

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



ON INVOKING THE DIVINE NAME 'ALLAH'

MIBDA

English Monograph Series — Book No. 23

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ تَذَرَهُمْ فِي خُوضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ

Say: 'Allah', then leave them to their idle talk.

The Holy Qur'an,
Al-An'am, 6:91

الله

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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№ 23
M  BDA
English Monograph Series

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MABDA · English Monograph Series · No. 23
On Invoking the Divine Name 'Allah'
ISBN: 978-9957-428-62-4

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© 2012 The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought
20 Sa'ed Bino Road, Dabug
PO BOX 950361
Amman 11195, JORDAN
www.rissc.jo/

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Typeset by Besim Bruncaj and Simon Hart
Set in Ehrhardt Pro

LEGAL DEPOSIT NUMBER

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan National Library
2012/9/3470



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Introduction

THIS BOOKLET IS COMPRISED of Shaykh Ahmad ibn Mustafa al-Alawi's *Treatise on the Invocation of the Divine Name (Al-Qawl al-Mu'tamad fi Mashru'yyat al-Dhikr bi al-Ism al-Mufrad)*, selections from two works of Shaykh Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari *The Key to Salvation and the Lamp of Souls (Miftah al-Falah wa Misbah al-Arwah)*, *The Pure Goal Concerning Knowledge of the Unique Name (Al-Qasd al-Mujarrad fi Ma'rifat al-Ism al-Mufrad)*, and a short extract from Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's *The Scale of Deeds (Mizan al-'Amal)*.

The selections focus on the practice of invoking the name 'Allah'. They look at this from various points of view including grammatical, legal, logical, and metaphysical, inevitably drawing upon numerous Qur'anic verses and *hadith* in their discussions.

Shaykh al-Alawi's treatise was written in response to a criticism of his students' practice of invoking out loud the name 'Allah'. The criticism focuses on the religious and grammatical legality of invoking solely the name 'Allah'. Shaykh al-Alawi's treatise takes the points of these criticisms, and answers them by delving deeper into each point. For example, the criticism that it is grammatically incorrect to invoke the sole word 'Allah' is answered by two deeper arguments:

Firstly, grammatical rules apply to speech when it is intended to communicate meaning from one person to another;

the invocation of ‘*Allah*’ does not fall into this category because it is employed by a person to benefit his/her own soul, and not to communicate meaning to another person.

Secondly, the vocative particle should be understood as part of the invocation [thus making the invocation grammatically correct]. This dropping of the particle is a normal practice and indeed occurs in the Qur’an itself. Quoting Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi [pg.10]:

If there is a vocative mentioned from man to God, it appears without the vocative particle, for originally it was used when cautioning someone, and God cannot be cautioned. Moreover, the vocative particle signifies distance...and God has revealed that He is near to the one who calls upon Him’ (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:186), (*Al-Mujadilah*, 58:7), (*Qaf*, 50:16).

His other answers are similar in nature; they do not merely rebut the criticism, but they open up a deeper understanding.

Ibn Ata *Allah*’s treatment of the subject focuses not on answering criticisms, but rather on elucidating the value of invoking ‘*Allah*’. His works delve the depth of meaning of the name ‘*Allah*’ by explaining that it is the name of the Divine Essence and thus ‘synthesises all the perfections of the Divine Qualities’. As well as these metaphysical explanations he also presents the linguistic positions on how the noun ‘*Allah*’ may have been derived. Finally, he quotes anecdotes and gives other logical reasons with the objective of galvanising us into adopting the practice of

invoking the Unique Name.

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ﴾

*Say: 'Allah', then leave them to their
idle talk [Al-An'am, 6:91].*

Treatise on the Invocation of the Divine Name

Shaykh Ahmad ibn Mustafa al-Alawi al-Mustaghani

Trans.: Leslie Cadavid, Fons Vitae, (Reproduced with permission)

PRAISE BE TO GOD, and He is our sufficiency. May He grant peace to His chosen servants. From the servant of his Lord, Ahmad ibn Mustafa al-Alawi al-Mustaghani, to the honorable So-and-so. Peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you. I was honored by your visit accompanied by the beloved Shaykh So-and-so, but I observed during our brief conversation that you felt rancor (or so it seemed to me) against your brethren the Alawites not for any sin they committed, but because they ceaselessly pronounce the unique Name *Allah*. You feel that this deserves reproof, or let us say chastisement, for according to you, they devote themselves to this Name whether it is appropriate to do so or not; according to you, it does not matter to them if they happen to be in the street in a place that is deemed unsuitable for such an utterance. This is true, you say, to such an extent that when one of them knocks on the door, he says *Allah*, when someone calls to him, he says *Allah*, when he stands he says *Allah*, when he sits he says *Allah*, and so on.

In addition, you are of the opinion that this Name does not merit being called a form of invocation as it does not, according to you, constitute a ‘complete sentence’ (*‘kalam mufid’*), based on what the grammarians have determined as being necessary components of grammatical constructions.

I am answering you concerning all these things solely for the purpose of arriving at an understanding, and in order to determine the correctness of the Alawites' actions.

The question is: is this permissible or not? I write this missive in the hope that it might provide a cure for the heart and rest for the soul.

To begin with, what you say about the grammarian stipulations of necessary components of complete sentences is correct, except that you do not realize that when the grammarians laid down this rule it pertained to the classification of a form of speech that conveys a meaning to the listener. They had no thought of applying this criterion to forms of invocation, of judging its legality or illegality, of discussing the rewards due for accomplishing it, and so on. Were you to have asked them about this in their day or were you to do so today, they would undoubtedly answer by saying, "What we have stipulated in that regard is merely a technical formulation that we use in our field, for such formulations prevent ambiguity of meaning in our discussions." You are well aware of the fact that the formulations used by grammarians differ from those used by theologians, which differ in their turn from those used by doctors of the law, and these differ once again from those used by specialists in the origins of law, and so on. In this way, every group uses its own terminology, which leads us to conclude that the grammarians were for their part concerned with the identification of complete sentences – that speech which benefits the person addressed in some way. They were not

concerned with distinguishing lawful invocations from unlawful ones. In other words, conditions about the requirements of grammatical speech are meant in particular for him who wishes, by his words, to inform someone of something. The one who invokes, however, does it only to benefit his soul and in order to establish the meaning of the noble Name firmly in his heart, and other intentions of this kind. Moreover, the grammarians did not formulate these conditions so as to include the expressions of a grieving or saddened man, for the latter's intention is not that of the grammarians. The grammarian would hardly say to him, "I do not understand what you mean by your sighs and groans, for they are not a grammatical statement – they need some explanation," or the like. The intention of the saddened or grieving man is not to inform others of anything, but only to console his heart. In the same way, the intention of one who invokes the Name is to have it become imprinted permanently in his soul.

You know, brother, that every name has an influence that attaches itself to the soul of he who utters it, even if it is not one of the Divine Names. For example, if a man repeats the word "death" he will feel an effect which attaches itself to him on account of mentioning this word, especially if he persists in it. This effect will undoubtedly be different from the one had by the mention of "money," "power," or "authority," even without considering this in the light of the noble *hadith*: "*Increase in remembrance of the Destroyer of Pleasures (Hazim al-Ladhdhāt)*", the reference here being

to death. The word “death” is but one word, yet it is said that among some of the first believers it formed an entire litany. Every man with a sense of the subtle is aware of the effect of what is mentioned on the soul, whether it be something serious or light-hearted. If we admit this, then we are bound to admit also that the Name of God has an influence on the soul, as do other names, each to its own degree. And brother, do not lose sight of the fact that a name is as noble as that which is named, inasmuch as it bears its imprint in the folds of its secret essence and meaning.

Now let us cease to consider everything set forth above, and concern ourselves solely with the judgment of the Law-giver (God) concerning the pronunciation of this Name: we see that it must fall under one of the five categories of the law, namely the obligatory (*wujub*), the recommended (*nadb*), the permitted (*ibuha*), the strongly discouraged (*karuha*), and the forbidden (*hurma*) for there exists no question pertaining to words or actions that does not fall within one of these categories. Thus, before opposing the utterance of this Name, one should decide under which category such an act falls. If we find that it is something forbidden or strongly discouraged then we are obliged to oppose whoever does it, for he has committed something worthy of reproach. If, on the other hand, it does not fall into either of these categories, then to reproach it is unjust, for the person concerned has uttered something permissible, even if it is not obligatory or recommended and even if it falls just within the bounds of the lawful. What is to prevent us from repeating

something lawful, and how can you make the one who does so deserve reproach or punishment through stripping this Name of all religious significance? However we think of this, we cannot classify it among the strongly discouraged or forbidden things, and it retains its value in accordance with its divine station.

You are the type who limits himself to the levels that suit you; and whoso honors that which is sacred to God has done well in the eyes of his Lord;

﴿وَمَنْ يُعَظِّمْ شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ﴾

And whoso honors the commandments of Allah has acted out of devotion of heart) [Al-Hajj, 22:32].

All that we have thus far set forth has been done for the sake of determining that the Name is unique, and without association with anything, be it even by way of implication. If we search for the truth, stripping it of its veils, we can see that its mention is permitted even for a grammarian, for it is in reality a noun in the vocative – which is classified as a complete sentence because it has a vocative particle meaning “I call.” It is permissible and even common to omit this particle in Arabic. In fact, very often the position of the words makes it necessary to do this – as for example in the case we are speaking of – because of the demands of Qur’anic knowledge and Islamic learning which are, perhaps, greater among the Sufi masters than among others.

I sincerely hope, brother, that you do not think it unlikely that people devoted to a Sufi path can realize a manner of

acting in conformity with the Qur'an and persevere in piety to attain to discernment between the true and the false. God has said:

﴿إِنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا﴾

*If you fear Allah He will grant
thee discernment [Al-Anfal, 8:29].*

These people have yearned in their innermost beings for this and God has given to them what He has withheld from others.

