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See also: DESCENT OF THE QUR‘ĀN; DIVINE DECREE; JIHAD; PRESERVED TABLET; WANT AND VOLITION; WILL.

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ABSTINENCE (*Zuhd*)

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions; ii. Relinquishing unbelief and sin; iii. Relinquishing worldly lusts; iv. Relinquishing one’s own rights; v. Relinquishing one’s own life; vi. Relinquishing all but Allah; vii. Early *zuhd* literature; viii. Bibliography.

Definitions

The root *z-h-d*, which denotes abstinence, occurs in the Qur‘ān only once, in the participial adjective form of *zāhidīn* in the verse *and they attached no value to him* (Q 12:20). The terms *zuhd* and *zahāda*—which points to paucity (*qillat al-shay‘*) according to *Mu‘jam al-maqāyīs*—the infinitive nouns for the root *z-h-d*, can be translated as abstinence, abstemiousness, asceticism, austerity, continence, doing-without, moderation, renunciation, self-denial, simple living and other related terms. “Lexically, *zuhd* means to disincorporate from something, while legally it means to despise the world and avoid it;” or, “in the language of the Arabs, it means to shun wealth and status” according to al-Jurjānī (d. 816/ca.1413) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) respectively (*Ta‘rīfāt*, s.v. *zuhd*; *Qam‘ al-ḥirṣ* p. 157). The *Lisān*, following the *‘Ayn*, differentiates between *zuhd*

and *zahāda*, the former (“disinclining from the world” in the religious sense) being a spiritual subset of the latter (“disinclining from all things”) (Farāhīdī, *‘Ayn*; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, s.v. *zuhd*).

Conceptually, however, *zuhd* is a major theme in the Qur‘ān—from the entire Fātiḥa to *You will certainly die and they will certainly die* (Q 39:31) and *Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of humankind* (Q 114:1)—emphasizing the Overlord (*Mawlā*) over the world (*dunyā*), and, by extension, everlastingness in Paradise over this fleeting life. From this Qur‘ānic metaphysical orientation stems a wide spectrum of ethical choices: others over oneself, truth over falsehood, virtue over vice, etc. Many other verses highlight the importance of abstinence, such as those related to fasting, spending on others and sacrificing one’s personal interests and selfish motives, and the ubiquitous emphasis on Godwariness (*taqwā*).

This Qur‘ānic method comprises the following five aspects and goals: (i) relinquishing unbelief and sin; (ii) relinquishing the lure of worldly lusts; (iii) relinquishing even personal moral and physical rights; (iv) relinquishing life itself, and the fearless embrace of jihad; (v) relinquishing all other than Allah, which incorporates and bests all that precedes. These aspects sum up the holistic coverage of all the early works on *zuhd* (see section below) as illustrated by the wide range of their section-headings.

Relinquishing unbelief and sin

The individual’s lifelong flight from sin is both the categorical precondition of Godwariness (*taqwā*) and its single most important element, both being enjoined in countless verses. Al-Zuhri (58-124/678-742), Mālik (93-179/712-795), and Ibn ‘Uyayna (107-198/ca.725-ca.814) all defined *zuhd* as *taqwā* and “relinquishing what Allah Most High forbade” (Qurṭubī, *Qam‘ al-ḥirṣ* p. 158). Thus, *zuhd* is first and foremost abstinence from sin (as borne out by the title of Ibn Ḥazm’s work, see section vii below) and all that Allah Most High hates, beginning with the enormities of the Jāhiliyya (see TIME OF IGNORANCE) such as polytheism (Q 3:64, 3:95, 4:48, 7:180), murderous feuds and clannishness (Q 3:103, 48:26), female infanticide (*wa‘d*, Q 6:51, 6:137, 17:32), fornication (Q 4:22, 7:28, 17:32, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 6:120), usury (*ribā*, Q 2:278, 30:39), disloyalty to parents and relatives (Q 29:8, 31:14, 46:15, 2:181, 2:215...), treachery to strangers (Q 4:36), and mistreatment of slaves and the poor (Q 4:36, 30:38). Putting all this behind is required to the point that

one may not even let out a grumble against parents (Q 17:23), and the believers are summoned to part once and for all with even the very thought of sin: *And abandon the outwardness of sin and its inwardness (zāhir al-ithm wa-bāṭinah Q 6:120)*, where according to Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) “the outwardness of sin is its commission; the inwardness, love of it” (Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya* 10:198).

Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) brings together the two strains of relinquishing evil and being conscious of Allah in the following definition of righteousness (*q.v.*):

In the terminology of sacred law *taqwā* is a name for one who guards himself from what harms him in the hereafter. It has three levels:

1. Guarding oneself against everlasting punishment by clearing oneself of polytheism, as in His saying, *and He imposed on them the word of God-wariness (Q 48:26)*.
2. Avoiding everything that constitutes sin—whether doing something or omitting to do it—including small sins according to some. This is what is commonly known by the name of *taqwā* in sacred law and what is meant in His saying, *And if the people of the townships had believed and guarded against evil (Q 7:96)*.
3. To keep oneself free of what preoccupies one’s inward other than the True, and to dedicate oneself to Him heart and soul (*Anwār, sub Q 2:2*).

