

SHAYKH MASĪḤULLĀH KHĀN

The Path to  
*P*erfection

An Anthology of the Spiritual  
Teachings of Ḥakīm al-Umma  
Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE



**I**N THE NAME OF ALLĀH, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful, and peace and blessings upon His final Messenger, Muḥammad, and upon his Family and Companions.

The abridged translation of the *Sharīʿat & Taṣawwuf* by Shaykh Masīḥullāh Khān of Jalalabad, India was originally published in South Africa in 1981 by some of his students. It was widely acclaimed in that Shaykh Masīḥullāh Khān was one of the foremost students of Ḥakīm al-Umma Mawlānā Ashraf ʿAlī Thānawī and remained in the company of his shaykh for many years. Today, the students of Ḥakīm al-Umma Mawlānā Thānawī, through the guidance of Shaykh Masīḥullāh and others like him, are present all over the world in countries such as, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Africa, England, United States, Australia, and Canada, spreading the teachings of Islam and reviving the hearts of many.

Ḥakīm al-Umma was a prolific writer, and as reported by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda, the late Syrian scholar, his works amount to more than one thousand (*Qīmat al-zaman ʿinda ʿl-ʿulamāʾ*). Many of these works have been translated into English, Bengali, Persian, and other languages.

This book was selected by White Thread Press for publication because of its rich content, particularly because it highlights the salient features of spirituality and of moving on a spiritual path, the signs of a noble shaykh, the description of blameworthy traits and the means of remedying them, and the description of praiseworthy traits and the method of inculcating them. This is followed by a section that brings clarity to those matters pertaining to the thoughts of the heart, notions of the self, and the whisperings of Satan. The author does this in such a way that he simultaneously provides answers

to the most common and the most specific questions people have on the issue of spirituality. Aside from this, the book provides many general and specific counsels and advices. A reader cannot but feel inspired after reading this book, and feel an immediate need to purify the heart and embellish it with praiseworthy traits.

White Thread Press is grateful to the original translator and publishers for granting us permission to edit and publish this work afresh. We have made some changes to the first edition. The language has been completely edited and revised. The Arabic terms have been left in parentheses and replaced, for ease of reading, with suitable English equivalents. Also, many parts of the books were verified against the original Urdu text and revised where it was considered necessary, and a few sections relating to the prescription of specific daily worships and litanies were left out. We felt that these would be more appropriately acquired from a qualified representative of the Shaykh. Where missing, references were added to the ḥadīths and Qurʾānic verses.

An index has also been added to this edition. The biography of Shaykh Masīḥullāh Khān, which was part of the original text, has been edited and condensed for this edition and follows the main body of the book. We are very grateful to Ali Mian of Louisville, Kentucky, for compiling a brief yet sufficiently detailed biography of Ḥakīm al-Umma for this edition, providing insight into the life, piety, and academic, educational, and spiritual achievements of one of the greatest scholars of the Indian Subcontinent.

We thus present this work as *The Path to Perfection: An Edited Anthology of the Spiritual Teachings of Ḥakīm al-Umma Mawlānā Ashraf ʿAlī Thānawī*. May Allāh bless the author, his teachers, and students for their accomplishments and reward them abundantly, as well as those who assisted in the publication of this work.

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### CHARACTER TRAITS

*Khalq* and *khulq* are two different terms. *Khalq* refers to external form, whereas *khulq* means the internal dimension. Man, while consisting of body and physical parts, also consists of spiritual forms: spirit (*rūḥ*) and lower self or ego (*nafs*). His physical body has been given the faculty of sight (*baṣāra*), which is exercised by the eyes of the body. Similarly, he has been given the faculty of insight or seeing with the eyes of the heart (*baṣīra*). The external eyes lack the ability to perceive the internal dimension.

Allāh Most High has created man with these two component parts in different moulds. He has bestowed them with different physical forms along with various internal forms. Some have a beautiful form and character and some have ugly form and character. The physical form is known as *ṣūra*, while the spiritual or internal form is known as *sīra*. The rank of *sīra* is higher than that of *ṣūra* because Allāh Most High has related the former to Himself. In this regard He says, “I blew in him [Ādam] My spirit (*rūḥ*)” (Qur’ān 15:29).

In this verse, Allāh relates *rūḥ* to Himself. In another verse, He says, “Say, the *rūḥ* is of the Command of my Lord” (Qur’ān 17:85). This indicates that the spirit is not lowly nor of dust. However, Allāh Most High relates the physical body to soil. He says, “Verily, I shall create man from soil” (Qur’ān 38:71). The meaning of “spirit” in this context is the substance, which was generated by the direct inspiration of Allāh Most High. Each such substance acquires cognition of things in proportion to its inherent ability.