In addition to all that we have said previously about the invocation of the unique Name with the vocative particle omitted, there is the fact that those who invoke thus obey the words of God:

﴿قُلِ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ﴾

*Say: Invoke Allah, or invoke The All Merciful. However
ye call upon Him, His are the most beautiful Names
[Al-Isra, 17:110]*

They have thus concentrated upon the first form of invocation ordered by Him. This is our saying *Allah*. Through their single-minded effort and their total absorption in the solitary invocation of God

﴿فِي مَآمٍ وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ﴾

*Standing, sitting, and lying on
their sides [Al-Nisa, 4:103]*

and through their perseverance in the commanded invocation,

the triumph of the divine in them compels them to drop the vocative particle, for the latter is used for one who is far, not for Him who is “nearer [to us] than our jugular vein.” There are verses from the Book of God which prove the truth of the inspiration of those who invoke thus. Invocations are of two types: those from the servant to his Lord, and those from God to His servant. There are examples of the first type where the vocative particle has been dropped, and of the second where it has been kept. How is this, I wonder? And how were people guided to do thus? Glory be to God! I would like to quote the great Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi.¹ Let us content ourselves to draw from his words (may he rest in peace!). Citing from his book *Al-Mumafaqat*, Part 2, pp. 68–69:

The Qur'an contains a call from God to men and from men to God, the glorious, conveyed through stories and teachings. When God calls to man, it is always with a vocative particle because of the distance of the latter, as in His words:

﴿يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ أَرْضِي وَاسِعَةٌ﴾

*O my slaves who believe! Verily
my earth is vast [Al-'Ankabut,
29:56]*

I d. 1388 CE.

﴿قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ﴾

Say: O my slaves who have squandered themselves [Al-Zumar, 39:53]

﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا﴾

Say: O mankind! Verily I am the Messenger of Allah to you all [Al-A'raf, 7:158]

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا﴾

O you who believe [Al-Baqarah, 2:104]

If there is a vocative mentioned from man to God, it appears without the vocative particle, for originally it was used when cautioning someone, and God cannot be cautioned. Moreover, the vocative particles signify distance, for example the particle ‘*ya*’—which is the principal one—and God has revealed that He is near to the one who calls upon Him, particularly by His words:

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ﴾

When my servants question thee concerning Me, then verily I am near [Al-Baqarah, 2:186]

It is also clear in His words to mankind as a whole:

﴿مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَاسُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ﴾

There is no conversation between three men but He is the fourth, nor between five but He is the sixth [Al-Mujadilah, 58:7]

and,

﴿وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ﴾

And we are nearer to him than his jugular vein [Qaf, 50:16]

From these words men have gained two teachings: one is to drop the vocative particle and the other, to be conscious of the Divine immanence. Similarly, in keeping the particle for the previous category, namely that from God to man, there are two significations: firstly it serves to strengthen those who, while having the position of servant, tend to be forgetful, and turn away from God in their blindness. It is also an indication of the elevation of Him who calls upon man and shows that He is far above being “near” as men are, for in His nearness He is exalted, and in His exaltation He is near, glory be to Him! The call of the servant to God is one of yearning and asking for whatever will better his soul. The supplications in the Qur’an use the expression ‘Lord’ (‘*Rabb*’) in most instances, to admonish and teach; for in his supplication the servant should address God using the expression that corresponds to His station, and the word ‘Lord’ means the one who helps those who are under His dominion (*al-marbub*).

God has clearly set forth the supplications of the servant as follows:

﴿مَرَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا مَرَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا
إِصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا﴾

Our Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or err. Our Lord, do not make us bear a burden as you did those who came before us [Al-Baqarah, 2:286]

So you see—may God have mercy on you—that the invocations by the servant omit the vocative ‘*ya*’ for the reasons set forth above. If you have understood this, then tell me, by your Lord: If we hear the people omitting the vocative ‘*ya*’ in their invocations and prayers to their Lord, are they still to be reproached? And do they do this because of their understanding of their religion, or because of their complete ignorance thereof?

Given all of our attempts to prove our point, I am yet aware that the opponent, or let us say the one who is searching for the correct answer, will continue to scrutinize the texts and proofs of the other side indicating the legality of invoking the Name alone and showing this practice to come from that of the earliest believers. At the same time, those who are searching thus should not forget that the other side is also curious to see the proofs and arguments which judge the invocation thus to be illegal and say that the earliest believers never used it. The strongest basis you

have for this disagreement is the grammatical argument that the Name is not structured speech. We have shown the falseness of this statement by the proofs in this section; even if there were more texts in your possession concerning this, you should at least not be so quick to reject what people may have as arguments. Finally, whether each side is given an equal voice or not, the matter remains within the realm of *ijtihad*. Thus, the statement of the opponent to the effect that the invocation of this Name in isolation is not permissible proves nothing to those who say the opposite. The crux of the matter is that your assertion of illegality is restricted to what concerns you in particular; but legislating and compelling others to do things is the prerogative of the Infallible, and no one else can say of his own accord, “this is permitted” or “this is not.” Whoever does so should lower his voice where his ignorance of the subject exceeds his knowledge. This is a principle that holds for all other disputes, for the Sufi, like others, is obliged to bow his head and to refrain from holding other opinions in the face of the noble law and the Holy Book.

It is certainly possible that the opponent will attack us from another quarter, saying that we have no right to worship and seek reward for a practice that we do not know for certain the earliest Muslims performed. To this we would reply, yes, this is as you say. I hope for the sake of God that we are at least in unison on this point. However, I believe you will not forget, brother, and take note that it is in fact permissible to recite the Divine Names and this is proven

by the words of the Mighty and Powerful:

﴿وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا﴾

*To God belong the most beautiful
Names, so invoke Him by them
[Al-A'raf, 7:180].*

They are single words, and although they are thus, neither this verse nor any other have stipulated as to how the invocation should be pronounced—that is, what form it should take, and so on. This, I believe, is simply out of consideration for the levels of those who are pious and on the path of God, for they will vary in strength and weakness, desire and awe, passion and yearning. People are at different levels and there are degrees of desire for God; and the innermost depths of men are known from the standpoint of their relationship with Him, mighty and glorious. From this we see that there were no restrictions concerning the forms of prayers and invocations among the earliest believers that could cause us to conclude that the Name was definitely not used as a form of invocation among them, or that they did not consider this Name as a form of invocation. For we do not know with certainty all that they uttered in their seclusion or in the world, or in times of illness or health. It is impossible for us to believe that the companions of the Prophet (may God be pleased with them!) did not repeat the Name of God, *Allah, Allah*, for He has protected them from such a possibility. Here I would like to put before you evidence

which will decide the argument, and you may see then that this question has a wider import than you imagined. Muslim in his *Sahih* related on the authority of Abu Hurayrah ؓ that the latter once saw a sick man groaning in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ. One of the companions told him to cease his groaning and exhorted him to be patient. The Prophet ﷺ then said: *“Let him groan, for he is invoking one of the Names of God most high.”* Al-Bukhari and Tirmidhi also had on the authority of Abu Hurayrah ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said, *“Let him groan, for the groan is one of the Names of God which brings relief to the ill.”* Then—God have mercy on you—what would you do in such a situation if the sick man were pronouncing the Name of Majesty—*“Allah, Allah”*—instead of saying *“ah! ah!”*?

Would it be correct for this companion to forbid him this? Certainly not, for the exaltedness of the Name clearly precludes this possibility. The companion was reproached only because of his failure to understand the meaning of the word “ah,” for it is one of the Names of God most high—and the Prophet ﷺ acknowledged that it is a form of invocation as such, apart from its being classified as a Name of God. This is undoubtedly a valuable lesson which should make men think well of those who invoke, however they do so. But even supposing you are not convinced that what we have presented to you as a logical argument is sound, yet justice permits one only to say that the question is one about which we must remain in disagreement. However sure its conclusion may seem to us by this argument, it remains

a question of *ijtihad* and thus, how can you try to compel us, brother, to agree with your argument or submit to your *ijtihad* when we compel you to nothing of the sort? All this is one thing, and what is more, however much you assail your brethren the Alawites with reproaches, you cannot prevent them from following the way of those who invoke the Name alone, or from advocating this invocation for the leaders and guides of religion.

Here I would like to quote a passage which, God willing, will put your hearts at rest. I am assuming that you have not heard of it before, for, if you had, how could you regard the Alawites with such contempt, since they are among those the saying refers to? In the *Mufid al-Rawi* of Shaykh Mustafa Ma'al-Aynayn² it is written that Ibn Jarir [Al-Tabari] in his commentary on the Qur'an spoke of the importance for the aspirant on the path of confining himself solely to the invocation of the unique Name. Shaykh Mustafa said further that when the servant pronounces the word *Allah*, shafts of light rise from within him and spread over the horizon, travelling up until they reach the Divine Throne, filling all of creation with their light. At this God says to it, "Cease." And the light replies, "By Your Might and Majesty, I will not cease until You grant forgiveness to the one who utters Your Name." He would then say, "By My Might and Majesty, I have sworn an oath before the creation of the world that I will cause no one to utter this Name except those whose sins I have forgiven."

2 b. end 18th Century CE.

In his *Sharh al-Mubahith*, Ibn ‘Ajiba³ (may God have mercy on him!) relates that Abu Hamid al-Ghazali رحمته الله said:

At first I desired to travel upon the path with many prayers, litanies, and fasts. Then, when God saw the sincerity of my intention, He brought me to one of His saints who said to me: ‘My son, rid yourself of all preoccupations save God alone. Withdraw into isolation, gather together all your strength and fervor, and say: *Allah, Allah, Allah*.

And al-Ghazali in his *Mishkat al-Anwar* said:

As long as you occupy yourself with that which is other than God, you must remain with the negation [at the beginning of the First *Shahadah*], ‘*la ilaha*’. When you have become oblivious to all of creation by your contemplation of the Creator, then you have left the negation behind and attained the affirmation:

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ﴾

Say: Allah, then leave them to their idle talk [Al-An’am, 6:91].

He also said:

When you have left behind the remembrance of what never was, and devoted yourself to the remembrance of He who has never ceased to be, then when you say *Allah*

3 b. 1809 CE.

you will be delivered from all that is other than God.

He also said:

Open the door of your heart with the key of the saying *la ilaha illa Allah*, the door of your spirit with the word *Allah*, and invoke the presence of your innermost essence (*sirr*) with the word ‘*Huma*’, ‘*Huma*’ [referring to the Divine Essence].

Al-Ghazali also said in his work *al-Maqṣad al-Ana fī Sharḥ Asma’ Allah al-Husna*, speaking of the Divine Name *Allah*, that the servant should derive his sustenance from it, meaning from the invocation (*dhikr*), which sanctifies the servant; and we mean by this that his heart and aspirations become drowned in God most high, neither seeing nor turning to anything outside of Him. Thus al-Ghazali desired all believers to receive their sustenance from this Name. If you decide to choose what al-Ghazali chose for you, brother, then it is this. And if you do not so choose, do not hope that what you do will act as a proof against those whose choice agrees with that of al-Ghazali.