Relinquishing worldly lusts

The life of this world (al-hayāt al-dunyā) is mentioned no less than fifty-five times in the Qurʾān (see LIFE OF THIS WORLD) invariably with deprecation, notably in such verses as *Stretch not your eyes toward what We gave certain classes of them to enjoy—the flower of the life of the world—that We may test them thereby. The provision of your Lord is better and more lasting (Q 20:131, cf. 15:88); And whatever you all have been given is a comfort (matāʿ) of the life of the world and an ornament thereof; and that which Allah has [in store] is better and more lasting. Have you then no sense? (Q 28:60, cf. 42:36, 87:17)*. The most frequent meaning of *zuhd* is freedom from the attraction of *dunyā*, in which sense *zuhd* closely parallels the Qurʾānic virtues of God-dependence (*tawakkul*), steadfastness (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), the constant remembrance of death (*dhikr al-mawt*), and expectancy of next-worldly reward (*iḥtisāb*) together with the practice of hunger and the embracing of poverty (*q.v.*). Shining examples of these qualities are documented in the corresponding chapters of *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, the works of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/ca.857) and al-Sulamī (325-412/936-1031), al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 378/988) *al-Iḥmāʿ*, al-Kalābādhi’s (d. 380/990) *al-Taʿarruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, Abū

Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 386/996) *Qūt al-qulūb*, al-Qushayrī’s (376-465/ca.986-ca.1073) *Risāla*, and other pre-Ghazalian Sufi classics which culminated with *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, in addition to the *zuhd* compilations of the first five centuries.

The beauty of *dunyā* constitutes both a remembrance of Allah (*q.v.*) and a test for creatures: *We have placed all that is in the earth as an ornament thereof that We may try them: which of them is best in conduct (Q 18:7)*. “Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty” (Muslim, *Īmān*, taḥrīm al-kibr; al-Tirmidhī, *Birr wal-ṣila*, mā jāʿa fil-kibr, *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb*). Accordingly, the believer also recognizes that “the universe is the apex of beauty” (*cf.* Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, §372 and elsewhere). However, attraction to *dunyā* in obliviousness of the Creator, coupled with ingratitude, is characteristic of unbelievers: *The life of this world is alluring to those who reject faith, and they scoff at those who believe (Q 2:212); They know an outward part of the present life, but of the Hereafter they are heedless (Q 30:7); They know the favor of Allah and then deny it. Most of them are ingrates (Q 16:83)*. Hence the proverb that “Love of the world is the source of every sin” narrated from ʿIsā—upon him peace—in the Muslim sources (*cf.* Aḥmad, *Zuhd* p. 143 §473) and the Qurʾānic warnings against the lusts (*shahawāt*) of carnality, empire, and capital: *Beautiful for mankind is the love of lusts—women, sons, arching heaps of gold and silver, gilded steeds, cattle and tillage (Q 3:14)*, as well as commerce (Q 62:9-11, *cf.* 24:37).

Like ʿIsā and other Prophets before him, the Prophet Muḥammad—upon him and them blessings and peace—reviled the lure of money in many words and deeds in many hadiths:

Perish the slave of the dinar and the dirham! (Bukhārī, *Riqāq*, mā yuttaqā min fitnat al-māl); Cursed is the slave of the dinar and cursed is the slave of the dirham! (al-Tirmidhī, *Zuhd*, mā jāʿa bi-akhdh al-māl bi-ḥaqqih; *ḥasan gharīb*).

If the son of Ādam possessed a valley full of gold he would love its like in addition; nothing fills the soul (*nafs*) of the son of Ādam but dust! (Muslim, *Zakāt*, *law anna li-ibn Ādam wādiyān; cf.* Bukhārī, *Riqāq*, mā yuttaqā min fitnat al-māl).

The most enviable of my friends (*aghbaʿ awliyāʾī*) in my sight is truly a light-backed (*khafīf al-ḥādh*, i.e., with little property and few dependents: *Qāmūs, s.v. ḥ-w-dh*) believer with his share of prayer. He worships his Lord excellently, obeys Him in secret, goes unnoticed among people—no one refers to him—and his sustenance is barely enough, but he bears it patiently; he dies an early death, few weep for him, and he leaves little behind (al-Tirmidhī, *Zuhd*, mā jāʿa fil-kafāf wal-

ṣabr ‘alayh; through Abū ‘Abd al-Malik ‘Ali b. Yazid whom al-Tirmidhī declared weak).

