



# Heavenly Affection: Living the Love of Al-Wadūd

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## Introduction

Most theistic religions, including Islam, affirm love as one of the divine attributes of God, our Creator. It is considered a virtue by many people to selflessly love others for God’s sake, or to love others as oneself. However, a common criticism we hear against Islam today is that Muslims allegedly worship an angry, vengeful, cold, distant, and unloving god who teaches them to hate all non-Muslims (we seek refuge in Allah from this misguided claim). In response to this accusation, we as Muslim believers must answer the following question: What is the proper understanding of Allah’s love in Islam? And how does Allah’s love inform the behavior of Muslim believers?

This article will elaborate on Allah’s name *al-Wadūd* (The Affectionate) as mentioned in the Qur’an. Allah’s love will be looked at from the following angles: Allah’s general love for His creation, Allah’s specific love for the believers, the believers’ love for Allah, and the believers’ love for His creation. Then, the meaning of ‘hatred for the sake of Allah’ will be explained in the context of Allah’s love.

## Allah’s Beautiful Name *al-Wadūd* (The Affectionate)

Love is part of the essence of Allah as expressed in the Beautiful Name *al-Wadūd*, which is often translated as ‘The Most Loving.’ It can also be rendered as ‘The Affectionate,’ as it is related to the word *wudd* or *widd*, meaning affection or amity.<sup>1</sup> This is a specific type of friendly love that is distinguished from the more general Arabic words for love, *ḥubb* or *maḥabbah*, although both root words are often used synonymously.<sup>2</sup> Many early Muslims connected the name *al-Wadūd* to similar Beautiful Names denoting Allah’s mercy, such as *al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) and *al-Ghaḥūr* (the Forgiving).

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Wehr and J. M. Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Urbana, IL: Spoken Languages Services, 2002), 1240.

<sup>2</sup> Wehr and Cowan, 179.

*al-Wadūd* appears in two verses of the Qur'an, both times in connection to the forgiving and merciful nature of Allah.

Allah said:

He is the Forgiving, the Loving.<sup>3</sup>

And Allah said, speaking through the Prophet Shu‘ayb عليه السلام:

Ask forgiveness from your Lord and repent to Him. Verily, my Lord is Merciful and Loving.<sup>4</sup>

This name is mentioned in a long hadith enumerating the ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah, although the chain of authorities is weak according to al-Tirmidhī who recorded it.<sup>5</sup> In another narration, also recorded and considered weak by al-Tirmidhī, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reportedly supplicated in his prayer, “Verily, You are Merciful and Loving.”<sup>6</sup> Although the name *al-Wadūd* is not widely used in the hadith corpus, its appearance in two verses of the Qur'an is sufficient to establish it as one of Allah's names.

The early Muslims had two perspectives on the meaning of this name: from the perspective of Allah as the granter of love or Allah as the object of love. al-Bukhārī cites Abū al-‘Āliyah as saying *al-Wadūd* means *al-Ḥabīb* (the Beloved).<sup>7</sup> That is, Allah is the One Who is beloved by His servants and creatures. According to al-Bayhaqī, *al-Wadūd* is “He Who intends the best for His allies.”<sup>8</sup> al-Ghazālī elaborates this view, writing, “*al-Wadūd* is He Who loves good for all of creation, and treats them in the best manner, and commends them. It is close in meaning to *al-Raḥmān* (the Merciful).”<sup>9</sup> Al-Bayhaqī also recorded the interpretation of Ibn

<sup>3</sup> Qur'an 85:14.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an 11:90.

<sup>5</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1998), 5:411, no. 3507. A weak (*ḍa‘īf*) ḥadīth is a narration from the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in which scholars have found deficiencies in its chain of authorities or its content. Scholars disagree on the role of weak ḥadīth, with some allowing their use as supporting evidence whereas others discourage their use completely.

<sup>6</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 5:358, no. 3419.

<sup>7</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najjāh, 2002), 9:124.

<sup>8</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt* (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Suwādī, 1993), 1:349.

<sup>9</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* (Cyprus: al-Jaffān wal-Jābī, 1987), 122; for an alternative translation, see Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī, David B. Burrell, and Nazih Daher, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), 118–19.

‘Abbas (ra) that *al-Wadūd* means both ‘the Merciful’ and ‘the Beloved,’ which seems to encapsulate both views.<sup>10</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim summarizes these two different perspectives:

*al-Wadūd* is among the names of the Almighty Lord. In this regard there are two opinions: First, it means One Who receives affection. al-Bukharī, may Allah have mercy on him, said in his authentic work that *al-Wadūd* means the Beloved. Second, it means One Who is affectionate to His servants, that is, One Who loves them.<sup>11</sup>

These two interpretations are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complementary. They are both true. Allah is the ultimate receiver of love through the worship and gratitude of His creatures and, at the same time, He is constantly bestowing His love and mercy upon His creation.

Ibn al-Qayyim also notes how the two verses of the Qur’an connect this name to Allah’s forgiveness, “It is linked with His name ‘the Forgiving’ to indicate that He forgives sins and He loves those who repent to Him.”<sup>12</sup> Any person can embrace the love of Allah through sincere repentance, no matter how much they have sinned in the past. Everyone has the opportunity to turn to Allah and receive His love until they reach their deathbed or the world ends, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, Allah accepts the repentance of his servants, as long as they are not on their deathbed.”<sup>13</sup> No one denies themselves the love of Allah unless they choose to live and die as an unfaithful sinner. Even though a portion of Allah’s love and mercy reaches all people, even sinners, His love is a blessing we should not take for granted, lest we fail to give Allah the love that He deserves from us.

<sup>10</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt*, 1:198, no. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij al-sālikīn bayna manāzil īyyāka na ‘budu wa-īyyāka nasta ‘īn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1996), 3:29.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 3:29–30.

<sup>13</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 5:438, no. 3537; declared fair (*ḥasan*) by al-Tirmidhī in the comments.