It has thus been established that the object of greater honor and importance is the command of Allāh: the *sīra* of man. As long as beauty is not inculcated into the internal dimension of man, he will not be described as having a beautiful *sīra*. Allāh Most High has granted the physical body limbs: hands, feet, and so forth. Similarly has He bestowed “limbs” to the internal form. The “limbs” of the internal form are the faculties of knowledge, wrath, desire, and justice. A *sīra* cannot be called beautiful until these four faculties have been adorned. Imperfection in the *sīra* is comparable to deformity in the physical body (*ṣūra*). As a deformed physical body cannot be called beautiful, neither can a defective internal form. For example, if one’s faculty of anger (*quwwa ghaḍabiyya*) is below the level of equilibrium and one’s

faculty of desire (*quwwa shahwāniyya*) is excessive, one's character (*sīra*) cannot be called beautiful.

## EQUILIBRIUM AND BEAUTY OF THE FOUR INTERNAL FACULTIES

### 1. THE FACULTY OF KNOWLEDGE

Equilibrium (*ītidāl*) of knowledge is man's ability to distinguish between statements of wrong and right, between beliefs of falsehood and truth, and between deeds of vice and virtue. When this ability has been cultivated, the fruits of wisdom (*ḥikma*) will be experienced. Regarding such wisdom, Allāh Most High says, "He who has been granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant good" (Qur'ān 2:269). In reality, this wisdom is the root of all merits and excellence.

#### *About Intelligence*

Equilibrium in intelligence (*ʿaql*) makes man wise, cultured, sharp-witted, and farsighted. His advice will be sound and he will possess the ability to act correctly in all affairs. Ingenuity manifests in him. If intelligence exceeds equilibrium it will be called deceptive and fraudulent. Intelligence below the degree of equilibrium is ignorance, dim-wittedness, and stupidity. The consequence is that such a person is easily misled. In short, man is described as having a beautiful *sīra* only when all these faculties are in the state of equilibrium. It has been said that the best of affairs is its middle (its state of equilibrium). Allāh Most High says, "Our servants are such that when they spend they neither are extravagant, nor are they miserly, but they remain in a condition in between [in the state of equilibrium]" (Qur'ān 25:67).

Internal beauty (*sīra*) varies with people just as external beauty (*ṣūra*) differs. The possessor of the most beautiful *sīra* was the Messenger of Allāh (Allāh bless him and give him peace). About his excellence, Allāh declares, "Verily, you are of splendid character" (Qur'ān 68:4).

Among the Muslims, the degree of beauty of character (*sīra*) will be in proportion to the degree to which they resemble the character of the Messenger of Allāh (Allāh bless him and give him peace). The greater their resemblance to the character of the Messenger of Allāh (Allāh bless him



the child anything, her statement merely being to lure the child to her, then such a statement would also be a lie (*Abū Dāwūd*).

### *The Remedy*

When speaking, be cautious. Do not speak without thinking. Think before you speak, and be firm in confronting and curbing the urge to speak what is false. If falsehood is spoken, make up for this error by seeking forgiveness. Should any word contrary to the Shari‘a pass your lips, resort to repentance in profusion.

## ENVY

Allāh Most High says:

Say! I seek refuge with the Lord of the morning ... from the evil of the envier when he envies (Qur‘ān 113:1,5).

The Messenger of Allāh (Allāh bless him and give him peace) said:

Do not envy each other (*Bukhārī*).

### *The Nature of Envy*

To be displeased with another’s good position and to wish for its elimination is envy (*ḥasad*). Envy has three stages: the natural human quality—in this degree of envy, man is excused and is not at fault; acting according to the demands of envy—in this degree, man is a sinner; opposing the demands of envy—in this degree, man is laudable and will be rewarded.

Generally, the basis of envy is pride (*takabbur*) and deceit (*ghurūr*). Without any valid reason man seeks to withhold the bounties of Allāh Most High. He desires [at times consciously and at times subconsciously] that just as he withholds from giving to others, Allāh too should withhold His bounties from others. Envy is a disease of the heart. It is harmful to both one’s spiritual life and worldly life. The harm to man’s religion (spiritual life) consists in the eradication of his good deeds, and he becomes the victim of Allāh’s Wrath. The Messenger of Allāh (Allāh bless him and give him peace) said, “Envy devours good deeds as fire devours wood” (*Abū Dāwūd*).