My Lord offered to turn the entire plain of Makka into gold. I said, “No, my Lord. Rather, I shall be sated one day and be hungry one day; when I am hungry I shall entreat You and remember You, and when I am sated I shall thank You and praise You” (al-Tirmidhī, Zuhd, mā jā’a fīl-kafāf wal-ṣabr ‘alayh, *ḥasan*). This hadith shows that *zuhd* does not consist in doing without when one has no choice—which is more akin to patience (*ṣabr*, see *FORITITUDE*)—but in willingly doing without necessities as a means of nearness to Allah.

The old man’s heart remains young in two things: love of the world and distant hopes (Bukhārī, Riqāq, man balagha sittīn); lust for life and love of money (Muslim, Zakāt, karāhat al-ḥirṣ ‘alā al-dunyā).

Commenting on the latter narration, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932) said:

The Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—therefore urges us to remember death, as he said: “Always remember the destroyer of delights” (al-Tirmidhī, Zuhd, mā jā’a fī dhikr al-mawt, *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb*; al-Nasā’ī, Janā’iz, kathrat dhikr al-mawt). Remembered often, its power lessens; seldom remembered, its power grows. The meaning is that when you remember death you realize that your lot is to possess nothing and that you are heading for extinction in the end. If you remember the latter, death becomes an easy thing for you, and if you remember the former, you realize that the little that one has in the world is plenty. For one knows not at what time, in one instant, death suddenly may confront him. Thus death is the “destroyer of delights;” remembering its destruction does away with false joys and replaces them with despondency and sadness. (*Adab al-murīdīn* p. 38-39)

Keeping the world at bay is obligatory to the extent that not doing so veils one from the Hereafter. The remembrance of Allah Most High makes hearts tender (Q 39:23), tranquil (Q 13:28), and clairvoyant (*cf.* Q 22:46, 11:24, 12:108), while the remembrance of the world does the opposite (Q 5:13, 6:43-44, 19:83), until one reaches a state that the Qur’ān describes as covetousness akin to idolatry, and hopeless materialism—a condition worse than that of dumb beasts: *And you will find them [Jews] the greediest of mankind for life, even more than the idolaters. Each one of them would wish to live a thousand years (Q 2:96); Have you seen him who chooses for his god his own lust? Would you then be guardian over him? Or do you think most of them hear or understand? They are but as cattle—nay, they are farther astray (Q 25:43-44).* Ibn ‘Umar—Allah be well-pleased with him and his father—narrates:

The Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—said: “None shall meet Allah with the testimony that there is no god but Allah alone, without partner, except he

shall enter Paradise, as long as he does not mix anything extraneous with it.” He repeated it three times. Someone said from afar: “My father be your ransom, and my mother, Messenger of Allah! And what extraneous thing would anyone mix with it?” He said: “Love of the world, putting it first, accumulating its trappings, being pleased with it, and acting the way tyrants act.” (*Shu‘ab al-īmān* 7:338 §10499)

Accordingly, the heart’s attachment to transient things is the litmus test of belief: *Say: If your fathers, and your sons, and your brethren, and your wives, and your tribe, and the wealth you have acquired, and merchandise for which you fear that there will be no sale, and dwellings you desire are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and fighting for His cause: then wait till Allah brings His command to pass. Allah guides not wrongdoing folk (Q 9:24).* Ibn Surayj (d. 303/ca.915 or 306/ca.918) saw in this verse a proof that love of Allah was a personal categorical obligation, since punishment is not threatened except in relation to a categorical obligation (*fard*) (al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 1:365 §406). Such higher love is indispensably coupled with following of the Prophet—*Say: If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins (Q 3:31)*—and, furthermore, cannot coexist with love of the world, since *Allah has not assigned unto any man two hearts within his body (Q 33:4, cf. Q 58:22).* That indeed is *the commerce that shall never fail (Q 35:29, cf. 61:10)* as opposed to the world, which is contemptible and even cursed: “If the world weighed as much as a gnat’s wing in the sight of Allah, He would not have allowed an unbeliever as much as a sip of water from it;” “Truly, the world is cursed and cursed is what is in it—except the remembrance of Allah and whatever is related to it, a learned person, and one who seeks learning” (al-Tirmidhī, Zuhd, mā jā’a fī hawān al-dunyā ‘alā Allāh, respectively *ṣaḥīḥ gharīb* and *ḥasan gharīb*).

The proof that worldly luxuries are not inherently reprehensible is that the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—attributed them to both the unbelievers and the believers, but not in the same plane of existence: “Do not wear silk or brocade. Do not drink from vessels of gold and silver, or eat from plates of them. They are theirs in this world and ours in the next” (Bukhārī, Aṭ’ima, al-akl fī inā’ mufaḍḍaḍ; al-Nasā’ī, Zīna, dhikr al-nahī ‘an labs al-dibāj). Thus, the very same terms are used for the beauties of Paradise in the Qur’ān and the Sunna even though they pass all description: gold, silver, maidens, immortal youths, palaces of pearl, rivers of wine with banks of musk, etc.; however, their earthly types are the materia of sin,

repentance (*q.v.*), and spiritual wayfaring, as expressed in the following remarkable report from the ever-inquisitive Abū Hurayra—Allah be well-pleased with him:

We said: “Messenger of Allah, how is it that whenever we are with you, our hearts soften, we do without the world, and we are among the people of the hereafter; but when we leave your presence and greet our wives and kiss our children, we no longer recognize our former selves?” He replied: “If you remained, whenever you left my presence, in the same state that you mentioned, the angels would visit you inside your homes; and if you did not sin, Allah Most High would produce another creation in order that they should sin and that He should forgive them!” I asked, “Messenger of Allah, from what substance would that creation be?” He replied, “From water.” We said, “And Paradise, what is its masonry?” He said, “A brick of silver alternates with a brick of gold, its mortar is fragrant musk, its gravel pearl and coral, and its soil saffron. Whoever enters it is gratified forever and never experiences hardship again, lives eternally and never dies again; their garments never wear out and their youth never fades.” (al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣifāt al-janna, mā jā’a fi ṣifāt al-janna wa-na’imihā*, with a slightly weak chain according to al-Tirmidhī; Ibn Ḥanbal 13:410-413 §8043, Bāqī musnad al-mukthirīn, musnad Abī Hurayra, a collectively sound narration according to the *Musnad’s* editors)

Such *zuhd*, however, does not countenance extremism. When the Prophet heard that one of the pious Companions had said, “I shall marry no woman,” another “I shall eat no meat,” another, “I shall not sleep,” and another, “I shall never break my fast,” he said: “What ails people that they should say such and such? I am the most Godwary of you all, yet I offer prayers and sleep, I observe and break the fast, and I marry women. Whoever avoids my way is not one of us” (Bukhārī, *Nikāḥ, al-targhib fil-nikāḥ*; Muslim, *Nikāḥ, istiḥbāb al-nikāḥ*). On another occasion he said: “The priesthood and monasticism of this Community is fighting in the path of Allah” (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Bāqī musnad al-mukthirīn, bāqī al-musnad al-sābiq; al-Bayhaqī, Shu’ab 4:14 §4226-4227*). *Zuhd*, then, redresses all the deviances of prior systems and rejects not only the merely medicinal self-discipline of stoicism and the idealism of certain forms of yoga and Buddhism (as well as their modern hybrids of “liberation from self” and “freedom from the known”) but also the self-flagellation, social aloofness, celibacy, and other errors of Christianity.

Relinquishing one’s own rights

A further level of *zuhd* is abstinence from the pursuit and obtainment of personal moral and physical rights

such as

- revenge and self-vindication are toned down with repeated adjurations to *forgive and forbear beautifully* (Q 15:85 cf. 2:109, 5:13, 43:89); and *the recompense of evil is evil the like of it; but whoso pardons and puts things right, his wage falls upon Allah* (Q 42:40); accordingly, the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—did not seek revenge against Labīd b. al-A’ṣam after it was established that the latter had cast a spell on him (Bukhārī, *Ṭibb, siḥr*; Muslim, *Salām, siḥr*), or against the woman of Khaybar who had served him a poisoned roast (Abū Dāwūd, *Diyāt, fīman saqā rajūlan samman; Dārimī, Muqaddima, mā akrama Allāh bihi Nabīyyahu min kalām al-mawtā*). He also renounced any action against Thaḳīf—who had had him stoned and driven out of Ṭā’if—and Quraysh when the angel offered to tumble down the two major mountains of Makka over them; he hoped that in time their progeny would accept belief (Bukhārī, *Badā al-khalq, idhā qāla aḥadukum āmīn wal-malā’ika*; Muslim, *Jihād wal-siyar, mā laqiya al-Nabī min adhā*).
- comforts: the *matā’* or niceties of the world are downplayed and belittled because the real wealth is yet to come: *The enjoyment of this world is little; the world to come is better for him who fears Allah* (Q 4:77, cf. 9:38). The unmindful disbeliever enjoys only this world for a while at most, and that by way of beguilement (*q.v.*) (*istidrāj*): *Allah outspreads and straitens His provision unto whomsoever He will. They rejoice in this present life; and this present life, beside the world to come, is naught but passing enjoyment* (Q 13:26, cf. 10:23, 40:39, 43:35, 57:20); *It is but a brief comfort, then their abode is hell—an evil resting-place!* (Q 3:197, cf. 10:70, 16:117, 28:61). Moreover, it is not merely the anticipation of comforts in Paradise that motivates such relinquishment but the realization that one is accountable for all that they consume and use in this world, as indicated by the Prophet to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar after they had been served a hearty meal on a day they had left their houses famished: “On the Day of Resurrection you will be questioned about this bounty (a reference to Q 102:8)” (Muslim, *Ashrība, jawāz istiḥbā’ih ghayrah ilā dār man yathīqu bi-riḍāḥ*). The Prophet refused himself and his households the comforts of the world, as witnessed by the hadiths concerning Fāṭima requesting a servant and being taught a

prayer of remembrance instead (Bukhārī, Nafaqāt, khādim al-marāa; Muslim, Dhikr wal-du‘ā’, mā yaqūl ‘ind al-nawm), ‘Ā’isha citing the lack of hot food in the Prophet’s households for consecutive months (Bukhārī, Riqāq, kayfa kāna ‘ayshu al-Nabī; Muslim, Zuhd wal-raqā‘iq, bāb), and ‘Umar’s visit to the attic in which the Prophet spent the month of his vowed marital separation, at which time the following dialogue ensued:

I said, “May I be at ease, Messenger of Allah?” [...] He smiled and, when I saw him smile, I sat down. Then I raised my eyes and looked around. By Allah! I could see nothing of note but three animal skins. I said, “Supplicate Allah, Messenger of Allah, that He grant some ease to your Community. For He has granted it to Persia and Rome, although they do not worship Allah!” He sat up and said: “Are you in doubt, son of al-Khattāb? Those are a people for whom their good things were hastened in this lower world.” I said, “Ask forgiveness for me, Messenger of Allah!” (Bukhārī, Nikāh, maw‘izat al-rajul ibnatah; Muslim, Ṭalāq, fil-īlā’ wa-i‘tizāl al-nisā’)

Such was the example that inspired the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, in turn, to deny themselves and their dependents the comforts of life and to adopt lifestyles of great austerity. They wore patched clothes, rode mules, and slept on the ground; ‘Umar fasted permanently and ordered his commanders in Persia and elsewhere to “keep the rough Arab ways of Ma‘add” (*ikhshawshanū wa-tama‘dadū!*), free from foreign refinements in living, dress and diet (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, sub Q 2:187; Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya* 1:52-53, 1:60; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya* 10:185 [Year 23]).

- self-reliance, parsimony, and over-planning betoken mistrust in Allah’s power over all things (an Attribute repeated over thirty times in the Qur’ān), His exclusive ownership of the heavens and the earth (repeated four dozen times), His minute knowledge of all things therein (Q 2:33, 17:55, 18:25, 27:25), His full control of the storehouses (Q 15:21) and keys (Q 39:63, 42:12) of creation, and the fact that He is the sole guarantor of sustenance for all things (Q 6:14, 29:60, 51:58, cf. 16:73). In this respect the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—disapproved of saving for the next day (see TRUST IN ALLAH). A remarkable incident has Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164-241/780-855) narrate the following short-chained report on God-dependence (*tawakkul*), and then characterize the latter quality as a

typically Sufi trait:

Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī (d. 304/ca.917) said: “I came to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in the early days of al-Mutawakkil’s rule and said, ‘Narrate a hadith to me [...] by which I shall remember you and invoke mercy upon you.’ He said, ‘Marwān al-Fazārī narrated to us, from Hilāl Abū al-Mu‘allā, from Anas: Three birds were offered to the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—and he gave his servant one of them to eat. The next day she brought it to him. He said: “Did I not forbid you to store up food? Truly, Allah Most High provides the sustenance of each morning” (Ibn Ḥanbal 20:339 §13043, Bāqī musnad al-mukthirīn, bāqī al-musnad al-sābiq; a fair chain according to Haythamī, *Majma‘* 10:546 §18188 and 10:579 §18273). Then Aḥmad said: ‘This [hadith] is very suited for you, Sufī! Narrate it’ (*hādha min bābatik yā sūfī, haddith bih*.)” (Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* 1:418-419)

Under this chapter also falls the Qur’anic condemnation of the delusion of counting on oneself, one’s deeds, possessions, and powers, all of which the unbelievers mistake for tangible achievements: *And it is not your wealth nor your children that will bring you near unto Us, but he who believes and does good* (Q 34:37); *Their own deeds were made to seem beautiful to the unbelievers* (6:122, cf. 8:48, 9:37, 10:12, 35:8, 47:14). The Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—and his Community were taught never to put stock in their own acts or projects: *You (Muslims) slew them not, but Allah slew them. And you (Muḥammad) threw not when you did throw, but Allah threw* (Q 8:17); *And do not say of anything, “I am going to do that tomorrow,” but only, “If Allah will”* (Q 18:23-24); *Yet “will” you shall not, unless Allah wills, the Lord of the worlds* (81:29, cf. 76:30). From such verses the Egyptian Sufi master Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (d. 709/1309) extracted the first of his great sapiential aphorisms (*al-Ḥikam*): “One of the signs of relying on one’s own deeds is the loss of hope when a downfall occurs” (*Ḥikam* p. 23).