## Allah’s mercy for His creation

The love of Allah reaches all people and all creatures through His innumerable acts of mercy to His creation. Every day we are the recipients of some blessings, whether it is in our health, our wealth, our family, our sustenance, our answered prayers, or even hidden favors we cannot perceive. We are also given a lifetime of opportunity to sincerely repent for our sins and become faithful believers in Him. It is truly impossible for us to know the full extent to which Allah has treated us well in this life and blessed us with the priceless gift of life.

Allah said:

He has given you all that you asked of Him. If you were to count the favors of Allah, you would never be able to number them. Verily, humankind is most unjust and ungrateful.<sup>14</sup>

The blessings of health, wealth, and provision are obvious, but other divine favors are more subtle. How has Allah given us everything we have asked of Him? Al-Suyūṭī explains that all of our supplications have been answered “in accordance with [our] best interests.”<sup>15</sup> Allah says that sometimes in your life “you may like something that is bad for you and you may hate something that is good for you.”<sup>16</sup> We might ask Allah for fabulous wealth but He does not give it to us because He knows it would mislead us into sin or we would misappropriate it. Wealth would be bad for us in this case, so Allah ‘answers’ the prayer by not granting the request.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

There is no Muslim who supplicates to Allah, wherein there is no sin or cutting of family ties, but that Allah will give him one of three answers: He will hasten fulfillment of his supplication,

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<sup>14</sup> Qur’an 14:34.

<sup>15</sup> al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2001), 1:335, verse 14:34.

<sup>16</sup> Qur’an 2:216.

He will store it for him in the Hereafter, or He will divert an evil from him similar to it.<sup>17</sup>

As parents know, we can never give our children everything they want because we know it would not be good for them. Similarly, Allah does not give us everything we ask for in this life, as an act of love for us and not deprivation, although He may hold onto our supplications until the Day of Judgment to answer them when we need them most. These are the hidden blessings on top of the many blessings we already know about.

All of this is the manifestation of Allah’s love in its most general sense. Yet, despite His generosity, humankind has a tendency to be ungrateful to Him because they commit “acts of disobedience” and “deny the favors of their Lord.”<sup>18</sup> People have a natural inclination to follow their whims, seek instant gratification, and be ungrateful for their blessings. We all know how painful it is when stubborn people do not acknowledge our acts of kindness to them. Behaving in this disrespectful manner towards Allah is so evil that the Qur’an uses the word ‘unbelief’ (*kufṛ*) as a synonym for ingratitude.<sup>19</sup> Even so, Allah continues to bless such people, provide for them, and keep the door of repentance open for them during their whole lives, despite their thanklessness. But this general benevolence of Allah for His creatures does not preclude the possibility that He will punish them for their sins.

Allah said:

As for My punishment, I bring it upon whomever I will, yet My mercy encompasses all things. I will decree it for those who were righteous and gave in charity, those who had faith in Our signs.<sup>20</sup>

According to al-Suyūṭī, the mercy of Allah is “general for all things in the world” but is specific for the believers “in the Hereafter.”<sup>21</sup> Allah’s mercy is qualified by

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<sup>17</sup> Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 17:213, no. 11133; declared very good (*jayyid*) by al-Arnā’ūt in the comments.

<sup>18</sup> al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 1:335, verse 14:34.

<sup>19</sup> Qur’an 2:152.

<sup>20</sup> Qur’an 7:156.

<sup>21</sup> al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 1:216, verse 7:156.

His complementary name *al-'Adl* (the Just). While Allah bestows an abundance of blessings upon His servants, the righteous and sinful alike, His justice necessitates that those who do not reciprocate His love in this world will be denied it in the Hereafter, as Allah said, “Thus did Our signs come to you and you forgot them, so thus will you be forgotten on this Day.”<sup>22</sup>

The dual aspect of Allah’s mercy is contained in the *basmalah* (‘in the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful’), the short prayer that Muslims say before reciting the Qur’an or doing any good deed. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa’dī, a distinguished scholar from Saudi Arabia, writes about these two names of Allah, the Gracious and the Merciful:

These are two names indicating that the Exalted is characterized by vast and great mercy, which encompasses all things and is general for every living being. He has decreed it for the righteous followers of His Prophets and Messengers. They will have His unconditional mercy. As for those who are hostile to Him, they still have a portion of it.<sup>23</sup>

The mercy of Allah is vast, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah is more merciful to His servants than a mother is to her child,”<sup>24</sup> but the mercy of Allah should not be taken for granted while ignoring His imperative to enact justice. Keeping this in mind, believers should worship Allah in a balanced manner, hoping in the special mercy of Allah reserved for the believers, while also fearing His punishment awaiting the sinners, as Allah said, “Their sides forsake their beds to call upon Him in fear and hope.”<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim provides a helpful illustration as to why true love for Allah must be accompanied by fear and hope:

The heart on its journey towards Allah the Exalted is like that of a bird. Love is its head and fear and hope are its two wings. When the head is healthy, then the two wings will fly well. When the head is cut

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<sup>22</sup> Qur’an 20:126.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir al-Sa’dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-Mannān* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2000), 1:39, verse 1:1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:8, no. 5999.

<sup>25</sup> Qur’an 32:16.

off, the bird will die. When either of two wings is damaged, the bird becomes vulnerable to every hunter and predator.<sup>26</sup>

Love should be the driving force that motivates us to obey Allah, while our love is also pushed along by a healthy combination of fear and hope. We fear displeasing Allah because we truly love Him since genuine love requires doing everything we can to satisfy our Beloved. People who depend solely upon the general mercy (or love) of Allah, but have no fear of His justice, become vulnerable to the satanic impulses inside them and behave as if their sins were insignificant. Likewise, the ‘hellfire-and-brimstone’ style of preaching, which offers little hope to believers, leads to a dysfunctional practice of religion as well. Too much fear or too much hope, without enough love, is like a bird trying to fly with only one wing.

Hence, it is dangerous to only speak about the love of Allah in unqualified or unconditional terms, as is common in the popular ‘feel-good’ and ‘prosperity’ forms of religion today. This one-sided message deludes people into the false notion that the love of Allah can be taken for granted, that Allah ‘loves’ them even when they unrepentantly insist on disobeying Him and denying His favors. Rather, it is incumbent upon the believers to take on the characteristics of those whom Allah described in the Qur’an as worthy of His love.