Even if we were to grant that your arguments could bear some weight against such as the Alawites, could you also argue against our forbearers, some of whom were scholars and Qur’anic interpreters, such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi⁴ and others? For he himself undertook the practice of the

4 d. 1209 CE, 606 AH.

invocation of the Name and clearly expressed his choice in his *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir wa Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, in the section on the *BasmAllah*, where he says:

Know, O people, throughout my life I repeat the word *Allah*. When I die I will say *Allah*, when I am questioned in the grave I will say *Allah*, on the Day of Resurrection I will say *Allah*, when I take the book I will say *Allah*, when my good and bad deeds are weighed I will say *Allah*, when I reach the path I will say *Allah*, when I enter Paradise I will say *Allah*, when I see God I will say *Allah*, etc.

Al-Razi said all this in spite of the contempt of those who do not say *Allah*. We took pains to transmit these lines so that you may realize, brother, that the Alawites are not inventing something by their invocation of the word *Allah*, as you suspected. We hope you will also realize that the generality of Sufis share this practice with them, and believe that this Name is the supreme one. If the Most High is called by it, He will surely answer, and if something is requested of Him through this Name, it will be given. And this belief is not confined to the Sufis alone, but extends to more than one religious leader, as well as to the majority of transmitters of *hadith* and theologians. Concerning this, Shaykh Muhammad Bayram the fifth⁵ (may God have mercy on him!), who enjoins the invocation of the Divine Name, said:

5 d. 1899 CE.

It was related in the *Radd al-Muhtār* [of Ibn Abidin⁶] that Hisham said on the authority of Muhammad ibn Abu Hanifah رحمته الله: ‘*Allah* is the supreme Name of God most high.’

Al-Tahawi⁷ said the same, as well as many other religious scholars. Shaykh Abu Muhammad Abd al-Qadir ibn Yusuf al-Fasi also cited it among his arguments in defence of the legality of invoking the Divine Name by itself. He then said: “In the *Sahih* it says: ‘*The Last Hour will not come until there no longer remains anyone on earth who says Allah, Allah.*’” This is excellent evidence in a single sentence in favour of the mention of this word by itself, and is transmitted either as *Allahu, Allahu*, in the nominative; or in the accusative case as *Allaha, Allaha*. One can undeniably pronounce the noble Name alone, and this being so, how can one object to someone repeating it often, and what would be the nature of his objection? The preceding *hadith* was related by the Imam [Ahmad ibn Hanbal] in his *Musnad* and by Ibn Majah in his *Sahih* from Anas ibn Malik رحمته الله thus: “*The Last Hour will not come until the time when Allah, Allah is no longer invoked on earth.*” The greatest proof, as I have indicated, is from this *hadith*, for in it the Divine Name is repeated, and this shows clearly that He wishes us to invoke the Name. If the passage had the Name written only once it could have been construed as “until there no longer remains anyone on earth who believes in the existence of *Allah*.” However,

6 d. 1836 CE.

7 d. 933 CE.

because it is repeated, there is no such implication.

Let us assume that the Divine Law contains no indication whatsoever as to whether the repetition of the Name is permitted or not. If this is the case, then there is nothing at all to cause one to prohibit its repetition by the tongue, or its passage to the heart. In fact, it appears that there is nothing in the law to forbid the repetition of any name related by tradition and if this is so, then how can pronouncing one of the Divine Names be prohibited? Far be it from the Divine Law to contain such excesses and deviation and oblige the believer not to repeat the Name of his Lord – not to say *Allah, Allah*, or what is the same, not to repeat any of the rest of God's Names, for He said:

﴿وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا﴾

*To God belong the most beautiful
Names, so invoke Him by them*

[Al-A'raf, 7:180].

meaning petition Him by them and invoke Him by them. This is what we have understood and chosen for ourselves. You in turn have the right to choose for yourselves, but you should not oblige us to agree with your choice while we have not obliged you to agree with ours. I will end this section by quoting a passage that contains conclusive proof about the matter. I say this assuming the humility and generosity of those who claim that this Name is in the category of strongly discouraged things. I ask forgiveness of God! The

question of the strongly discouraged (*karaha*) or permitted (*nadab*) category of the word has been resolved, and it was stipulated that it ranks above the merely “permissible.” Concerning this, al-Ajhuri, in his *Sharh* of Khalil mentions the following on the authority of al-Mawwaq:

If there is a disagreement as to whether something is ‘permitted’ or ‘strongly discouraged,’ it is better to do it than not to. In the same way, if there is disagreement as to whether an action is part of the *Sunnah*, or strongly discouraged, then it cannot be less than ‘permitted’ in any case.

All the passages that we have set forth here are intended to act as intercessors on our behalf, so that you accept the excuses of the Alawites for whatever wrong they have committed by the invocation of the Divine Name – and may God accept the excuses of all, Amen! All that has been said thus far refers to the first question, namely the legality or illegality of invoking the Name.

You also mentioned, or let us say objected, to the fact that they repeatedly utter the name of Majesty whether or not it is appropriate to do so. They behave thus in the street and other such places. It appears to you that this attitude is lacking in reverence for the Divine Names, and that this practice was never specifically ordered by the law. When one of them knocks on the door, he says *Allah*, when someone calls to him he says *Allah*, and other things of this kind, all of which you find inappropriate. Here I must add that

however indulgent I am in my answer I am yet compelled, after asking your leave, to say that you have neglected to reveal the *Ahadith* relevant to our case which have given you cause to reproach the Alawites for having done something wrong. For, if you had indeed read about such traditions you would not have tried to oppose us on the basis of suspicions that the earliest believers practiced differently. If you were able to find texts which corroborate what we have said, I am certain that you would have scrutinized them and pondered them in your heart, submitting to what they say, and placing them above your own opinion. This is only proper and fitting for someone in your position. Thus, here I will quote what should be sufficient, God willing, to show that in the practice of the Alawites free, spontaneous invocation is not outside the realm of the *Sunnah*; nor is it in conflict with it. We have concluded that it is the essence of the *Sunnah*, and we base this belief on the command to “practice the invocation”; this must indicate that it is not to be restricted to a certain time or place, but can be practiced at all times and in all places. At each instant, man must build upon his moments of remembrance and rid himself of his inherent forgetfulness so that the former gains strength in his mind and remains fixed in his consciousness. In other words, the remembrance of God is praiseworthy whatever the circumstances, just as forgetfulness is blameworthy whatever the circumstances. Certainly the best course for both of us is to seek direction from the Holy Book and the *Sunnah*. The passages which the Qur’an contains about the

importance of the invocation and its warnings about being forgetful probably do not need to be quoted for clarification, especially to such as you. The *Sunnah*, in turn, contains passages which are no less clear, but it will not hurt for us to quote a few of these *hadiths*, along with some practices established by the four schools of law, so that we know the Will of the Lawgiver concerning us, and can act according to it, God willing. Ibn Durays and Abu Yala⁸ related on the authority of Abu Said al-Khudri:

It is incumbent upon you to fear God as much as possible, and to mention His Name at every tree and stone.

The most important idea here is the generalization of time and place with reference to the practice of the invocation. Similarly, Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* related on the authority of Anas رضي الله عنه, through a faultless chain of transmission, that the Messenger of God ﷺ used to invoke at every free moment. ‘Aisha رضي الله عنها related the same tradition. Al-Alqama transmitted from al-Dimiri that the Prophet ﷺ invoked God while performing the ablution, when in conversation, and when standing, lying down, walking, or on horseback, and so on. Al-Nawawi relates something similar in his commentary on Muslim, the gist of which is that the Prophet ﷺ constantly practiced the invocation, regardless of circumstance or place. Anyone who researches legal opinions of scholars on this subject will find ample

8 d. 1131 CE.

evidence indicating unanimous consensus in favour of this invocation. The Hanafi masters have related according to the *Nujum al-Muhtadin*, that the Qadi Khan said:

The invocation of God, as well as irreligious and dispersive gathering are permitted in the market place, provided that the one in the first activity is preoccupied with glorifying and declaring the oneness of God, and the others are preoccupied with their worldly affairs.

If you ponder—God have mercy on you!—the words “dispersive and irreligious gatherings” you will find that the Alawites are not so negligent as to belong to that category. In fact, the invocation has even been permitted in the hot baths, the place where one’s private parts are uncovered and one cleanses oneself of filth. This is shown in a large number of texts such as:

Reciting the Qur’an out loud while in the bath is disliked, but it is not disliked to do so in a whisper, just as one can glorify God and pronounce the testimony of unity there, even in a loud voice.

Other statements like this are to be found among the Hanafi masters in such works as the *Fatawa al-Khaniyya*, the *Husamiyya*, the *Sirajiyya*, the *Mutalaffaz*, and the *Jinas*. The author of the *Nusra* also quoted something similar. If the invocation is permissible in the bath, what is the sin if the Alawites invoke in the street, for example? Given that a person unaccustomed to hearing someone invoke in such places may be repulsed by it, it is nonetheless incumbent

upon the impartial man, if he wishes to judge others, to do so according to the justice of God and His prophets and not according to what he would choose or approve by himself. He should act without fear of the man who approves of one thing and disapproves of all other possibilities. For this reason, we must not be concerned with what a few have approved of, but should limit ourselves to choosing one of the possibilities contained in the religious law. The duty, then, for all who believe in God and the Last Day, is to look no further than these texts, and to act in accordance with their commands by choosing for their soul what God chooses for it.

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ﴾

When Allah and His Messenger ordain something for the believer, whether man or woman, it is not proper for him to choose for himself in the matter [Al-Ahzab, 33:36]

Brother, in spite of the nobility of your intention to examine this question by means of texts and statements of scholars, perhaps what we have quoted here will suffice you, though but a summary. If you need more evidence—and the believer often needs an increase in what is good—I will say further that more than one religious leader has clearly stated that the invocation is permitted even in the toilet. We mention this to make you recall that you even considered permitting

invocation in the street to be something unthinkable. The Qadi Iyad⁹ in the conclusion of his *Kitab al-Salat*: said:

The legal schools of Abd Allah ibn Amr ibn al-Aas, Shafi'i, Malik, and Ibn Bashir all permit the invocation of God most high in the toilet, etc.

It is also indicated in Ibn Rushd's¹⁰ *Sama' Sahnun* and by Shaykh Muhammad al-Kattani¹¹ in his quotation of Burzuli's treatise on the explanation of the words of God:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَهْلِهَا﴾
O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own without first asking permission to enter, and saluting those within [Al-Nur, 24:27]

The permitted nature of the invocation is also indicated in the *Sunan al-Muhtadin* [by Al-Mawwaq] as follows:

Al-Lakhami said, 'He who is about to relieve himself invokes God before entering the place where he does it.'