Relinquishing one’s own life

Naturally derived from the latter two aspects is *zuhd* with regard to life itself in expectation of the true life in the hereafter. This translates into a perpetual readiness for the virtual sixth pillar of Islam—jihad—not in dark nihilism, but with scrupulous observance of Divine and human rights as well as fortitude in life and gratitude to Allah. Its despised antonym is fear of death and the abandonment of the cause He promotes in many vibrant Divine entreaties and Prophetic warnings, among them the following:

O believers, what is amiss with you, that when it is said to

you, “Go forth in the way of Allah,” you sink down heavily to the ground? Are you so content with this present life, rather than the world to come? Yet the enjoyment of this present life, compared with the world to come, is a little thing (Q 9:38);

This life of the world is but a pastime and a game. Verily the home of the Hereafter—that is the Life, if they but knew (Q 29:64);

Whoso desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We give him increase in its harvest. And whoso desires the harvest of the world, We give him thereof, and he has no portion in the Hereafter (Q 42:20);

Rivalry in worldly increase distracts you until you visit the graves. Nay, but you will come to know! Again—nay, but you will come to know! (Q 102:1-4);

and the famous hadith reported by the Prophet’s freedman Thawbān:

“Very soon, nations shall summon one another against you from every horizon the way diners summon one another to their platter.” We said, “Messenger of Allah, will it be because we are so few at that time?” He replied, “You will be very many at that time! But you will be froth like the froth of a stream: fear will be removed from the hearts of your enemy and feebleness will be placed in your hearts.” We said, “What feebleness?” He said: “Hatred of death” (Ibn Ḥanbal, Bāqī Musnad al-Anṣār, wa-min ḥadīth Thawbān).

Hence the threadbare, starving Companions, when they heard the Prophet—upon him and them blessings and peace—declaim “O Allah, there is no life but the life of the hereafter, so forgive the Helpers and the Emigrants!” on the cold eve of the battle of the Trench, declaimed back, “We are those that pledged to Muḥammad jihad for as long as we live!” (Bukhārī, Maghāzī, ghazwat al-khandaq; Muslim, Jihad wal-siyar, ghazwat al-khandaq). This state of belief reflects the reality that *the Prophet has a greater right over the believers than their own selves* (Q 33:6) and is further elucidated by the following hadiths of the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace:

One will taste the sweetness of faith when Allah and His Messenger are dearer to him than all else; when he loves others for no reason other than for the sake of Allah; and when he would loathe to return to disbelief after Allah has rescued him from it just as he would loathe to be cast into a blazing fire (Bukhārī, Īmān, man kariha an ya’ūda fil-kufī; Muslim, Īmān, bayān khiṣāl man ittaṣafa bihim wajada ḥalāwat al-īmān).

None of you believes until I am dearer to him than his father, his son, and all people (Bukhārī, Īmān, ḥubb al-Rasūl min al-īmān; Muslim, Īmān, wujūb maḥabbat Rasūl Allah). Other versions, also in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, add property and self.

Relinquishing all but Allah

Every Muslim is ultimately tasked with *zuhd* from all

other than Allah, the reminder of which begins with the *adhān* and *iqāma* uttered into his or her ears at birth and ends with the *talqīn* on the deathbed and after burial: to remember Allah with all one’s strength, heart and soul, love Him, cherish Him and obey Him. This loving remembrance is enjoined in many verses, notable examples being *O you who believe, remember Allah with much remembrance* (Q 33:41); *And among people there are those who, instead of Allah, attach themselves to peers whom they love as much as they love Allah; but the believers have greater love for Allah* (2:165); and *Strive for Allah to the utmost of your power* (Q 22:78). Such remembrance connects one to *Allah Who is the Real* (Q 22:6), besides which all is but *falsehood* (Q 22:62, 31:30), *play and idle distraction* (Q 6:32, 47:36), *gloss, mutual vanity and increase in property and sons* (Q 57:20), *delusion* (Q 35:5, 57:20), and a *mirage* (Q 24:39), with the recurring simile of the world as verdure soon withered (Q 3:117, 10:24, 18:45-46, 57:20). Such remembrance comprises abundant worship, which was an obligation for the Prophet and his close Companions (Q 73:20), and which Allah Most High extols (Q 3:191, 4:103, 32:16). It includes the obligation to love Allah Most High and the Prophet, as already shown, more than oneself, one’s family, one’s commerce, or the trappings of wealth, *even though it be against yourselves or parents or kindred, whether a rich man or a poor man* (Q 4:135). Al-Bayḍāwī sums up the above meanings in his explanation of the two Divine Names al-Raḥmān and al-Raḥīm:

He specifically chose to be named by these Names so that the knowing might realize that the one truly deserving to be sought for help in all matters is He Who is truly worshipped, Who is the grantor of all favors, both the immediate and the deferred, both the sublime and the humble, turning with every last shred of his being (*bi-sharā’irih*) to the divine Presence and firmly grasping the rope of success, engrossing his inward being with His remembrance and taking Him as his sufficiency without any other (*Anwār, sub Q 1:1*).