## Allah’s love for the believers

The believers benefit from the general mercy of Allah in the same manner as all of His creatures, but they are further rewarded with His special love in this life and in the Hereafter on account of their faith, good deeds, and pure hearts. Allah sent Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as the Final Messenger to humanity, with the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, by which anyone can draw close to Allah and experience the fullest extent of His love.

Allah said:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 1:513.

Say (O Muhammad): If you love Allah, then follow me. Allah will love you and forgive your sins, for Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.<sup>27</sup>

The Qur'an describes the broad character traits of those who are worthy of Allah's love, which is a special reward reserved in the Hereafter for those who have faith in Him. Allah loves those who follow the Prophet ﷺ,<sup>28</sup> those who are mindful of Him and fear Him,<sup>29</sup> those who rely upon Him,<sup>30</sup> those who behave in the best manner,<sup>31</sup> those who are just,<sup>32</sup> those who repent and purify their hearts,<sup>33</sup> and those who are patient.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Allah does not love those who disbelieve in Him,<sup>35</sup> those who are ungrateful to Him,<sup>36</sup> those who spread corruption,<sup>37</sup> those who transgress the limits,<sup>38</sup> those who are treacherous,<sup>39</sup> those who are arrogant,<sup>40</sup> those who are proud and boastful,<sup>41</sup> those who are extravagant,<sup>42</sup> and those who wrong others.<sup>43</sup> Allah loves the believers and rewards them in the Hereafter to the extent that they behave righteously, while at the same time He hates their sins and He reserves the right to punish them accordingly. As for the unbelievers who had no honest excuse for their disbelief, they will receive no love from Allah in the next life if they die without faith. If they never bothered to reciprocate Allah's mercy for them in this world by genuinely loving Him, why should they be rewarded in the Hereafter?

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<sup>27</sup> Qur'an 3:31.

<sup>28</sup> Qur'an 3:31.

<sup>29</sup> Qur'an 3:76.

<sup>30</sup> Qur'an 3:159.

<sup>31</sup> Qur'an 2:195.

<sup>32</sup> Qur'an 60:8.

<sup>33</sup> Qur'an 2:222.

<sup>34</sup> Qur'an 3:146.

<sup>35</sup> Qur'an 3:32.

<sup>36</sup> Qur'an 2:276.

<sup>37</sup> Qur'an 5:64.

<sup>38</sup> Qur'an 2:190.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'an 8:58.

<sup>40</sup> Qur'an 16:23.

<sup>41</sup> Qur'an 4:36.

<sup>42</sup> Qur'an 7:31.

<sup>43</sup> Qur'an 3:140.

## Signs of Allah’s love

We can never really know whom Allah loves other than the Prophets or those specifically named by the Prophets, as the final judgment of everyone else is in the Unseen and will only be revealed in the Hereafter. However, there are signs in this life that Allah loves a particular believer or that He loves us. Al-Ghazālī outlines the most important characteristics of the believers whom Allah loves:

Allah’s love for a servant is in bringing him close to Himself by repelling distractions and sinful acts of disobedience from him, purifying his inner-self from the cloudiness of the world, and lifting the veil over his heart until he bears witness to Him, as if he can see Him with his own heart.<sup>44</sup>

The love of the believers for Allah is not simply a *feeling*; it involves *action*. When the believers are inspired by Allah to perform acts of worship, to give in charity, or behave with good character, all of these are signs that Allah loves them for their faith in Him and, at the same time, are expressions of their love for Him. The Prophet ﷺ said, “If Allah intends goodness for a servant, He puts him into action.” It was said, “How is he put into action, O Messenger of Allah?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “He is guided to righteous deeds before death.”<sup>45</sup> As such, Allah guides the believers whom He loves to good deeds, beginning most importantly with the obligatory acts of worship and building upon these to include all sorts of voluntary virtues. As the believer grows closer to Allah in this manner, Allah loves him (or her) more and more until His guidance permeates their lives.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

Allah Almighty said: My servant does not grow closer to Me with anything more beloved to Me than the duties I have imposed upon him. My servant continues to grow closer to Me with extra good works until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he

<sup>44</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1980), 4:329; for an alternative translation, see al-Ghazālī and Eric L. Ormsby (trans.), *Al-Ghazali: Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), 104.

<sup>45</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 4:18, no. 2142; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Tirmidhī in comments.

strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something from Me, I would surely give it to him. Were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant it to him.<sup>46</sup>

In describing this spiritual state of being loved by Allah, al-Ghazālī writes:

Allah takes charge of (the believer's) outward and inward affairs, in private and in public. He refers to Him to arrange his affairs and beautify his character, to enable his limbs, and to direct him outwardly and inwardly. (The believer) makes his concern a single concern (for the Hereafter), and Allah makes worldliness hateful to him in his heart. Allah detaches him from those besides Him. He puts him at ease with private conversation in seclusion with Him. He lifts the veil between him and gnosis of Him. These and the like are signs that Allah loves a servant.<sup>47</sup>

Simply having the opportunity to practice Islam is a sign that Allah loves us. The love of Allah for the believers further manifests itself in their own actions, in their character, worship, and good deeds. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The most beloved people to Allah are those with the best character.”<sup>48</sup> When we see believers exhibiting good behavior with respect to Allah and others, this is a sign that Allah loves them. When we find these good qualities within our own selves, this is a sign that Allah loves us; it is a blessing for which we should be grateful and praise Allah, not something to be arrogant about.

Beautiful character traits are among the hallmarks of the righteous believers, another sign of His love for them and their love for Him. Gentleness (*al-rifq*) is one such divine quality found in Allah and which He loves to find in the behavior of the believers. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, Allah is Gentle and He loves gentleness in every matter.”<sup>49</sup> And the Prophet ﷺ said, “Gentleness is not found in anything but that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything but that it

<sup>46</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:105, no. 6502.