[Qadi] Iyad, speaking of the permissibility of invoking in the toilet says: 'Some have said it is permissible to invoke while relieving oneself and these include Malik, Nakha, and Abd Allah ibn Amr ibn al-As'.

9 d. 1149 CE.

10 Averroes; d. 1198 CE.

11 d. 1927 CE.

He also said: ‘Ibn al-Qasim used to say ‘Praise be to God!’ if he happened to sneeze while urinating and all of the preceding treatises mentioned this as well.’

You may ask: “Did not Shaykh Khalil¹² say: ‘The invocation of God should be avoided when in the toilet’ ?” And it was in fact said that one should refrain from it. Perhaps at first glance it appears that the words of Ibn Abd al-Salam¹³ and Khalil indicate that something one should refrain from doing must fall into the category of the forbidden. We would say that where it can be understood from the words of these men that to refrain from something means that it is forbidden (*haram*), it can equally be understood from Ibn Rushd, Iyad, and the author of the *Tiraz*¹⁴ that the meaning of refraining is that the action is to be strongly discouraged (*makruh*). This is obviously what is meant in the writings of Jazuli¹⁵ and the author of the *Madkhal*.¹⁶ Some religious leaders, among them Abu Abd Allah al-Hattab,¹⁷ have found fault with those who have understood the word to mean forbidden. He said:

It is not obvious, since none of the statements of earlier sources agree with this meaning, and it has not

¹² d. 1365 CE.

¹³ d. 1262 CE.

¹⁴ Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Khajafi, d. 1659 CE.

¹⁵ d. 1465 CE.

¹⁶ Ibn al-Hajj al-Abdari, d. 1336 CE.

¹⁷ d. 1546 CE.

been declared to mean this. The import of their words should be taken to be 'strongly discouraged' and not 'forbidden,' so as to agree with the earlier sources.

In drawing upon all these texts my purpose is not to favour the legal schools which either permit the invocation in the toilet or otherwise, but in order to demonstrate, brother, that some religious leaders have approved of the invocation even in the place considered to be the worst and most unclean by far. Thus, if you happen to find someone invoking God while in such a place, do not consider it strange, or look upon him as an innovator, for al-Shafi'i and Malik have stated it to be permitted, and they are sufficiently good examples of those who hold fast to the bond with God and to the *Sunnah* of His Messenger ﷺ. This and other texts clearly declare without a doubt that the Alawites were wronged by your accusations, for they have not gone, through imprudence, to the extreme limits of what is permitted. You have not heard anyone of them say that he did not refrain from invocation even in the toilet or in other such unclean circumstances. The most that one can relate of the Alawites is that if someone calls to one of them he says *Allah* and if he calls out to someone he says *Allah*, and so on. Someone may say that the Names of God are too exalted to be used as a means of gaining access to anything outside of the realm of the after-life, nor should it be permitted to use them as a means of calling upon someone or attracting his attention. This would be correct, were it not for the fact

that this same thing is permitted and even commanded in the religious law. If you were to look in the most obvious area for material which corroborates these arguments, you would find that what God wills of us in this matter is so clear that it comes close to being an order from Him. For example, just consider the call to prayer. As I am sure you know, it has been established as a means of declaring that the times of prayer have come, and as an exhortation to all to fulfil their duty of prayer. It would be more precise and fitting, perhaps, to call out “The time of prayer has come” or “The time for prayer has commenced,” or something that indicates the same thing. Why, in that case, is the whole testimony of faith recited and not simply a few words summarizing it? Furthermore, would you have asked why these Names of God have come to be used as instruments to call men to prayer? A similar example is saying “Glory be to God!” to inform the leader in prayer of a mistake, or to inform him of whatever necessity demands. It is said that the companions of the Prophet ﷺ used to awaken each other by the saying, “God is most great!” This is confirmed in both *Sahih* collections in the story of the valley, where they slept past the time for the dawn prayer, and the first to awaken was Abu Bakr ؓ. ‘Umar ؓ was the fourth one to awake, and he began calling out “God is most great!” until the Prophet ﷺ awoke. Consider—may God have mercy on you!—how they used forms of invocation to awaken one another from sleep. This was how they acted in time of war or otherwise – indicating things by saying “God is most

great!” In Khalil’s account, Ibn Rushd related something along the same lines:

Boasting is permitted when shooting arrows, at naming ceremonies, and in the battle-cry, but the remembrance of God is better.

In addition, Ibn Arafah¹⁸ said:

One may boast when he thinks he has hit the mark, but to invoke God is best.

Consider how he chose to use the invocation of God as a means of announcing that he hit the mark. They chose thus so as to be in conformity with the will of God, who intended the invocation to be done in every circumstance.

As it is likely that what we have thus far presented is not sufficient to provide a clear enough proof for you concerning the invocation, I thought to quote a few words from *hadith*, especially in connection with the question of invoking God, Mighty and Powerful, when asking permission to enter someone’s home. By this means our noble brother may find the answer to the question which has sent him delving into the texts of religious law. Among those *Ahadith* which are very clear on the subject is the following: The Prophet ﷺ said: “*When you reach the doors of your houses, announce your presence by invoking God.*”

This was related by the distinguished al-Sanusi,¹⁹ author

18 d. 1401 CE.

19 d. 1490 CE.

of the *Aqa'id*, in his book *Nusra al-Faqir* as a response to Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir. This practice is supported all the more by the majority of Qur'anic exegetes, who have written about the meaning of asking permission before entering in reference to the passage in the Qur'an:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَهْلِهَا﴾

O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than you own without first asking permission and greeting those within
[*Al-Nur*, 24:27].

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, in his *Tafsir*, after speaking of a number of aspects of asking permission, says:

Akrama said it means to declare 'God is most great!' and 'Glory be to God!' and other invocations of this kind.

Nisaburi,²⁰ in his exegesis entitled *Gharib al-Qur'an* has the same as al-Razi. Ibn Abu Shaybah, Tirmidhi, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawayh, and Tabarani all relate the authority of Abu Ayyub that he said:

I said, O Messenger of *Allah*, tell me about the words of *Allah*,

﴿حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَهْلِهَا﴾

(until you ask permission and greet those within)

20 d.1328 CE.

The greeting we have learned, but what is the form of asking permission? He ﷺ replied: *‘A man should say “Glory be to God!” “God is great!” or “Praise be to God!” and clear his throat, so that the people within the house hear.’*

Al-Suyuti related this *hadith* in his book *Al-Durr al-Manthur fī Tafsir al-Qur’an bi al-Ma’tthur*. There is no question, among religious leaders, that the invocation is preferable to calling out, or knocking loudly on the door.

Brother, no matter how much you endeavour to examine what we have presented impartially, you should realize that when you create a rift between the *Sunnah* and ourselves, it makes us guilty of a form of innovation. For this reason we have risen to combat it with no consciousness or knowledge save that which God inspired in us—He who guides us along with you, Amen!

Before we end this letter, a letter that, God willing, contains blessings for you and for us—I would like to relate some *Ahadith* on this subject. I hope that you will give them the attention they deserve, as is your custom. There are two *Ahadith* which contain the essence of all we have said about the duty of devoting oneself to the remembrance of God, Mighty and Glorious, at every time and place and of filling up every moment with this remembrance. The first is related by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Ibn Abi al-Dunya, Nasai, and Ibn Habbān. In Abu Dawud’s words: The Prophet ﷺ said: *‘Whoever sits in a place and does not invoke Allah there, his sitting is vain and frivolous in the eyes of Allah.’*

There Hafiz Abd al-Azim said the word *al-tira*, pro-

nounced with a short ‘i’ and a single ‘r’, means a fault and something which God counts against a person. The second *hadith* comes from Abu Dawud and al-Hakim, on the authority of Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه. He said: ‘*No one will arise from a group in conversation where Allah has not been mentioned except they will be like the corpses of donkeys, and will lament their deed on the Day of Judgment.*’

Here we end our letter. All victory is in the hands of Him to whom we shall return, and with whom is the final abode. Peace and blessings be upon our lord Muhammad, and upon his family and companions. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.

The Pure Goal Concerning Knowledge of the Unique Name

Shaykh Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari

Trans.: Khalid Williams, 2012

Pg.24-36

THIS NAME, THIS UNIQUE, glorious, precedential, singular Name – the name *Allah* – is the Name of the Supreme Essence, which is endowed with the attributes of Divinity, Lordship, Oneness, Uniqueness and Plenitude, transcendently removed from modality and comparability, and too holy to be encompassed in knowledge by the human mind. *Allah*: it is the Name of God, the One, the Eternal, the Living, the Sustaining, the Sublime, the Infinite, the Permanent, the Timeless, the Great, the Transcendent, the Absolute, the Beyond-Time who remains ever First and Last, Outwardly Manifest and Inwardly Hidden, the Sole Possessor of True Being, the Necessary Being. Every other being draws its existence from Him, so that it is non-existent in its own right, and existent only by Him who gives it existence.

It is the greatest of all the Names, because it refers to the Supreme Essence, in which is synthesised all the perfection of the Divine Qualities. The perfection of the Essence is the perfection of Being and Its timeless and eternal presence, without beginning or end. He can never cease to be; His Being is necessary, as is His Eternality.

Now the scholars differ as to whether this Unique Name

is morphologically derived or not. This question may be approached from three perspectives: that of language, that of wisdom, and that of gnosis.

Concerning the first perspective, that of language, there are two opinions. Some say it is morphologically derived and that the source of its derivation is known; others say that we cannot say anything about this, but must take the Name as it is. The latter group say that it is not permitted to trace the Name's derivation at all, because God says: ﴿هَلْ نَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا﴾ which can be interpreted in three ways. Firstly, *'Do you know of anyone besides Allah who is called Allah, or any name for Him other than that which He has given Himself?'* Secondly, *'Do you know of anyone who deserves to be described by such perfect names and qualities as God does and is?'* Thirdly, *'Do you know of any name which is greater than this Supreme Name, or do you imagine it is derived from something else, as human names are? For nothing resembles Him.'*

[According to this understanding], the Name refers to the Essence of God by which all the Qualities exist; it is like the word *'ilm*, which simply means 'knowledge' and is not derived from anything else. It is a name which God Almighty has chosen for Himself alone, by which He describes His Essence, and which He has given precedence above all the other Names, so that they are all adjectives for it and connected to it. All the other Names are called 'the Names of *Allah*', usually known by their relationship to this one Name: they are called 'the Names of

Allah’, not ‘the Names of *Al-Sabur* [the All-Patient]’ or ‘the Names of *Al-Ghaffar* [the All-Forgiving]’ or ‘the names of *Al-Jabbar* [the Irresistible]. Conversion to Islam, too, requires mention of this Name and no other; one cannot say *la ilaha illa ‘l-Ghaffar* [‘there is no god but the All-forgiving’], or ‘the Merciful’, or ‘the Irresistible’; one may only say *la ilaha illa Allah*. The Qur’an and *hadith* also speak in this way, because it is the clearest way to refer to the concepts of divinity, and means nothing else. It is more recognised as fulfilling this function than any other name, and conveys this concept more clearly and perfectly, needing no other name to clarify it, while all the other Names are known only in connection with it. It has been set aside for speech, invocation and attachment, and is ascribed to no created being. A poet said:

O you who, by your search and study
 Have approached a secret above all ascription,
 Take the advice of one who says:
 Do not allow for any resemblance
 For the Name of God, which is unique
 And has no derivation, and is shared by none.
 He chose it for Himself, and kept it secret,
 Not even disclosing it in the other scriptures.
 He made it the Name of His own Essence,
 So that the other Names marvelled at it:
 By means of them, the Name is praised,
 And thanked for blessings, and lauded in speeches.
 Proclaim it always, then, and allow for it no precedent,

If you are a man of depth and etiquette.

