourth is the supreme name of the supreme being: Allah. Most likely, you will find the other notes to be far more interesting, especially when I address matters of conflict. This letter, however, is far more important than those.

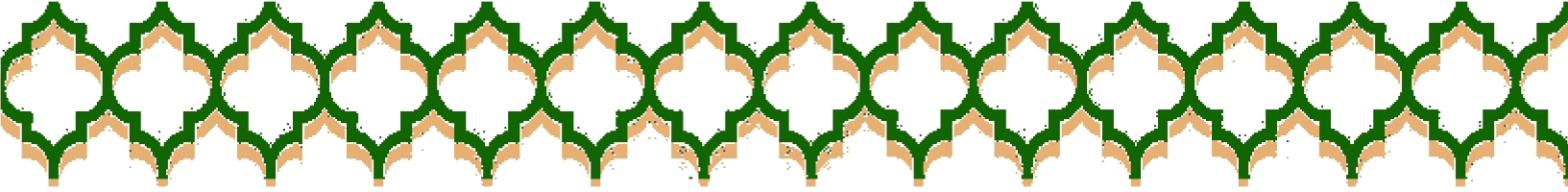
All three of the sacred spaces lead to the fourth. The innate goal of the human heart is to connect to the Divine, as though each lub-dub beat of the heart is hoping to say “Allah.” The purpose of the mosque is the mention of the name of Allah, as though if walls had ears, then what they keep hearing is, “Allah.” The best use of any given moment is remembrance of Allah, as though each inhale and exhale is saying “Allah.”

The Qur’an itself contains over 6,000 verses. The name “Allah” appears among those verses nearly 3000 times. This count does not include all the times the other names of Allah are mentioned.

There is the sacredness of the name “Allah,” and there is the sacredness of reciting it. The most sacred utterance that can come from your tongue is any name of Allah, specifically the name “Allah.” In interesting contrast with Jewish Tradition, our Tradition prescribes that we recite the name “Allah” as frequently as possible. In Jewish Tradition, they are prescribed against reciting the most sacred name of the Divine. Thus, you will find that Jews will not use the most sacred name for the Divine (which I am also not listing here), but will use other names for G-d, like Ha-Shem, which would be akin to a Muslim speaking about Allah as “The Name” (al-Isim). In terms of etymology, there are two common theories about the history of the name “Allah.” One theory is that the name “Allah” is as old as the Arabic language, and might be older, and has always referred to Allah. The other common theory is that the name “Allah” is a contraction of “al-ilah,” which some translate as “the god.”

Considering that Arabic is a Semitic language, there are similar names in Hebrew and in Aramaic. In Hebrew, the similar terms include “el,” “eloh,” “elohim,” and “alah,” among others. If you have seen “The Passion of the Christ,” you will recall a moment when Jesus, may peace be upon him, is on the Cross saying in Aramaic, “My Lord, My Lord, Why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). The word he is using is “eli, eli,” meaning, “my el, my el,” and his pronunciation sounds to an Arabic ear like “ilahi ilahi.” The meaning of “ilahi” is “my god.” But, then we have the issue of the tongue. You’ve perhaps heard the reprimand about the uses of the tongue, getting asked how you can use your tongue to speak niceties to your mother in one instance, and then in another instance use your tongue to curse. Or consider the warnings against taking the Lord’s name in vain. Take these points higher: when you use your tongue to utter the most sacred of all utterances -- “Allah” -- try to appreciate the seriousness of that utterance, with everything else you say. Meaning, take control of your tongue.





But, what does it mean to regard an utterance as sacred? When you say or hear the name “Allah,” consider that mention to be something very heavy in weight and magnitude. Imagine the demeanor you put yourself in when you are hearing something very colossal. That is the demeanor to have whenever you hear or say the name “Allah.” It is though you almost feel a tremor.

Do not use your tongue for sin. One of the most common sins in our local Muslim community is the sin of backbiting. This is a huge problem, which I will address in the future. But, for now, understand that the sin manifests in the tongue. Rather, fill your tongue with mentions of Allah. Fill your tongue with such statements as “SubhanAllah” (God is most glorified), or “Alhamdulillah” (Praise and gratitude are due to God), or “Allahu Akbar” (God is greatest), or “Astaghfirullah” (I seek forgiveness of God). Just keep whispering it all day long on your tongue.

This point also requires me to comment on something else: the way we use references to Allah. One example is, “Insha Allah.” It literally means, “If Allah wills.” It’s figurative meaning is “I hope that Allah wills it.” But, as you and I know, we tend to mean something a bit sinister. Someone asks, “Can you do this for me?” and we want to respond with, “No, I don’t want to,” so we too often say, “Insha Allah.” Thus, the literal meaning of “Insha Allah” is still “If God wills,” but we have changed the figurative meaning to “Only Allah can make it happen.” So, “Can you help me with this?” “Insha Allah.” Bring these sacred terms back to their proper meanings.

All in all, these four notes about the sacred are a call to return the sacred to our lives. In returning the sacred, we are returning the sense that there are some things in our world that are of vast value and importance, beyond anything measurable with money. Our era is so full of apathy that for so many people nothing seems important, including human life itself. It is as though we are all too exhausted to care. So, think about what is of vast importance to you. Often it easiest to figure those things out by imagining losing them. If you lose them, you feel ache. Thus, look that way to the human heart, the mosque, the moment, and the most majestic name, “Allah.”

And God knows best.

May Allah bless you.

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