<sup>47</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4:329; for an alternative translation, see al-Ghazālī and Ormsby (trans.), *al-Ghazali: Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 105–6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1993), 2:236, no. 486; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Arnā'ūṭ in the comments.

<sup>49</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9:16, no. 6927.

disgraces it.”<sup>50</sup> The Prophet ﷺ once said to his companion Al-Ashajj ‘Abd al-Qays, “Verily, you have two qualities beloved to Allah. They are forbearance and patience.”<sup>51</sup> And the Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, Allah is Generous. He loves generosity and exalted character and He detests pettiness.”<sup>52</sup> Allah loves for His servants to interact with people using such beautiful manners, so it is another sign of His love upon them when He facilitates them to behave well.

The best religious habits to Allah are the ones that are consistent, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “The most beloved deeds to Allah are those performed regularly.”<sup>53</sup> Allah loves for the believers to build up beneficial routines, even if they are small deeds. This could be something as simple as reciting *Āyat al-Kursī* every night before going to bed, or something more involved like performing the night prayers (*qiyām al-layl*). To earn Allah’s love, we should pick a good deed that we can do on a regular basis. The Prophet ﷺ was often asked by his companions what the most beloved deed was to Allah, or what they personally should focus on and, in his prophetic wisdom, he gave them different answers based on their individual situations. The best deeds for us to do are those the Prophet ﷺ praised but also what we can realistically do day after day without falling off the train, so to speak. Once we consolidate our routine, we can add more and more to it in a manner of systematic spiritual improvement. As mentioned earlier, the believers grow closer to Allah through voluntary deeds (in addition to the obligations) until Allah loves them and becomes their Ally. Whatever we choose to do, we should do it as best as we can. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, Allah Almighty is Excellent and He loves excellence.”<sup>54</sup> This is true for anything we do in life, whether it is worship, school, work, and so on. Allah loves for us to put in our best effort and make things as perfect as possible.

<sup>50</sup> Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ([Beirut?]: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyah, 1955), 4:2004, no. 2594.

<sup>51</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:48, no. 17.

<sup>52</sup> al-Bāyhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah, 2003), 10:322, no. 20781; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ wa ziyādātihi* ([Damascus?]: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1969), 1:370, no. 1801.

<sup>53</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:542, no. 785.

<sup>54</sup> al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-awsaṭ* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1995), 6:40, no. 5735; declared very good (*jayyid*) by al-Albānī in *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma’ārif, 1996), 1:840, no. 469.

Another important sign of Allah’s love is the hardships that He, in His infinite wisdom, imposes upon the believers to purify their sins and bring out the best in them. The Prophet ﷺ said, “If Allah loves people, He afflicts them with trials.”<sup>55</sup> This might seem counterintuitive if we only view it from the perspective of the world. However, the world is only half of the story. The ending of the story occurs in the Hereafter on the Day of Judgment, when the ultimate fate of people is decided. What appears ‘bad’ in this life is actually good for the believers, as the Prophet ﷺ informed us, “The bitterness of the world is sweetness in the Hereafter.”<sup>56</sup> Perhaps we lost a good job that we loved or suffered a serious health crisis. It certainly seems bad on the surface, and it is to the extent that these trials are not desirable in themselves, but Allah knows this particular trial is good for our spiritual development. We might love something very dear to us in the world, yet Allah takes it away from us because He loves us. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, Allah Almighty will put his faithful servant on a diet from the world when He loves him, just as you put your ill on a diet from food and drink, fearing for him.”<sup>57</sup> We cannot see how the bigger picture plays out in the Hereafter, so part of true faith is to trust in Allah to decree the best for us.

Hardship in this life functions as the believer’s atonement for the sins he or she commits. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Nothing afflicts a Muslim of hardship, nor illness, nor anxiety, nor sorrow, nor harm, nor distress, nor even the pricking of a thorn, but that Allah will expiate his sins by it.”<sup>58</sup> In this way, every difficult matter that troubles us in the world is good for us as long as we have faith and endure it patiently. The Prophet ﷺ said:

Wondrous is the affair of a believer, as there is good for him in every matter; this is not the case for anyone but a believer. If he experiences pleasure, he thanks Allah and it is good for him. If he experiences harm, he shows patience and it is good for him.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 39:48, no. 23641; declared very good (*jayyid*) by al-Arnā’ūt in the comments.

<sup>56</sup> *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 37:533, no. 22897; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi‘ al-ṣaḡhīr*, 1:603, no. 3155.

<sup>57</sup> *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 39:37, no. 23626; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Arnā’ūt in the comments.

<sup>58</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7:114, no. 5641.

<sup>59</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2295, no. 2999.

Thus, when a believer is afflicted by pain, suffering, or distress, he or she has faith that Allah has decreed this hardship in their best interests, that it is expunging their sins “just as leaves fall from a tree.”<sup>60</sup> This is a sign of Allah’s love, not His wrath.

In the optimistic spirit of faith, a trial is viewed as an opportunity to be rewarded for patience. Indeed, hardship often brings out the best in people. One of the Qur’anic words for ‘trial’ is *fitnah*, which is related to a metalworking term that means “he put it into the fire, namely gold and silver, in order to separate or distinguish the bad from the good.”<sup>61</sup> Just as a blacksmith puts raw gold ore into a fire to extract the pure gold from within the rock, Allah imposes trials upon the believers to compel them towards their best behavior. The best examples, of course, are the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, whose faith was refined by the persecution they endured at the hands of their enemies. We know Allah loved them very much and, for this reason, He tested them severely; every subsequent generation of Muslims has benefited from the lessons they learned. Even so, we should not rush into trials or seek out hardship because we cannot know if it is a test we will pass. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Blessed is the one kept away from trials.”<sup>62</sup> Ease is an immense blessing from Allah, one for which we should be thankful and reciprocate by obeying Him.

Another important sign of Allah’s love is the love of believers for other believers. If a believer is beloved to the people in his or her community, that is an indication that Allah loves them and is pleased with them.

Allah said:

Verily, those who have faith and perform righteous deeds, the Merciful will appoint affection for them.<sup>63</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ further explained how this works in the Unseen:

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<sup>60</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7:115, no. 5648.