Those who are of the opinion that the Name is indeed morphologically derived say that it is derived from five things: adoration, salvation, veiling, attachment and height. It is said to be derived from adoration [*walah*] in the sense that its origin is *ilah* [god], and a god is something that is adored, and from whom needs are sought, and from whom protection is asked at times of trial, and whose grace is hoped for, and whose justice is feared.

This is based on the notion that the Name is derived from the definite article *al-* which was added to *ilah* by way of implying grandeur, to make *al-ilah*, ‘the God’; the letter I was then removed, and the two Ls joined (the L of grandeur joining with the L of glorification), to make *Allah*. Since *Allah* is the Name of God, it implies *walah* [which means both ‘adoration’ and ‘grief’], either in the sense of the servant’s rapture and joy, or in the sense of his grief and fear, as he passes between the two states of contraction and expansion. In the state of contraction, he feels awe and consequently bewilderment; and in the state of expansion, he feels closeness and consequently joy. The one who knows his Lord seeks refuge in Him, calls out to Him, adores Him and turns away from all besides Him, preferring His contentment to his own caprice.

Concerning the Name’s derivation from the concept of ‘veil’, it is based on the word *lah*, which can mean ‘to be veiled.’ God is veiled from mankind and hidden from their

sight in this world.

The one who knows his Lord is aware of Him, and monitors his own soul, and knows that He can see him though He cannot be seen, and is shy of Him.

As for the Name's derivation from the concept of 'height', it is also based on the word *lah*: the sun is said to have *lahat* when it reaches the zenith, its highest point. Thus it has been said:

God is on high [*lah al-ilah*] at the highest of heights;

It is enough for me to know that my deeds ascend to Him.

Now concerning the second perspective, that of wisdom, it has been said that the Almighty Real has designated this Unique Name – *Allah* – to Himself alone, and barred any other from being named by it, and prevented mankind from claiming it and adopting it, or describing one another by it, because of the greatness and magnificence of divinity. God says:

﴿إِلَٰهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ﴾

God: there is no god but He, the Lord of the Mighty Throne [Al-Naml, 27:26],

and:

﴿إِلَٰهُ مَعَ اللَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Is there a god with God? Nay, but the most of them have no knowledge [Al-Naml, 27:61],

and:

﴿إِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ حَصَبُ جَهَنَّمَ أَنْتُمْ لَهَا
وَامِرُونَ لَوْ كَانَ هُوَ آلِهَةً مَا وَرَدُوهَا وَكُلٌّ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ﴾

Surely you, and that you were serving apart from God, are fuel for Gehenna; you shall go down to it.' If those had been gods, they would never have gone down to it; yet every one of them shall therein abide forever [Al-Anbiya, 21:98-99],

and:

﴿قَتَعَالَى اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْكَرِيمِ وَمَنْ يَدْعُ مَعَ
اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ لَا بُرْهَانَ لَهُ بِهِ فَإِنَّمَا حِسَابُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الْكَافِرُونَ﴾

Then high exalted be God, the King, the True! There is no god but He? the Lord of the noble Throne. And whosoever calls upon another god with God, whereof he has no proof, his reckoning is with his Lord; surely the unbelievers shall not prosper [Al-Mu'minin, 23:116-117].

An authentic *hadith* says: 'God Almighty says: "Pride is My garment and greatness is My cloak; and whoso challenges Me in either one of them, him I will destroy"'²¹; that is, I will send him to Hell. The Divine Name expresses That to which hearts turn in sincere devotion, and That to which

²¹ Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah and Ibn al-Najjar on the authority of Ibn al-'Abbas رضي الله عنه, and al-Hakim on the authority of Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه, whose wording is used here.

bodies and limbs turn in sincere humility of worship. He is the Absolute Necessary Being, and the true Real, and all besides Him are perishing, non-existent and false. The Prophet ﷺ said that ‘*the truest thing any poet said was the words of Labid: “Verily, all besides God is naught”*’.²²

Now concerning the third perspective, that of gnosis, it has been said that the Real chose this Name – *Allah* – for three reasons:

Firstly, for itself, since it is unique and shared by no one, neither metaphorically nor literally, because of the mysteries, wisdoms and meanings it embodies, and because of the uniqueness and glory it implies.

Secondly, because of the subtle meanings and noble qualities it synthesises. Other names have one or two meanings, such as Creator, Maker, Designer, Beginner, Cause, and so on, which all have the same meaning, even though each Name has something that marks it out from the others. Consider also Names such as Provider, Giver of Blessings, Kind, Giver of Grace, Generous and Munificent, which all mean essentially the same thing. All the other Names and Qualities might share common meanings with others, or be unique, but have only one meaning. The Name *Allah*, however, has meanings beyond count and limit, and all the other Names ultimately refer back to it and act as adjectives for it, and are defined by it, while it is not defined by anything but the Essence.

22 Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

Thirdly, because it is distinguished by mysteries which are not present in any of the other Names. God's Grace, Glory, Names and Qualities are all of tremendous virtue, but this one Name has an additional perfect distinction which sets it aside from all of them. Just as, although the Torah, Gospel, Psalms and Qur'an are all the Word of God, He chose the Qur'an and set it aside from all of them, He likewise chose this one Name from all his Names for special distinction and glory.

One special distinction of the Name is that it is perfect in its letters, complete in its meaning, unique in its mysteries and singular in its quality. Originally it is *Allah*; if the initial *alif* is removed, it leaves *lam-lam-ha*, which spells *lillah*, 'to God.' If the first *lam* is then removed, this leaves *lam-ha*, which spells *lahu*, 'to Him.' Finally, if the second *lam* is removed, this leaves the letter *ha*, which signifies the third person pronoun *hu*, 'He.' Thus every letter of the Name has a complete meaning and a perfect distinction, and its meaning does not change. When the letters are separated, no benefit is lost, nor any wisdom removed, and each successive word has a strange and marvellous meaning of its own. The meaning of these words and their letters will be explained at the end of this section, God willing.

The other Names are not like this, for if their letters are removed or separated, their meanings change and they are nullified and spoiled, and no longer give any benefit. This shows how this Name is universal and perfect, both in general and in detail. The removal, separation or isolation

of its letters does not affect its meanings or blot out any of its mysteries; its parts are not less than its sum.

Know that the Most Beautiful Names number one thousand, of which there are three hundred in the Torah, three hundred in the Gospel, three hundred in the Psalms, one in the scriptures of Abraham, and ninety-nine in the Qur'an. Now the meanings of all these Names are synthesised in the ninety-nine Names of the Qur'an, which encompass them and contain all of their virtues, mysteries and treasures; and of all the Names in all the scriptures, the first of them is: *Allah*. This is why this Name is the most frequently uttered by people as they go about their affairs: whether it be a word, a deed or anything else, it should be begun with the Name *Allah*. God says:

﴿وَقَالَ امْرُؤُكُومَا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ جَرَّاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾

And [Noah] said, "Embark therein; in the name of Allah is its course and its anchorage. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful [Hud, 11:41],

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا أُحِلَّ لَهُمْ قُلْ أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَمَا عَلَّمْتُم مِّنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ تُعَلِّمُونَهُنَّ مِمَّا عَلَّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ فَكُلُوا مِمَّا أَمْسَكْنَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَادْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ﴾

They ask you, [O Muhammad], what has been made lawful for them. Say, "Lawful for you are [all] good foods and [game caught by] what you have trained of

hunting animals which you train as Allah has taught you. So eat of what they catch for you, and mention the name of Allah upon it, and fear Allah . " Indeed, Allah is swift in account [Al-Ma'ida, 5:4],

﴿فَكُلُوا مِمَّا ذَكَرَ اسْمُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾
So eat of that [meat] upon which the name of Allah has been mentioned, if you are believers in His verses. [Al-An'am, 6: 118],

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا﴾
O you who believe, remember Allah with much remembrance [Al-Ahzab, 33:41],

﴿اتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْعُونَ﴾
Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do [Al-'Ankabut, 29:45].

All this is an encouragement to invoke this Name.

* * * * *

[PAGES 97-123]

The Messenger of God ﷺ said: *'The unique ones will be*

foremost.’ They asked, ‘Who are the unique ones, O Messenger of God?’ He answered: ‘Those who invoke God often, be they men or women.’²³ He ﷺ also told us that God says: ‘If someone invokes Me so much that He has no time to ask of Me, I will give him more than I give those who ask.’ He ﷺ also said: ‘The strongest deeds are three: honesty with oneself, helping one’s brother financially, and remembrance of God Almighty.’ He ﷺ also said: ‘A man can perform no action more likely to save him from God’s punishment than the remembrance of God.’ Al-Hasan asked the Messenger of God ﷺ about the best of actions, and he ﷺ replied: ‘That when you die, your tongue is moist with the remembrance of God.’

See, then, may God give you success, how this Name – Allah, the Name of God – is the best of all acts of worship. This is because God has appointed specific times and amounts for all other acts, but has not prescribed any specific time or amount for this Name, but has simply encouraged us to invoke it often, saying:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا لَقِيتُمْ فِئَةً فَاثْبُتُوا وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾
O you who have believe, when you encounter a company [from the enemy forces], stand firm and remember Allah much that you may be successful [Al-Anfal, 8:45]

﴿فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمْ مَنَاسِكَكُمْ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا فَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَاقٍ﴾

23 Narrated by Muslim and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

And when you have completed your rites, remember Allah like your [previous] remembrance of your fathers or with [much] greater remembrance. And among the people is he who says, "Our Lord, give us in this world," and he will have in the Hereafter no share [Al-Baqarah, 2: 200].