The counter-implication of these two Names is the over-arching human attribute of servanthood to Allah (*‘ubūdiyya*) as the highest possible human state. This level of ‘abd Allāh is embodied in the person of their foremost model, the Prophet himself—upon him blessings and peace—thus named or rather extolled in several great verses (Q 2:23, 8:41, 18:1, 25:1, 39:36, 53:10, 57:9) and as expressed in the following hadiths:

An angel descended as Jibrīl was sitting with the Prophet—upon all of them blessings and peace. Jibrīl said: “This angel has never descended to earth before this moment since it was first created.” The angel said: “O

Muḥammad, your Lord has told me to ask you: ‘Shall I make you a king, or a servant and Messenger?’” Jibrīl tapped his foot to signify: “Humble yourself before your Lord, O Muḥammad!” The Prophet said: “Rather a servant and Messenger!” (Ibn Ḥanbal, Bāqī musnad al-mukthirīn, musnad Abī Hurayra, with a sound chain according to Haythamī, *Majmaʿ* 9:18-19).

Al-Būṣīrī (608-695/ca.1211-1295) recapitulated some of the above aspects of the Prophetic *zuhd* in the following celebrated passage of his “Poem of the Mantle:”

I profaned the Sunna of him who enlivened the dark
[of night with worship] until
his feet complained of injury for being swollen.
And he straightened his stomach on account of hunger
and folded
over his mid-section a stone beneath which was delicate
skin.
And lofty mountains of gold tried to tempt him
away from himself, but he showed them the meaning
of loftiness.
His extreme need emphasized his *zuhd*.
Verily need never prevails over the infallible.
And how could need attract toward this world such
a one
but for whom this world would not have come out of
the void? (*Burda* v. 29-33)

The last line dramatically highlights the paradoxical fact that the paragon and liegeland of creatures—for whose sake everything in existence was created (Q 2:29) and made subservient (Q 45:13)—stands in no fundamental need of any of it but only of Allah Most High, since he represents the essence of worship, which is the reason for their creation (Q 51:56). Ibn Taymiyya (661-728) addressed this fact in glowing terms in one of his fatwas devoted to Sufism:

Muḥammad—upon him blessings and peace—is the Chief of the Children of Ādam, the Best of Creation, the noblest of them in the sight of Allāh Most High. This is why some have said that “Allāh created the universe because of him,” or that “Were it not for him, He would have neither created a Throne, nor a Footstool, nor a heaven, earth, sun or moon.” This is not a hadith on the authority of the Prophet, but it may be explained from a correct perspective...

Since the best of the righteous of the children of Ādam is Muḥammad, creating him was a desirable end of deep-seated purposeful wisdom, more than for anyone else, and hence the completion of creation and the fulfillment of perfection was attained with Muḥammad...

Since Man is the seal and last of all creation and its microcosm, and since the Best of Men is thus the Best of all creation absolutely, then Muḥammad, being the Pupil of the Eye, the Axis of the Mill, and the Distributor to the Collective, is, as it were, the Ultimate Purpose

among all the purposes of creation. Hence it cannot be denied if one says that “On his account was all of this created,” or that “Were it not for him, all this would not have been created.” (*Majmūʿ al-fatāwā* 11:57-58)

Early *zuhd* literature

Among the works on *zuhd* that came to prominence in the first five centuries are

- *al-Zuhd* of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak al-Marwazī (d. 181/797).
- *al-Zuhd* of Asad b. Mūsā, known as Asad al-Sunna (132-212/ca.750-827), largely a book of eschatology.
- *al-Zuhd* of Hannād b. al-Sarī al-Kūfī (152-243/769-ca.857), a student of Ibn al-Mubārak.
- *al-Zuhd* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, a student of Hannād.
- *al-Zuhd* of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (195-277/ca.811-ca.890) in which he narrates the reaction of Abū al-Dardāʾ to a group of bereaved mourners at a burial: “Pity them—tomorrow’s dead weeping over today’s dead” (p. 38-39 §9).
- *al-Zuhd* of Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/ca.888), a student of Aḥmad.
- *al-Zuhd* of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (208-281/823-894).
- *al-Zuhd* of Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (206-287/ca.821-900) the Sufi Zāhirī, a student of Abū Bakr Ibn Abī Shayba and colleague of al-Bukhārī.
- *al-Zuhd wa-ṣifāt al-zāhidīn* of Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 340/ca.951), a student of Abū Dāwūd.
- *al-Zuhd al-kabīr* of al-Bayhaqī (384-458/994-1066).
- *Mudāwāt al-nufūs wa-tahdhīb al-akhlāq wal-zuhd fīl-radhāʾil* of Ibn Ḥazm (384/994-456/1063), thought to be his last work.
- *al-Zuhd wal-raqāʾiq* of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (392-463/1002-1071), the teacher of Abū Nuʿaym.
- *al-Zuhd*, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī but in reality a modern compilation of the reports narrated from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in the above and other works.

Also among the notable works on this topic are al-Qushayrī’s chapter on *zuhd* in his famous *Risāla*, al-Hujwārī’s (d. 465?/1072?) pages on poverty and its relationship to the spiritual path (*taṣawwuf*) in the first few chapters of his *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ’s (471-544/ca.1078-1149) chapter on the *zuhd* of the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—in his *Shifāʾ*, and al-Qurṭubī’s *Qamʿ al-ḥirṣ bil-zuhd wal-qanāʿa wa-radd dhull al-suʾāl bil-kutbi wal-shafāʿa* (The subduing of greed through abstinence and contentment and the

repelling of the humiliation of beggary through handwritten requests and intercession).