<sup>61</sup> Edward W. Lane and Stanley Lane-Poole, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), 2334.

<sup>62</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Saida, Lebanon: al-Maktabah al-Aṣṣṛīyah, 1980), 4:102, no. 4263; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī in the comments.

<sup>63</sup> Qur’an 19:96.

When Allah loves a servant, He calls Gabriel and He says: Verily, I love this person so you should love him. Then Gabriel loves him and makes an announcement in the heavens, saying: Allah loves this person so you should love him. Thus, the dwellers of the heavens love him and he is honored on the earth.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, the good reputation of a believer is a sign of Allah’s love for them. This is particularly true in the context of the funeral prayer. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whenever four persons testify to the goodness of a Muslim, he will enter Paradise.” The companions said, “And three?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Even three.” They said, “And two?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Even two.”<sup>65</sup> If a Muslim leaves behind a good impression upon even two believers (which is consistent with their true state), they will enter Paradise as a reward.

Sometimes the signs of Allah’s love for a believer are so overwhelming that they are nearly impossible to deny. It is reported that as many as two and a half million Muslims prayed for Imām Aḥmad at his funeral.<sup>66</sup> Aḥmad’s works are still beloved and beneficial to countless Muslims even today. Similar accolades have been earned by great imams, scholars, and righteous believers throughout Islamic history, which strongly suggests that Allah loved them and was pleased with them.

We cannot say with absolute certainty whom Allah loves or does not love unless it is mentioned in divine revelation, nor should we exaggerate the status of any particular believer as the Prophet ﷺ told us, “If one of you inevitably praises his companion, let him say: ‘I consider him to be good and Allah will hold him accountable. I cannot testify to anyone’s purity before Allah, but I consider him good as far as is known.’”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, the signs of Allah’s love for a believer can provide us with a high degree of confidence with regard to who we should learn Islam from and spend our time with.

<sup>64</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9:146, no. 6485.

<sup>65</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:97, no. 1368.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah* (Cairo: Dār Hajr, 1997), 14:424.

<sup>67</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3:176, no. 2662.

## The believers' love for Allah

Since Allah's love for the believers is clearly conveyed in the Qur'an and Sunnah, it is a duty upon them to respond to this love by loving Allah in return. The good deeds that Allah facilitates for those whom He loves are the same deeds by which believers show their love for Allah. The distinguishing feature of a monotheist's love for Allah, as opposed to an idolater, is its principled consistency.

Allah said:

Among people are those who take rivals besides Allah, loving them with love only due to Allah, but the believers are even stronger in their love of Allah.<sup>68</sup>

According to Al-Suyūfī, the believers are stronger in their love for Allah than the idolaters because “they do not turn away from Him regardless of the situation, whereas the unbelievers only turn to Allah in times of hardship.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, the idolaters share their love with their idols and only show Allah the love He deserves from them when they are in a dangerous situation, like being lost in a storm at sea. Conversely, the believers are constant in their love of Allah through acts of obedience, worship, and good deeds, whether at times of ease or difficulty. As the Prophet ﷺ would say, “All praise is due to Allah in every circumstance.”<sup>70</sup> In fact, the Prophet ﷺ told us, “No one loves to be praised more than Allah.”<sup>71</sup> As such, we should make it a habit to praise Allah at all times.

al-Ghazālī includes the believer's love for Allah as one of the ‘salvific virtues’ (*munjiyāt*) that can take one to Paradise. In his view, Allah should be the only true object of love for the believers or, rather, Allah is the source of all love:

Allah alone is deserving of love. Whoever loves something besides Allah and not with regard to his relationship with Allah, that is from his ignorance and deficiency in knowing Allah Almighty. Love for the

<sup>68</sup> Qur'an 2:165.

<sup>69</sup> al-Suyūfī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 1:33, verse 2:165.

<sup>70</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1975), 2:1250, no. 3803; declared fair (*ḥasan*) by al-Albānī in the comments.

<sup>71</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7:35, no. 5220.

Messenger ﷺ is praiseworthy, as it proceeds from the love of Allah Almighty. Likewise is the love of the scholars and the righteous, as those loved by the Beloved should be loved... None is beloved in reality, for those with insight, except Allah Almighty. None deserves love besides Him.<sup>72</sup>

Every love that we have for a person, object, or idea in the world should be related to our love for Allah. We love the believers and the righteous because we know Allah loves them in a general sense. We love our parents because, not only has Allah made this natural to us, He has commanded us to uphold our family ties. Even if our parents strive against our faith, we are still obligated to “accompany them with good conduct.”<sup>73</sup> In this way, everything we love is simply an outgrowth of our original love for Allah.

The clearest example of our derivative love is our obligatory love for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and, indeed, all of the Prophets. The Prophet ﷺ said, “None of you have faith until I am more beloved to him than his children, his father, and all of the people.”<sup>74</sup> This also includes love for the companions, as the Prophet said, “None loves the *Anṣār* but a believer and none hates them but a hypocrite. Whoever loves them, Allah will love him. Whoever hates them, Allah will hate him.”<sup>75</sup> Despite our love for things in this world, our relationship to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his companions is the most important because our guidance and salvation depend upon it. If our family and friends contradict the teachings of Islam, we are called to follow the dictates of our religion instead of them.

Again, love for the Messenger ﷺ is not merely a feeling; it requires action. On one occasion, ‘Umar said to the Prophet, “O Messenger of Allah, you are more beloved to me than everything but myself.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “No, by the one in whose hand is my soul, until I am more beloved to you than yourself.” ‘Umar said, “Indeed, I swear by Allah that you are more beloved to me now than myself.”

<sup>72</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4:301; for an alternative translation, see al-Ghazālī and Ormsby (trans.), *al-Ghazali: Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Qur’an 31:15.

<sup>74</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1:12, no. 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 5:32, no. 3783.

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Now (you are right), O ‘Umar.”<sup>76</sup> ‘Umar did not instantly change the feelings in his heart after the Prophet ﷺ said this; instead, he became determined to change his intention. He now pledged to give preference to his love for the Messenger ﷺ over his love for anyone else, including himself.