* * * * *

We have spoken about this Name according to the light of what has been taught about it, and the understanding God has inspired of it. Now you should know that the point of all this is to encourage that this Name be invoked, and invoked more often than anything else, because of the love God has for it, and its tremendous standing in His sight, and the special virtue and nobility He has assigned to its invocation above all others. The purpose of this is to provoke meditation on its mysteries, so that its resplendent lights are shone upon the heart and the body, and so that the gnosis and love of the one who invokes it is strengthened, and he is drawn ever closer to God. The sign of love is the frequent invocation of the Beloved; the sign of increase is the frequent offering of thanks to Him; the sign of grace is obedience to His commands and prohibitions; and the sign of contentment is the offering of worship to Him at the appropriate times, and the preference of good to evil. A poet said about this:

Repeat to me the mention of His Names,
And polish hearts with His light and brilliance,
And fill the glasses for the souls,
For they are yearning to drink.

A Name from which the universe took its light,
 On earth, sea and sky;
 The minds of men are dazzled by its qualities,
 The hearts of men are brightened by its light.
 When its majesty is revealed to hearts,
 They sense the mystery of its glory and brilliance.
 The hearts of the righteous are glad to be near it;
 It takes them up to its highest heights.
 The repetition of His Name
 Is the dearest of His blessings to the gnostics.

One of the special qualities of this Unique Name is that every word of *Surat Al-Ikhlās* has its own special allusion and wondrous meaning, which imparts mystery, knowledge, and spiritual insight.

﴿قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ۝﴾

Say: He is God, One. [1] God, the Self-Sufficient, Besought of all. [2] He neither begot, nor was begotten. [3] Nor is there anyone equal to Him [4] [Al-Ikhlās,

112: 1-4]

Observe: (*Say*) alludes to a command, (*He*) to an affirmation of His Being, (*Allah*) to the Name of God, (*One*) to His Unique Oneness, (*Allah*) to the invocation of the Unique Name of Divine Oneness, (*the Self-Sufficient*) [*Al-Samad*] to the Essence's transcendence beyond the human soul, (*He neither begot*) to His perfect transcendence beyond all other than Him, (*nor was begotten*) to His eternality, timelessness

and beginninglessness, and (*nor is there anyone equal to Him*) to the absence of any opposite, counterpart, comparison or rival to Him.

This Name is called the ‘Unique Name’ because of how it is repeated and how it stands alone between the other Name [‘He,’ *Huwa*] and the Name ‘the Self-Sufficient’ [*Al-Samad*]; the Almighty Real chose this second Name and made it unique, and repeated it so that it would be repeated by others. He also chose it as the Name for the Divine Essence; by means of this Name, the Essence was revealed and given mention and renown in existence. He says:

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ﴾

Say: Allah, then leave them to their idle talk [Al-An‘am, 6:91].

and:

﴿وَهُوَ اللَّهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ﴾

He is Allah in the heavens and earth [Al-An‘am, 6:3];

that is, He is worshipped, invoked, praised and thanked, and all creatures are under His command and prohibition. He knows the treachery of the eye and what the heart conceals, and nothing in the universe is beyond His ken.

Likewise, regarding the phrase *Allahu Akbar*, there are five perspectives:

Firstly, it means that God’s remembrance of Himself

and His Oneness, Magnificence and Glory is greater and mightier than the remembrance of His poor weak creatures and their declaration of His Oneness; for He is Ever-Rich, All-Praised.

Secondly, the invocation of this Name is greater than the invocation of any other Name.

Thirdly, God's remembrance of His servant in pre-eternity, before he came into existence, is greater and mightier than the servant's remembrance of God now, and earlier, older, more complete, more brilliant, loftier, nobler and kinder. God says:

﴿وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ﴾

*And the remembrance
of God is greater [Al-
'Ankabut, 29:45].*

Fourthly, the remembrance of God in prayer is better and greater than the remembrance of him outside of prayer; and to witness the Object of remembrance in the prayer is mightier, greater and more perfect than prayer itself.

Fifthly, God's remembrance of you with these manifold blessings and boons, and the favour He does you by calling you to obey Him, is greater than your remembrance of Him in acknowledging them, since you cannot thank Him as He should be thanked. Therefore our Prophet ﷺ said: '*I cannot praise You; You are as You have praised Yourself.*'²⁴ Though

24 Narrated by Muslim and the Four Sunan on the authority of 'Aisha .

he was unsurpassed in his knowledge, status and gnosis, he ﷺ confessed his inability to praise God.

Moreover, after the affirmation of God's Oneness there is nothing greater than prayer, which is why it is the second Pillar of Islam, according to the words of the Prophet ﷺ: *'Islam is built on five: Declaring God's Oneness, prayer...'*²⁵ the start of the prayer is heralded by *Allahu Akbar*, and only this Divine Name will do, and no other; the Prophet ﷺ said: *'It is consecrated by the takbir.'* This Name is also mentioned in the call to prayer, and in every *takbir* of the prayer.

The invocation of this Name, then, is better than any other form of worship, and is closer to intimate discourse than prayer or any other form of worship. A *hadith* tells us that *God Almighty* says: *'I am the companion of the one who remembers Me.'* He also says: *'I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. When he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself. When he remembers Me alone, I remember him alone. When he remembers Me in a group, I remember him in a better group.'*²⁶ And God says:

﴿فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ﴾

*Remember Me; I will re-
member you [Al-Baqarah,
2: 152].*

25 Narrated by al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi and al-Nasa'i on the authority of 'Umar ﷺ.

26 Narrated by Muslim.

The proof that invocation is better than prayer is found in the same aforementioned verse. God says:

﴿إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ﴾

Prayer preserves from iniquity and abomination [Al-'Ankabut, 29:45],

which indeed it does, and it is a tremendous thing; but the remembrance of God is greater than it, and greater than every other form of worship, for God says:

﴿وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ﴾

And the remembrance of God is greater [Al-'Ankabut, 29:45].

Moreover, the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said: '*Shall I not inform you of the best of your deeds and the highest in rank and purest in the sight of your Master – a deed which is better than giving gold and silver, and better than to meet your enemies in battle and smite their necks and have your necks smitten by them?*' They said, 'Tell us.' He ﷺ said, '*The remembrance of God.*'²⁷ He ﷺ also said, as reported by Mu'adh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه: '*The son of man can perform no action more likely to save him from God's punishment than the remembrance of God.*'

For God to 'remember' His servants means that when

²⁷ Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and al-Hakim on the authority of Abu Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

they invoke His Oneness, he reminds them of Paradise and more besides, as He says:

﴿فَأَنبَأَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِمَا قَالُوا جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ﴾
God rewarded them, on account of what they said, with gardens beneath which flow rivers [Al-Ma'idah, 5:85].

When they invoke Him with his Unique Name – *Allah* – and call to him with sincerity, He answers them, as He says:

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَكُنِّي قَرِيبٌ﴾
If My servants ask you about Me, I am near [Al-Baqarah, 2:186].

When they invoke Him with gratitude, He increases them, as He says:

﴿لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ﴾
If you thank Me, I will surely increase you [Ibrahim, 14:7].

Whenever a servant remembers Him, He in return remembers the servant in a compensatory way. When the gnostic remembers Him with his gnosis, He remembers the gnostic by raising the veil that he might see Him. When the believer remembers Him with his faith, He remembers the believer with His mercy and good pleasure. When the repentant remembers Him with repentance, He remembers

the repenters with acceptance and forgiveness. When the sinner remembers Him by confessing his sin, He remembers the sinner by concealing him and bearing him. When the wicked person remembers Him with wickedness and heedlessness, He remembers the wicked person with punishment and rejection. When the unbeliever remembers Him with unbelief and insolence, He remembers the unbeliever with punishment and requital. He raises those who laud Him, rectifies those who glorify Him, aids those who praise Him, forgives those who ask His forgiveness, and accepts those who turn back to Him.

All the states the servant passes through can be summarised by four states: he is obedient, in which case God remembers him by allowing him to see the blessing of grace which allowed him to be obedient; or he is disobedient, in which case He remembers him by concealing him and guiding him towards repentance; or he enjoys a blessing, in which case He remembers him by inspiring gratitude in him; or else he suffers a trial, in which case He remembers him by inspiring patience in him.

The remembrance of God produces five things: God's good pleasure, the softening of the heart, increased goodness, protection from Satan, and abstinence from sin. Those who remember Him only do so because He remembers them; those who know Him only do so because He reveals Himself to them; those who declare His Oneness only do so because He teaches it to them; those who obey Him only do so because He gives them grace; those who love Him only

do so because He chooses to love them; those who disobey Him only do so because He forsakes them. Every blessing is His gift, and every trial is the fate He decreed; and all things come to pass in due course.

In *tawhid* and the invocation of *tawhid*, people are divided into three categories. First there are the masses, or those at the beginning stage: theirs is the *tawhid* of the tongue, by which they pronounce and invoke, with faith and sincerity, the testimony of *tawhid*: 'There is no god but god, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' This is surrender [*islam*]. Secondly there are the elite, or those at the intermediate stage: theirs is the *tawhid* of the heart, to which they hold with faith and sincerity. This is faith [*iman*]. Lastly there is the innermost elite: theirs is the *tawhid* of the intellect, in which they are certain, or which they witness directly. This is spiritual excellence [*ihsan*].

There are three stations then for those who invoke: the invocation of the tongue, which is the invocation of the masses; the invocation of the heart, which is the invocation of the spiritual elite; and the invocation of the spirit, which is the invocation of the innermost elite and the gnostics, who in their extinction [*fana*] are unaware of their own invocation and aware only of Him who remembers them and blesses them.

The one who invokes this Unique Name – *Allah* – passes through several states: the state of passion and extinction [*fana*], the state of life and subsistence [*baqa*], and the state of bliss and contentment [*rida*].

The first state, that of passion and extinction, is experienced by the one who invokes this Name alone and no other at the beginning, making it his confidant, and stressing the final letter *ha* of it as he invokes it. The one who does this consistently will be erased on the outside and effaced on the inside. Outwardly, he will appear like a madman, out of his mind with passion, and no one will accept him, and all will avoid him because of the passion that characterises his outward appearance, and the secret of the Name that he invokes. The quality of Godhood is not a quality which anyone can share, and people are unsettled by the one who invokes it, so that he becomes like those of whom God says:

﴿فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ﴾

There is no kinship any more between them, nor do they question one another
[*Al-Mu'minun*, 23:101].

