

## Stages of the Spiritual Journey

According to Islamic mysticism and ethics, wakefulness (yaqzah) is the starting point of the spiritual journey. The literal meaning of yaqzah is ‘to wake up.’ It technically refers to a state in which man wakes from negligence, pays attention to the path he is treading in his life, safeguards himself against his enemies like Satan, and tries not to forget his aim. Only as a result of such wakefulness can he achieve his ultimate objective, that is, nearness to God.

The initial step in the spiritual journey and self-purification is a person’s awareness of his imperfection. He understands that he is a traveler in this world with a long distance ahead to reach the ultimate objective of human perfection. He needs provisions and a means of travelling. No doubt, if somebody is neglectful of his being a traveler, he will not progress spiritually

For some people, fear of Hellfire and its punishments help them wake up. In others, it is eagerness for Heaven and its blessings. However, there are also people who are so fond of God that their eagerness to meet Him is sufficient to wake them up from negligence and reach “wakefulness.” That is why those who are near to Him read in the supplication of “Sha’baniyyah”, telling God, “O’ My Lord! You have wakened me up to Your love from the slumber of negligence.

Another necessary step in the path of wayfaring and spiritual journey is constant attention (muraqabah). Muraqaba is the servant's observation of performing actions so that they are not against divine orders. In muraqaba, the servant considers this fact that the Almighty is aware of the appearance and the heart of his actions and of what he has in the heart. Scholars of ethics emphasize on muraqaba a lot and consider it among the essentials of spiritual wayfaring. Due to muraqaba, a person will acquire a disposition in which having the knowledge in one's heart, one continuously observes (being in the presence of) God and is occupied and concerned with Him and knows that one will return to God.

### Levels of Muraqabah

Different levels are mentioned for muraqaba:

1. Performing obligations and abandoning forbidden actions.
2. Intensifying muraqaba and performing any action only for the contentment of God and avoiding self-indulgence.
3. Seeing God as the observant in all the states and admitting the fact that God Almighty is Omnipresent and Observant over creatures.
4. The highest level of muraqaba is that the wayfarer sees God as the Observant and generally sees divine beauty in all things.

In the early phases of wayfaring, the traveler practices a different kind of muraqabah than at later stages. The higher the stages and levels one traverses and the more one advances toward perfection, the more intense and more profound one’s muraqabah becomes—so much so that if it were to be imposed on a novice in the initial stages of wayfaring, he would not be able to bear it and would abandon wayfaring entirely; or he would be burnt out and consumed by it and perish. However, gradually and as a result of persistence and passing through preliminary stages, the traveler will be strengthened and prepared to enter into higher levels of muraqabah. At these stages, many things that were permissible and lawful for him in the early stages become unlawful and forbidden.

As a result of persistent muraqabah, gradually signs of affection and love appear in the inmost consciousness of the traveler. This is because love for the Divine beauty and perfection is primordial to man's nature. It is a treasure that is deposited in man's nature and engraved in his essence. But interest in material possessions and love for multiplicities become a veil for this primordial love and prevents this eternal light from manifesting itself. Through muraqabah the veils gradually turn thinner and eventually disappear, and that primordial love manifests itself in one's heart and guides him to that Source of Beauty and Perfection. In the terminology of the gnostics, muraqabah is referred to as wine.

It may be remembered that recitation of the Qur'an is very effective in securing this state. The devotee should offer the night prayers and should recite in them those surahs during the recitation of which prostration is obligatory, namely Surah Sajdah, Surah Hamim Sajdah, Surah Najm, and Surah al-'Alaq, for it is very pleasant to fall prostrating while reciting a surah. Experience has also proved that it is very effective for this purpose to recite the Surah Sad in the Thursday night prayers (wutairah). This characteristic of this surah is indicated by the report concerning the merits of this surah also.

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Adapted from:

1) Spiritual Journeying in the words of Shi'a mystics, Sayyida Iram-Zahra Zaidi

<https://www.al-islam.org/message-thaqalayn/vol-14-no-4-winter-2014/spiritual-journeying-words-shia-mystics-sayyidah-iram>

2) Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the wayfaring and spiritual journey of the people of intellect. From the teachings of Allama Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai

<http://islamicblessings.com/upload/Kernel%20of%20the%20Kernel.pdf>

3) <https://en.wikishia.net/view/Muraqaba>