Ibn al-Qayyim, who was skilled at making concise lists, provides us with the top ten ways the believers can acquire the love of Allah:<sup>77</sup>

1. Reciting the Qur’an, reflecting upon it, and understanding its intended meanings.
2. Performing extra, voluntary good deeds and acts of worship in addition to the religious obligations.
3. Constantly remembering Allah in every situation by words, heart, and deeds.
4. Giving precedence to the love of Allah over one’s desires and whims.
5. Studying the names and attributes of Allah, bearing witness to them, and recognizing them.
6. Bearing witness to His benevolence, kind treatment, and blessings, whether apparent or hidden.
7. Presenting one’s ‘broken heart’ before Allah (by this he meant to be humble in front of Allah).
8. Seeking seclusion and private conversation with Allah in worship.
9. Keeping company with righteous believers whom He loves and benefiting from the ‘fruits’ of their words.
10. Keeping away from anything that might come between one’s heart and Allah Almighty.

Ibn al-Qayyim concludes his list with the following, “From these ten means, those who show love to Allah will arrive at the (spiritual) station of true love and will enter upon the Beloved. The foundation of all that is in two affairs: preparing the soul for this matter and opening the eye of insight.”<sup>78</sup> Love of this nature is a very deliberate intention and act, not just a feeling we turn on and off like a switch.

<sup>76</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:129, no. 6632.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 3:18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 3:19.

Authentic love for Allah takes preparation, study, and effort, learning from the wisdom of our heritage, and activating new levels of perception gleaned from sincerely traversing the religious journey.

That said, love as an intention to do good is praiseworthy itself even if one cannot perform all the deeds on this list. Abū Dharr once said, “O Messenger of Allah, a man loves a people but he cannot do good deeds as they do.” The Prophet ﷺ answered, “You, O Abū Dharr, will be with those you love.” Abū Dharr said, “I love Allah and His Messenger.” The Prophet said, “Verily, you will be with those you love.”<sup>79</sup> So although some may have difficulty doing good deeds out of their love for Allah, whether because of weakness or sickness or some other reason, the longing in their hearts to grow closer to Allah by these deeds can be enough to join them with the righteous in the Hereafter. At the same time, we must be cautious of where we place our love because what we love in this life will be with us in the next life.

## The believers’ love for Allah’s creation

Since Allah loves good for His creation in a general sense, the believers should reflect this goodwill in their interactions with His creatures. In this way, the believers can let the divine quality of love shine through them in their behavior towards others, a practice known as ‘taking on character traits by the names of Allah’ (*al-takhalluq bi-asmā’ Allāh*). al-Ghazālī explains the implications of *al-Wadūd* for our behavior:

Loving-kindness among the servants of Allah involves desiring for the creation of Allah what he desires for himself, and the highest part of that is to prefer them over himself. As if one of them said: I wish I could be a bridge over Hellfire so that the creation would cross over me and not be harmed by it. The perfection of this is that anger,

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<sup>79</sup> *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 4:333, no. 5162; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī in the comments.

malice, and what he endures of harm will not prevent him from altruism and excellent behavior.<sup>80</sup>

al-Bayḍāwī similarly agrees in his explanation of the Affectionate, writing, “The portion of it with the servant is that he desires for the creation of Allah Almighty what he desires for himself, not that he desires for the creation what he does not desire for himself. Rather, he must often show loving-kindness to people and visit them in the legislated manner.”<sup>81</sup> If a servant of Allah truly loves Allah, then he or she should love those who already believe in Allah and also love guidance for those who do not yet believe. The highest level, according to al-Ghazālī, is to endure harm from the unbelievers while still showing them altruistic intentions (*al-īthār*) and benevolence (*al-iḥsān*). It can be summarized as the ethics of reciprocity: treat people as you want to be treated.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

None of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.<sup>82</sup>

Part of the perfection of faith is to show goodwill to people and to love that which benefits them in this life and in the Hereafter. The term ‘brother’ in this tradition, when interpreted in combination with several variant wordings, has been understood by scholars to be the brotherhood of humanity; all human beings are the children of Adam and are therefore ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in this sense. The version in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* says “until he loves for his brother—or he said his neighbor—what he loves for himself.”<sup>83</sup> And Ibn Ḥibbān’s version says “until he loves for the people...”<sup>84</sup> Based upon this evidence, al-Nawawī expanded the meaning of brotherhood to include non-Muslims:

Firstly, that [tradition] is interpreted as a general brotherhood, such that it includes the unbeliever and the Muslim. Thus, he loves for his

<sup>80</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maḥṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, 122; for an alternative translation, see Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī et al., *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 118–19.

<sup>81</sup> al-Bayḍāwī, *Sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 2015), 272.

<sup>82</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1:12, no. 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:67, no. 45.

<sup>84</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, 1:471, no. 235.

brother—the unbeliever—what he loves for himself of entering into Islam, as he would love for his brother Muslim to remain always upon Islam. For this reason, to pray for guidance for the unbeliever is recommended.<sup>85</sup>

The same broader interpretation of brotherhood by al-Nawawī was repeated nearly word for word by Ibn ‘Allān, which he attributes to Ibn ‘Imād al-Aqfahsī.<sup>86</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī likewise agreed with them, “It is apparent that the expression ‘brother’ here is based upon the general sense, as it is befitting for every Muslim to love Islam for the unbelievers and what arises from it of perfections.”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, commenting upon the word “neighbor” as it appears in the version of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, al-Ṣan‘ānī concludes:

The narration of the neighbor is general for the Muslim, the unbeliever, and the sinner, the friend and the enemy, the relative and the foreigner, the near neighbor and the far neighbor. Whoever accumulates in this regard the obligatory attributes of the love of good for him, he is at the highest of levels.<sup>88</sup>

Hence, believers should love for others what they love for themselves, whether people are Muslims or not. If they are Muslims, believers love for them to remain and improve in Islam. If they are not Muslims, the believers love for them to be guided to Islam. Even if they are enemies, the believers should love for them to stop sinning and repent of their ways.