Inside, he is virtually dead and extinct, because of the stillness of his essence and his qualities, and how he has renounced his habits and familiar things, and the submission of his body and the piety of his heart. God says of this:

﴿إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا﴾

We shall load you with a word of heavy weight [*Al-Muzammil*, 73:5],

and:

﴿وَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ
مِنْ كُلِّ مَرْجٍ بَهِيحٍ﴾

You see the earth blackened, and then, when We send down water upon it, it quivers and swells, and puts forth herbs of every joyous kind [Al-Hajj, 22:5].

The second state, that of life and subsistence, is experienced by the one who invokes this Name when he masters the invocation and becomes accustomed to it, so that his qualities and traces are erased, and the spirit of contentment is blown into him after the death of his will and desire. He becomes extinct to his habitual desires and passions, and sheds all his blameworthy attributes, and moves from the state of passion and extinction to the state of life and subsistence. He develops a powerful and awesome presence, and all contingent things come to fear and laud him, and humble themselves before him, and seek blessings from him.

The third state, that of bliss and contentment, is experienced by the one who invokes this Name when he lauds God's command, feels compassion for God's creatures, makes no prideful claims about God's religion, expands beyond himself by God and for God, realises the breadth of God's mercy, is no longer affected by God's creations, and is no longer under the thrall of anyone or anything, by God's leave. When he reaches this point, he moves from the state of life and subsistence to the state of bliss and contentment, and lives a life of perpetual bliss and happiness; a life that

is sound and peaceful, unsullied by turbidity or change. He gains mastery over his own state, and is given security, tranquillity and stability. He becomes, for his fellow man, like plentiful rain: wherever he goes, things bloom, grow and are nourished. He attains unto bliss and contentment in God, and God is content with him. God says:

﴿ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ﴾

Thereafter We produced him as another creature. So blessed be God, the fairest of creators!) [Al-Mu'minun, 23:14].

As the poet has said:


I cried out in passion for You when I invoked You,
 For Your mention makes a man moan and die in ardour.
 Whoso loses not his mind in yearning for love,
 Upon my word, lives a miserable life.
 What is remembrance? It is to lose sight
 Of remembrance through passion for the Remembered.
 The one of sound mind has no real remembrance;
 He who moves beyond his remembrance, moves upward.

Know that remembrance means to move from heedlessness to witnessing through fear, ardent love, overwhelming yearning and surrender. The reality of remembrance is to be fixed solely on the Remembered without being conscious of one's own remembrance, and to be extinct in the act of witnessing without being conscious of one's own witnessing, but only of His; thus one sees the Real, by the Real, and God

is the Invoker and the Invoked. Inasmuch as the remembrance is uttered by the tongue of the servant, the servant is the one who remembers; inasmuch as it is He who facilitates this and allows it to proceed from the servant's tongue, He is the One who remembers His servant and facilitates his remembrance; inasmuch as it is He who inspires the thought to begin with, He is the One who remembers himself on the tongue of His servant. The authentic *hadith* tells us that *God says: 'I become his hearing wherewith he hears, his sight wherewith he sees, his tongue wherewith he speaks...';*²⁸ and another narration has it, '*I become his hearing, sight, tongue, hand and aid.*'

There are several forms and types of invocation, but the Invoked is One, Indivisible and Infinite. The folk of invocation are the beloved of the Real, because of what the invocation produces in them. Invocation is of three categories: loud, silent and true. Loud invocation is for beginners. It is uttered by the tongue, and consists of expressions of gratitude, praise, and the magnification of blessings, favours and covenants. Each instance of it is worth between ten and seventy good deeds.

Silent, inward invocation is for the people of sainthood [*milaya*]. It is pronounced secretly in the heart when one has broken free of one's weakness and come to subsist in a state of constant witnessing of the Presence. Each instance of it is worth between seventy and seven hundred good deeds.

28 Narrated by al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra .

True, perfect invocation is for those at the end of the Path. It is the spirit's invocation of the Real's All-Seeing Presence with the servant after he has ceased to see his own invocation, whilst subsisting in his external form and life. One instance of it is worth between seven hundred and an infinite number of good deeds. This is because the state of witnessing is an extinction with no pleasure.

The spirit invokes the Essence, the heart invokes the Qualities, and the tongue performs a habitual and outward invocation. If the invocation of the spirit is operative, then the heart ceases to invoke; this is the invocation of the awe of the Essence, which signals that one has reached the level of extinction and nearness. If the invocation of the heart is operative, the tongue falls silent and ceases to invoke; this is the invocation of the blessings and boons of the Qualities, which signals that a remnant of the self remains and extinction has not yet been reached, and that one has not yet been accepted. If the heart's invocation is not operative, then the tongue simply invokes externally, out of habit.

Those who fear Him invoke Him by His warnings; those who hope for Him invoke Him by His promises; the monotheists invoke Him by His Oneness; those who love Him invoke Him by their vision of Him; the gnostics invoke Him by Him, not by themselves or for themselves. The gnostic invokes God with honour and magnification; the scholar invokes God with transcendence and glory; the worshipper invokes God with fear and hope; the lover invokes God with

passion; the monotheist invokes God with awe and dread; the masses invoke God out of mindless habit. The servant is compelled and called to invoke, and has no excuse not to do so as long as he is morally responsible.

Know that invocation is always one of three: it is either invocation of the tongue, which is to knock upon the door of the King, and is an expiation for sins and a means of ascending degrees; or it is invocation of the heart, which is to be granted permission to address the King, and is a means of drawing closer to Him; or it is invocation of the spirit, which is to speak and converse with the King, and to be present with Him and to witness Him.

Invocation of the tongue with an oblivious heart is mere habitual invocation, devoid of any hope of increase. Invocation of the tongue with presence of heart is worshipful invocation, from which benefit may come. Invocation with a whole tongue and a full heart is the way of unveiling and witnessing, and no one but God knows its worth.

It is said that a great gnostic was asked about the Supreme Name of God, he answered: 'It is to say *Allah* without being there yourself.' This is because when a created being says *Allah*, he says it with his ego; yet mystical realities cannot be perceived by the ego. The one who says *Allah* by pronouncing the letters of the word has not really said *Allah*, or really invoked it, because it is far beyond ego, letters, human understanding, physical form, shape, imagination and fancy. Yet nevertheless, our Lord in His grace accepts this from us, and rewards us for it, because there is no other

way for human beings to invoke Him and declare His Oneness. Because of how He favours and cares for the gnostics and those endowed with spiritual knowledge and mastery, He is not content to leave them to their own invocation of Him, as He says:

﴿وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ﴾

*There is not one of us, save
that he has a known station
[Al-Saffat, 37:164].*

When someone says *Allah* and invokes the Name, he does so by God's grace, aid and favour, not by his own power; and in doing so, all the Divine Names are realised for him, and his invocation of the Name becomes for him like the divine 'Be!' [*kun*], which brings things into being, so that all things seem to him engendered by this invocation. The one who says *Allah* for the sake of pure truth, not for any other goal but purely out of knowledge, gnosis and reverence, acknowledging the Divine Transcendence and Majesty and bearing witness to it, has truly exalted God, invoked Him, magnified Him, and recognised His glory. Their invocation of God and declaration of His Oneness is a manifestation of His contentment with them in that He gives them the grace to do it as He deserves. Gnosis is vision, not knowledge; direct sight, not second-hand information; witnessing, not description; discovery, not veiling. They are not who they are; they are no longer what they were. He says:

﴿إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا عَبْدٌ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ﴾

*He is naught but a servant whom
We have favoured [Al-Zukhruf,
43:59];*

‘And if I love him, I become his hearing, sight, hand, and aid.’ In reality, no one invokes God but God.

The Key to Salvation and the Lamp of Souls

Shaykh Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari

Trans.: Mary Ann Koury Danner, Islamic Texts Society.

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[pg.91-93]

THE FOURTH INVOCATION IS *Allah*. It is called the single invocation, because the invoker contemplates the Majesty and Sublimity of God, while being extinguished from himself. God Most High has said,

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ﴾

Say Allah! Then leave them to their
vain talk [Al-An'am, 6:91].

It is related that al-Shibli was asked by a man, 'Why do you say *Allah* and not *La ilaha illa Allah*?' So al-Shibli answered; because Abu Bakr gave all his wealth to the point where not a thing remained with him. Then he took off a garment in front of the Prophet ﷺ. So the Messenger of God ﷺ said, 'What did you leave for your family?' He answered, '*Allah*'. Likewise I say *Allah*.

Then the questioner said, 'I want a higher explanation than this'. So al-Shibli said, 'I am embarrassed to mention an expression of negation in His presence, while everything is His light'. Then the man said, 'I want a higher explanation than this'. Al-Shibli answered, 'I am afraid that I will

die during the negation of the phrase before reaching the affirmation.' The questioner again said, 'I want a higher explanation than this.' So al-Shibli said, 'God Most High said to His Prophet ﷺ

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ مُزِدَّهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ﴾

*Say Allah! Then leave them
to their vain talk [Al-An'am,
6:91].*

Then the young man got up and let out a shriek. Al-Shibli said 'Allah'. He screamed again; and al-Shibli said 'Allah', then he screamed a third time and died, may God Most High have mercy upon him! The relatives of the young man gathered together and grabbed al-Shibli, charging him with murder. They took him to the caliph and were given permission to enter, and they accused him of murder. The caliph said to al-Shibli, 'What is your response?' He answered, 'A soul yearned, then wailed and aspired, then screamed, then was summoned, then heard, then learned, then answered. So what is my crime?' The caliph shouted, 'Let him go!'

The reason for this teaching on the simple invocation is because God is the goal and the most worthy of being invoked; because the invoker of 'There is no divinity but God' (*La ilaha illa Allah*) might die between the negation and the affirmation; because saying *Allah* only is easier on the tongue and closer to the heart's grasp; because the negation of imperfection in One for Whom imperfection

is impossible is an imperfection; because being occupied with this formula conveys to one the grandeur of the Truth through the negation of alterities, since the negation of alterities actually derives from the heart's preoccupation with those very alterities. That is impossible for the person who is absorbed in the Light of Divine Unity.

Whoever says, 'there is no divinity but God' (*La ilaha illa Allah*) is indeed occupied with what is other than the Truth; whereas whoever says *Allah* is indeed occupied with the Truth. Hence, what a difference between the two positions! Likewise, negating the existence of something is needed only when that thing comes to mind; but it does not come to mind save through the imperfection of one's state.