Al-Nawawī (631-676/1234-1277) has given two epitomes of the topic of *zuhd* in his masterpieces *Riyād al-ṣāliḥīn* and *Bustān al-ʿarīfīn*. The former comprises a series of chapters entitled The Excellence of *Zuhd* in the World and the Insistence on Making Do with Little of its Resources, and the Excellence of Poverty; The Excellence of Hunger and Coarse Living; and Being Content with Little, Living Abstinently, and Moderation. These chapters begin by citing some of the verses mentioned in this article. In *Bustān al-ʿarīfīn* al-Nawawī expresses his unbounded admiration for the early Sufis who in his opinion were the best embodiment of the Prophetic *zuhd* both in speech and deeds, as illustrated by this passage on Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261-875):

Abū Yazīd—Allah be well-pleased with him—said: “I was for twelve years the blacksmith of my ego (*ḥaddād naḥsī*), then for five years I became the mirror of my heart, then for a year I looked at what lay between the two of them and saw around me a noticeable belt [the vestimentary sign of a non-Muslim subject of the Islamic state]. I strove to cut it for twelve years, then looked again and saw around me a hidden belt. I strove to cut it for five years, leaving no stone unturned. Then I reached a state of spiritual unveiling (*kushifa lī*) and looked at creation and saw that they were all dead. So I recited the funeral prayer over them.”

I say: The fact that hypocrisy should be as elusive as this to the peerless Master in this path [i.e. *taṣawwuf*] is enough to show how deeply hidden it lies. His phrase: “I saw them dead” is the apex of worth and beauty, and seldom do words other than those of the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—combine such a wealth of meanings. (*Bustān al-ʿarīfīn* p. 53-54)

Among other works, Ibn al-Jawzī’s (509 or 510-597/1115 or 1116-1201) monographs on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and early Sufis such as Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 161/777), Rābi‘a al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 185/801), al-Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ (d. 187/803), and Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), as well as several large Sufi biographical dictionaries such as al-Sulamī’s (325-412/937-ca.1021) *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* and *Dhikr al-niswat al-mutaʿabbidāt*, Abū Nuʿaym’s (336-430/ca.948-1039) *Hilya*, its adaptation in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya*, ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī’s (d. 481/1088) *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* in Persian, Ibn al-Mulaqqin’s (d. 804/ca.1402) *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ*, and al-Munāwī’s (d. 871/ca.1467) massive *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* are all replete with the ascetic acts and sayings of the early Muslims who strove with all their might to emulate the *zuhd* of him whose “character was the Qurʾān” as described by ʿĀʾisha—Allah be well-pleased

with her (Ibn Ḥanbal with a sound chain, Bāqī musnad al-Anṣār, bāqī al-musnad al-sābiq).

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See also: BEGUELEMENT; FORTITUDE; LIFE OF THIS

WORLD; POVERTY; REMEMBRANCE OF ALLĀH;

REPENTANCE; RIGHTEOUSNESS; TIME OF

IGNORANCE; TRUST IN ALLĀH

GIBRIL FOUAD HADDAD

Abū Bakr

See ANONYMOUS MENTIONS; COMPANIONS OF THE
PROPHET

ABŪ LAHAB

Literally “the father of flame,” Abū Lahab was the epithet given to ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, a paternal uncle of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, because of his glowing countenance or the redness of his face (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, Tafsīr, *sub* Q 111:1; al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī *sub* Q 111:1). He is mentioned once in the Qur’ān in the opening verse of Sūrat al-Masad (also known as Sūrat Tabbat and Sūrat al-Lahab): *Broken be the hands of Abū Lahab and may he perish*. Some commentators are of the opinion that the patronymic *abī* used in Q 111:1 (*Abī Lahab*) indicates that he is “one destined for Hellfire,” in the same manner in which one who kindles the fire of wars is called father or brother of wars, *abā* or *akhā al-ḥarb* (Rāghib, *Mufradāt*, s.v *l-h*) or one who is extremely evil is called *abū al-sharr* and one extremely good is called *abū al-khayr* (al-Zamakhsharī, 4:841). Abū Lahab is the only one of the Makkan opponents of the Prophet mentioned in the Qur’ān by name.

Historical Background

When the Prophet was commanded to warn his near relatives (Q 26:214), he ascended Mount Ṣafā and called out: “Be warned [O people!],” in the manner of those who wish to gather people to announce a great event or to warn them about danger from an enemy (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 111:1). When the people gathered around him, the Prophet addressed them, calling each tribe and family by name (“O children of ‘Abd Manāf, O children of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib,” and so on): “If I were to inform you that mounted troops are about to come