In the same spirit of mercy for creation, the believers love good for animals and all creatures. The Prophet ﷺ told the story of a man who had intense thirst while he was walking on a journey. When he found a well, he climbed down into it and drank from it. Then he came out and saw a dog lolling its tongue from thirst and licking the ground. The man said, “This dog has suffered thirst just as I have suffered from it.” He climbed down into the well, filled his shoe with water, and held it in his mouth as he climbed up. Then, he gave the dog a drink. God

<sup>85</sup> al-Nawawī, *Kitāb al-arba‘īn al-Nawawīyah wa sharḥuh* ([Cairo?]: Dār Ḥarā’ lil-Kitāb, 1987), 38.

<sup>86</sup> Ibn ‘Allān, *Dalīl al-fālihīn li-ṭuruq Riyāḍ al-Ṣālihīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 2004), 3:26.

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Ḥajar Haytamī, *al-Fath al-mubīn bi-sharḥ al-Arba‘īn* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2008), 305.

<sup>88</sup> Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl Ṣan‘ānī, *Subul al-salām: Sharḥ Bulūgh al-Marām min adillat al-aḥkām* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2007), 2:633.

appreciated this deed, so he forgave him. Upon this, the companions said, “O Messenger of God, we will have a reward in these beasts?” The Prophet said, “In every moist liver is a reward.”<sup>89</sup> The man was forgiven by Allah for having mercy upon a stray dog; the man even applied the ethics of reciprocity to the dog, treating the dog as he wanted to be treated! Ibn al-Qayyim then coaxes us to come to the logical conclusion, “If Allah Almighty had forgiven one who gave water to a dog suffering from extreme thirst, then how about one who relieves the thirst, satisfies the hunger, and clothes the naked among the Muslims?”<sup>90</sup>

## The believers’ love for each other

The culmination of this spirit is the fellowship of faith, the mutual love between believers as brothers and sisters in Islam. While believers should love good for all people, a special love is reserved for those who are brought together by faith. The believers reciprocate each other’s love within the context of their religious precepts, unlike unbelievers who may not reciprocate their love or who may only love for them to benefit in the world instead of the Hereafter. The Prophet ﷺ described the unity of the believers as if they were a single body whose parts affect each other.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.<sup>91</sup>

In another narration, the Prophet ﷺ said, “The Muslims are like a single man. If the eye is afflicted, the whole body is afflicted. If the head is afflicted, the whole body is afflicted.”<sup>92</sup> Implied in this imagery is that the believers love for each other

<sup>89</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3:132, no. 2466.

<sup>90</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Uddat al-ṣābirīn wa-dhakhīrat al-shākirīn* (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1989), 1:253.

<sup>91</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:10, no. 6011.

<sup>92</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2000, no. 2586.

what they love for themselves. The early scholar al-Ḥalīmī commented on this tradition, saying:

It is befitting for them to be like that. As one hand would not love but what the other loves and one eye or one leg or one ear would not love but what the other loves. Likewise, he should not love for his Muslim brother except what he loves for himself.<sup>93</sup>

The most beloved servant to Allah is the one who loves the believers the most; as the Prophet ﷺ said, “No two persons love each other for the sake of Allah but that the better of the two is the one with the strongest love for his companion.”<sup>94</sup> By loving each other for the sake of Allah, we grow closer to Allah and to one another at the same time.

The unifying power of Islam should inspire love among the believers regardless of where they live or what their ethnicity is. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib used to say, “Verily, the believers are people with goodwill and love for each other, even if their lands and countries are far apart.”<sup>95</sup> The true love of the believers for each other transcends national and political boundaries. It is what motivates Muslims to care deeply about what is happening to other Muslims in the world, despite having no familial or ethnic connection to them. This type of sincere, selfless love for the sake of Allah is highly rewarded in the Hereafter, to the extent that those who loved each other for His sake will be admired by the prophets themselves.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

Verily, Allah will say on the Day of Resurrection: Where are those who love each other for the sake of My Glory? Today, I will shelter them in My shade on a day when there is no shade but Mine.<sup>96</sup>

And the Prophet ﷺ said:

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<sup>93</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-īmān* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 2003), 13:467, no. 10627.

<sup>94</sup> Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, 2:325, no. 566; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī in the comments.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 23:465.

<sup>96</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1988, no. 2566.

Allah Almighty said: Those who love each other for the sake of My Glory will be upon pulpits of light, admired by the prophets and the martyrs.<sup>97</sup>

And the Prophet ﷺ said:

Allah Almighty said: My love is a right upon those who love each other for My sake. My love is a right upon those who visit each other for My sake. My love is a right upon those who sit together for My sake. My love is a right upon those who maintain relations for My sake.<sup>98</sup>

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb once heard the Prophet ﷺ say, “Verily, among the servants of Allah are people who are neither prophets nor martyrs, yet the prophets and martyrs will admire them on the Day of Resurrection due to their position before Allah Almighty.” The companions said, “O Messenger of Allah, tell us who they are.” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “They are people who love each other with the spirit of Allah, despite having no shared family relations or wealth. By Allah, there will be light on their faces and they will be upon light. They will not fear when people are afraid and they will not be sad when people are grieved.”<sup>99</sup>

In fact, the reward of believers for loving each other is not only in the Hereafter but in this life as well. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever would love to taste the flavor of faith, let him love a person only for the sake of Allah Almighty.”<sup>100</sup> The love between believers in this world is only a small preview of the joy they will experience together in the next life.

In sum, the believers act upon the divine name *al-Wadūd* by loving good for all creatures, as an extension of the principle to be merciful to the creation. They treat people the way they want to be treated, as their consciences and Islamic teachings dictate to them. Muslims love for unbelievers to be guided to Islam, and they love for Muslims to remain and improve in Islam. This general love applies even to enemies of Islam, although it may not be appropriate to show them affection or

<sup>97</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 4:175, no. 2390; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Tirmidhī in the comments.

<sup>98</sup> *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 32:327, no. 22002; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Arnā’ūṭ in the comments.

<sup>99</sup> *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3:288, no. 3527; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Ālbānī in the comments.