As for those who are perfect, for whom the existence of a partner alongside God would never occur to them, it is impossible that they be put under the obligation of negating the partner. Rather, for these people, only the remembrance of God comes to their minds or enters their imagination. So it suffices them to say *Allah*. Also, God has said,

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ﴾

*Say Allah! Then leave them to their
vain talk [Al-An'am, 6:91].*

Thus, he has enjoined upon the Prophet ﷺ the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allah*) and has forbidden him idle discussion with them in their vanities and diversions. Holding to associationism (*shirk*) is idle talk and constitutes rushing headlong into that state of affairs.

It is more appropriate to be content with saying *Allah*. The response of the one who upholds negation and affirmation with respect to the meaning of this Name is that the negation is for purification and the affirmation is for illumination. If you wished, you could say that the negation is for emptying oneself and the affirmation is for adorning oneself. If a tablet is not wiped clean of its figures, nothing can be written upon it. A single heart cannot serve as the place for two things, let alone for several things. If the heart is filled with the forms of sensory perceptions, it is rare that it would perceive the meaning of *Allah*, even if one were to say *Allah* a thousand times. When the heart is empty of all that is other-than God, if one uttered *Allah* only once, one would find such bliss that the tongue could not describe.

If you say, 'You have mentioned proofs for every invocation to the point where the observer thinks that each invocation is the best, which causes confusion when choosing a remembrance,' I respond: Each invocation has its own state and time wherein it is better than another type of remembrance. For every station there is a particular utterance which is more appropriate to it; and for every invocation there is a spiritual state, which is more suitable to it, as will follow. Just as the Qur'an is better than the invocation, the invocation in some situations is better than it for the invoker, as in bowing during prayer.

* * * * *

The word *al-ilah* (the deity) is a name given to anything worshipped, whether rightly or wrongly; then it prevailed as the name given to the One rightly worshipped. As for the word *Allah* (God), it is said to be a derivative; scholars have different opinions regarding it. It is said to be taken from *aliha ila'-rajul* (he took refuge with the man) which means to take refuge with someone from something that has happened. But then *alahahu* (he protected him) means to give someone sanctuary; the protector is named *ilah* just as the one who leads people in prayer (*amma*) is called imam.

It is said to be taken from *waliha, yawlahu*; [Perfect and imperfect verbs respectively, meaning 'he became bereft of his reason or intellect' due to grief or love.] originally it was *walaha* but the *waw* was replaced by a *hamzah*, just as one says *ishah* for *wishah* (*sash*). *Al-walah* is intense love. It should have been necessary to say *ma'luh* (passive participle of *walaha* 'adored'), just as one says *ma'bud* (worshipped); but that was changed, just as one says *kitab* (piece of writing) for *maktub* (what is written) and *hisab* (calculation) for *mahsub* (what is counted).

It is also said to be taken from *laha, yaluhu*, meaning 'to be covered', that is, 'He veiled the mind from His Reality'; and it is said to be from *laha, yaluhu*, which means 'to arise'; one says *lahat ash-shams*, 'the sun arose'. According to some, the word comes from *alihtu bi'l-makan*, I dwelt in a place, when one remains there; that is an indication of the duration of one's stay. A poet has said,

We took refuge (*alihna*) in a house whose outline was not clear
As if its remains were a tattoo mark on the hand.

The word *Allah* is said to be from *aliha*, *ya'lahu*, which means 'to be confused'; that is an indication of the confusion of the intellect in understanding the essence of His Reality. It is also said to be from *at-ta'lluh*, which is devoting oneself to the service of God (*ta'abbud*). One says *alaha*, *ya'lahu*, *ilahah*, that is, 'abada, *ya'budu*, 'ibadah (he worshipped, he worships, worshipping). Ibn 'Abbas recited:

﴿وَيَذَرُكَ وَالْهَكَتَكَ﴾

*And flout thee and
thy gods (ilahatak)?*

[*Al-'Araf*, 7:127],

that is 'ibadatak (thy acts of devotion). Al-Tilimsani said, 'It is closer to His words (may He be exalted!),

﴿وَاسْأَلْ مَنْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا أَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ دُونِ الرَّحْمَنِ آلِهَةً يُعْبَدُونَ﴾

*And ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before
Thee: Did We ever appoint gods (alihah) to be worshipped
beside the Compassionate? [Al-Zukhruf, 43:45]*

The meaning of *La ilaha illa Allah* is 'There is no one worshipped except God'. It is said: The word *Allah* is not a derivative; however, it takes the place of a proper noun because it is described by the rest of the Names while it does not describe itself, description being the characteristic of

the proper noun. We only say it is not a proper noun due to the lack of canonical permission. It is a noun for the true Being that contains the Attributes of the Divinity; it is qualified by the qualities of Lordship, the one who is uniquely possessed of real Being. Everything other-than-He derives its being from Him. This Name is greater than the Ninety-Nine Names because it refers to the Essence that contains all the Attributes of the Divinity. The origin of the rest of the Names indicates only their origin from an idea, such as knowledge or the like.

Amongst the Arabs, it is not mentioned before the time of the Prophet ﷺ nor after him that the pronunciation of this Name was used in its present form, let alone its being used as an attribute for someone other-than-Him. In the oral traditions, it is mentioned that, in pre-Islamic times (*al-Jahiliyyah*), the Arabs used to put down in their writings, ‘In thy name, O God (*Allahumma*)’; and He Most High has said,

﴿هَلْ تَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا﴾

*Knowest thou one that
can be named along
with Him? [Maryam,
19:65]*

For this reason al-Junayd (may God be pleased with him!), said, ‘No one knows God but God and He gave the Names to His creatures, veiling them thereby.’ He Most High said:

﴿فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ﴾

*Therefore, praise the Name
of thy Lord, the Supreme
[Al-Waqi'ah, 56:74]*

For, by God, no one knows God but God in the two existences and the two worlds, and in the two 'days'. God Most High has contracted the expansion of intellects, spirits, and hearts into the domain of this Name just as He has expanded them in the domain of the Names. Consequently, no insolence can take place nor does it occur to the mind to designate others by this Name, in spite of the presence of infidels and despotic pharaohs and the intensity of their disbelief. For that reason, each of the Names is good to emulate except this Name. Verily, it is for devotion.

The servant's part in this Name must be in adoring God. I mean by this that his heart and aspiration should be absorbed in God Most High, seeing neither other-than-Him nor being attentive to anything but Him, neither hoping for, nor fearing aught but Him. Attachment to this Name is not valid save after emulating the totality of Names in words, deeds, and states, outwardly and inwardly.

Whosoever desires proximity to God through this Name should follow these principles: to regard what is other-than-God as contemptible without delay; to glorify the commandments of God through illumination; to efface the worlds through contemplation; to extinguish oneself in everything totally; to devote one's zeal to God indefatigably;

to be inwardly vigilant over one's breathing; and to invoke the most supreme Name outwardly and inwardly until one is ardently devoted to God – that is, until one's inner being is immersed in His Being in the reality of one's contemplation, neither seeing other-than-Him nor perceiving anything but Him. Then God will watch over one and one's states and protect one's secrets (*asrar*) from alterities (*aghyyar*).

According to al-Shibli (may God have mercy upon him!), 'No one has truly said *Allah* save *Allah*, and whosoever has said it has done so out of good fortune.' Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz said,

Whosoever goes beyond the boundary of self-forgetfulness falls into the forgetfulness of his good fortune from God and forgetfulness of his need for God. For if his limbs could speak, verily they would say *Allah, Allah*.

These are they whose innermost being ardently loves God; their forms are obliterated in the essence of Oneness; God makes creatures subservient to them and makes the mysteries subject to them. Who, then, is the one who will enter a retreat with this Name until he becomes ardently immersed in it?

The reality of adoration (*tawalluh*) is that one be so immersed that he does not sense whether he is invoking or being silent, whether he is existent or non-existent, until the invocation overcomes him and he hears every member of his body saying *Allah, Allah*, in a tongue which he hears. Even if his blood were shed, verily it would spell out *Allah*,

Allah, and so forth.

Know that in every atom among the atoms of the world and even in what is smaller than an atom, there is a mystery among the mysteries of God's Name. By virtue of that mystery, every knower – whatever his kind might be, and whether he knows it or not – understands Him and affirms Oneness of Him, as God Most High has said:

﴿وَاللَّهُ يَسْجُدُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا﴾

And unto God falleth prostrate whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly [Al-Ra'd, 13:15]

The first *alif* refers to the Essence; the first *lam* refers to the Attributes of the Essence; the second *lam* refers to the names of the Acts; the third *lam* refers to the names of Qualities based on the names of the Attributes; and the *ha* refers to the demonstrative pronouns within the hidden Names.

The Scale of Deeds

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali

Trans.: Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, 2012

[pg.222-223]

THE [MYSTIC] WAY IS that you cut off your attachments completely, so that your heart no longer pays attention to: family, children, possessions, homeland, and [even] sanctity. Rather, you have to endure until your state is such that the absence and the presence of these things are equal to you. Then you isolate yourself in a private corner [somewhere] and limit your acts of worship to the obligatory prayers and to the established supererogatory prayers (*rawatib*), and you sit, empty of heart, concentrating your attention, preparing to draw near to God Most High, through your remembrance of Him.

This is at the beginning of the matter: you persist in remembering God Most High with your tongue, such that you do not stop saying: ‘*Allah*’, ‘*Allah*’ with presence of heart and full consciousness until you reach a state in which, if you were to stop moving your tongue, you would find it as if still invoking the word [‘*Allah*’], because it has grown so accustomed to it. Still you endure patiently doing that, until the role of your tongue is gone but your soul and heart continue invoking without your tongue moving. Then you persist until nothing remains in your heart except the meaning of the word [‘*Allah*’], and your mind does not think of the letters or form of the word [‘*Allah*’]—only purely the

meaning, present in your heart, necessarily and at all times.

You can choose things only up to this point. After this you have no control, except in continuing to repel distracting thoughts. Then you lose your power of choice, and nothing remains for you except to wait and see what happens to you by way of ‘spiritual openings’ [*futuh*], like what happens to the saints (and which are actually only a mere part of what happens to the Prophets). It may be something like a passing lightning bolt that does not last; then it comes back. But it may delay, yet if it comes back then it may stay, and stabilize [in you]. If it stays, it may stay for a long time, or perhaps just a short period. Or it may happen in succession. And there may be different varieties. The stations of the saints are countless, in accordance with their different natures and virtues. That is the method of Sufism; it has been summarized as complete purification on your behalf, along with serenity and clarity; and then preparedness and waiting, only.