<sup>100</sup> *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 13:347, no. 7967; declared fair (*ḥasan*) by al-Arnā’ūṭ in the comments.

warmth when they are committing major sins. The specific love of the believers is found in the fellowship of Islam, which transcends familial, ethnic, political, and national boundaries.

## Hatred for the sake of Allah?

When discussing the love of Allah, it is important to clarify its inverse: hatred for the sake of Allah. People might shy away from discussing what, at first glance, appears to be a negative concept opposed to the love of Allah. However, as properly understood, love for Allah cannot exist without hatred as well. If someone really loves Allah, they should hate sin and evil, but this does not mean one should hate sinners in the sense of wanting to harm them.

Allah said:

Allah has made faith beloved to you and beautified it in your hearts, and He has made hateful to you unbelief, wickedness, and sinful disobedience. Those are the rightly guided.<sup>101</sup>

The focus of our hatred in this verse is on the abstract concepts of unbelief and their concrete sinful deeds, not the identities of people. Muslim believers love faith and they hate acts of unbelief, wickedness, and sin, but they do not harbor malice towards unbelievers and sinners themselves. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The best of faith is to love for the sake of Allah, to hate for the sake of Allah, and to work your tongue in remembrance of Allah.” Mu‘ādh ibn Anas said, “How is it, O Messenger of Allah?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “That you love for people what you love for yourself, and you hate for them what you hate for yourself, and you speak goodness or remain silent.”<sup>102</sup> The prominent Indian Muslim scholar, Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq al-‘Azīmābādi, took the Prophet’s ﷺ saying that “hatred for the sake of Allah” is part of faith to mean “not to harm the one he hates but rather

<sup>101</sup> Qur’an 49:7.

<sup>102</sup> *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, 36:446, no. 22132; declared authentic due to external evidence (*ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihi*) by al-Arnā’ūṭ in the comments.

(hatred) for his unbelief and sinful disobedience.”<sup>103</sup> And Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī cites Shams al-Dīn al-Kirmānī as saying “it is also part of faith to hate for his brother what he hates for himself of evil.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, believers hate evil to come to people just as they love good to come to them. It is simply impossible to love good without also hating evil.

People today use the slogan: *love the sinner, hate the sin*. This is not a new concept at all, but rather it was understood by the earliest Muslims. Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham رحمه الله was passing through some cities and he saw two ascetics on a journey. One of them said to the other, “O brother, what do the people who love Allah inherit from their beloved?” The other said, “They inherit insight from the light of Allah Almighty and compassion for those who disobey Allah.” Ibrāhīm said, “How can he have compassion for people who contradict their Beloved?” The man looked at him and said, “They abhor their sinful deeds and have compassion for them that by their admonition they might leave their deeds, and they feel sympathy that their bodies might be burned in Hellfire. The believer is not truly a believer until he is pleased for people to have what he is pleased for himself.”<sup>105</sup> Ibn Rajab seemingly references this story and attributes it as an opinion among the righteous predecessors:

The people who love Allah look by the light of Allah and they are compassionate with those who disobey Allah. They hate their actions but show mercy to them so that through their warnings (sinners) might leave their actions. They are afraid that the Hellfire will consume their bodies. The believer will not truly be a believer until he is pleased for people to have what he is pleased for himself.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, believers hate the unbelief of the unbelievers while still showing them compassion, hoping for their guidance and repentance. We may even experience natural hatred for people, which is beyond our control. Certainly, it is not unusual to hate someone who wrongs us, but personal emotions of love or hatred should

<sup>103</sup> Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq al-‘Azīmābādī, *‘Awn al-ma’būd: Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2009), 12:285.

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1959), 1:74.

<sup>105</sup> Abū Nu’aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’* (Egypt: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 1974), 8:25.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi‘ al-‘ulūm wa-al-ḥikam* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 1:308.

never cross the line into acts of transgression. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه said, “Let not your love be infatuation and let not your hatred be destruction.” It was said, “How is this?” ‘Umar said, “When you love someone, you become infatuated like a child. When you hate someone, you want him to be destroyed.”<sup>107</sup> Hatred, when it leads to a desire to harm and destroy, is a spiritual disease that has consumed and ruined entire nations.

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

Creeping towards you are the diseases of the nations before you. Envy and hatred are razors. I do not say they shave hair, but rather they shave the religion. By the one in whose hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you have faith and you will not have faith until you love each other. Shall I tell you what can affirm that for you? Spread peace amongst yourselves.<sup>108</sup>

In brief, hatred for the sake of Allah means to hate evil, sin, and unbelief. It does not mean to hate unbelievers and sinners in the sense of desiring to harm them. Hatred at an extreme magnitude is a dangerous spiritual disease that must be resisted, even if it is a natural response to injustice.

## Conclusion

Love is part of the essence of Allah, *al-Wadūd*, and as such, it should permeate the lives of the believers. We should love Allah more than anything else, and as a result, love everything and everyone whom Allah loves: His Messengers, the believers, faith, and righteousness. Inversely, love for Allah is not complete until a believer hates everything that Allah hates: unbelief, wickedness, and sin. This teaching is encapsulated in the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم saying:

<sup>107</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-adab al-mufrad* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 1998), 1:744, no. 644; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī in the comments.

<sup>108</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 4:245, no. 2510; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Suyūṭī as cited by al-Ṣan‘ānī in *al-Tanwīr: Sharḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaghīr* (Riyadh: Muḥammad Iṣḥāq Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, 2011), 6:72, no. 4154.

Whoever has three traits within himself will find the sweetness of faith: one who loves Allah and His Messenger more than anything else, one who loves a servant only for the sake of Allah, and one who hates to turn back to unbelief after Allah has saved him, just as he hates to be thrown into the fire.<sup>109</sup>

Hating unbelief, of course, does not mean we should hate unbelievers or want to hurt them. It means hating evil actions and the sins by which they wrong their own souls. If we truly love someone, we hate to see them follow a path to their own destruction in this life and in the Hereafter.

*Success comes from Allah, and Allah knows best.*

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<sup>109</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1:12, no. 16.