

# The Twenty-First Word

[This Word consists of Two Stations.]

## First Station

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.  
For such Prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times.*<sup>1</sup>

One time, a man great in age, physique, and rank said to me: “The prayers are fine, but to perform them every single day five times is excessive. Since they never end, it becomes wearying.”

A long time after the man said these words, I listened to my soul and I heard it say exactly the same things. I looked at it and saw that with the ear of laziness, it was receiving the same lesson from Satan. Then I understood that those words were as though said in the name of all evil-commanding souls, or else they had been prompted. So I said: “Since my soul commands to evil, one who does not reform his own soul cannot reform others. In which case, I shall begin with my own soul.”

I said: O soul! Listen to five ‘Warnings’ in response to those words which you uttered in compounded ignorance, on the couch of idleness, in the slumber of heedlessness.

### FIRST WARNING

O my wretched soul! Is your life eternal, I wonder? Have you any incontrovertible document showing that you will live to next year, or even to tomorrow? What causes you boredom is that you fancy you shall live for ever. You complain as though you will remain in this world to enjoy yourself for ever. If you had understood that your life is brief and that it is departing fruitlessly, it surely would not cause you boredom, but excite a real eagerness and agreeable pleasure to spend one hour out of the twenty-four on a fine, agreeable, easy, and merciful act of service which is a means of gaining the true happiness of eternal life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Qur’an, 4:103.

## **SECOND WARNING**

O my stomach-worshipping soul! Every day you eat bread, drink water, and breathe air; do they cause you boredom? They do not, because since the need is repeated, it is not boredom that they cause, but pleasure. In which case, the five daily prayers should not cause you boredom, for they attract the needs of your companions in the house of my body, the sustenance of my heart, the water of life of my spirit, and the air of my subtle faculties. Yes, it is by knocking through supplication on the door of One All-Compassionate and Munificent that sustenance and strength may be obtained for a heart afflicted with infinite griefs and sorrows and captivated by infinite pleasures and hopes. And it is by turning towards the spring of mercy of an Eternal Beloved through the five daily prayers that the water of life may be imbibed by a spirit connected with most beings, which swiftly depart from this transitory world crying out at separation. And being most needy for air in the sorrowful, crushing, distressing, transient, dark, and suffocating conditions of this world, it is only through the window of the prayers that a conscious inner sense and luminous subtle faculty can breathe, which by its nature desires eternal life and was created for eternity and is a mirror of the Pre-Eternal and Post-Eternal One and is infinitely delicate and subtle.

## **THIRD WARNING**

O my impatient soul! Is it at all sensible to think today of past hardships of worship, difficulties of the prayers, and troubles of misfortune, and be distressed, and to imagine the future duties of worship, service of the prayers, and sorrows of disaster, and display impatience? In being thus impatient you resemble a foolish commander, who, although the enemy's right flank joined his right flank and became fresh forces for him, sent a significant force to the right flank, and weakened the centre. Then, while there were no enemy soldiers on the left flank, he sent a large force there, and gave them the order to fire. No forces then remained in the centre, and the enemy understood this and attacked it and routed him.

Yes, you resemble this, for the troubles of yesterday have today been transformed into mercy; the pain has gone while the pleasure remains. The difficulty has been turned into blessings, and the hardship into reward. In which case, you should not feel wearied at it, but make a serious effort to continue with a new eagerness and fresh enthusiasm. As for future days, they have not yet arrived, and to think of them now and feel bored and wearied is a lunacy like thinking today of future hunger and thirst, and starting to shout and cry out. Since the truth is this, if you are reasonable, you will think of only today in connection with worship, and say: "I am spending one hour of it on an agreeable, pleasant, and elevated act of service, the reward for which is high and whose trouble is little." Then your bitter dispiritedness will be transformed into sweet endeavour.

My impatient soul! You are charged with being patient in three respects. One is patience in worship. Another is patience in refraining from sin. And a third is patience in the face of disaster.<sup>2</sup> If you are intelligent, take as your guide the truth apparent in the comparison in this Third Warning. Say in manly fashion: “O Most Patient One!”, and shoulder the three sorts of patience. If you do not squander on the wrong way the forces of patience Almighty God has given you, they should be enough to withstand every difficulty and disaster. So hold out with those forces!

#### **FOURTH WARNING**

O my foolish soul! Is this duty of worship without result, and is its recompense little that it causes you weariness? Whereas if someone was to give you a little money, or to intimidate you, he could make you work till evening, and you would work without slacking. So is it that the prescribed prayers are without result, which in this guest-house of the world are sustenance and wealth for your impotent and weak heart, and in your grave, which will be a certain dwelling-place for you, sustenance and light, and at the Resurrection, when you will anyway be judged, a document and patent, and on the Bridge of Sirat, over which you are bound to pass, a light and a mount? Are their recompense little? Someone promises you a present worth a hundred liras, and makes you work for a hundred days. You trust the man who may go back on his word and work without slacking. So if One for Whom the breaking of a promise is impossible, promises you recompense like Paradise and a gift like eternal happiness, and employs you for a very short time in a very agreeable duty, if you do not perform that service, or you act accusingly towards His promise or slight His gift by performing it unwillingly like someone forced to work, or by being bored, or by working in half-hearted fashion, you will deserve a severe reprimand and awesome punishment. Have you not thought of this? Although you serve without flagging in the heaviest work in this world out of fear of imprisonment, does the fear of an eternal incarceration like Hell not fill you with enthusiasm for a truly light and agreeable act of service?

#### **FIFTH WARNING**

O my world-worshipping soul! Does your slackness in worship and remissness in the prescribed prayers arise from the multiplicity of your worldly occupations, or because you cannot find time due to the struggle for livelihood? Were you created only for this world that you spend all your time on it? You know that in regard to your abilities you are superior to all the animals, but in regard to procuring the necessities of worldly life you cannot compete with even a sparrow. So why can you not understand that your basic

---

<sup>2</sup> Suyuti, *al-Durar al-Muntathira*, 46; Suyuti, *al-Fath al-Kabir*, ii, 200.

duty is not to labour like an animal, but to strive for a true, perpetual life, like a true human being. In addition, the things you call worldly occupations mostly do not concern you, and are trivial matters which you meddle in officiously. You neglect the essential things and pass your time acquiring inessential information as though you were going to live for a thousand years. For example, you squander your precious time on worthless things like learning what the rings around Saturn are like or how many chickens there are in America. As though you were becoming an expert in astronomy or statistics.

**If you say:** “What keeps me from the prayers and worship and causes me to be lax is not unnecessary things like that, but essential matters like earning a livelihood,” then my answer is this: if you work for a daily wage of one hundred kurush, and someone comes to you and says: “Come and dig here for ten minutes, and you will find a brilliant and an emerald worth a hundred liras.” If you reply: “No, I won’t come, because ten kurush will be cut from my wage and my subsistence will be less,” of course you understand what a foolish pretext it would be. In just the same way, you work in this orchard for your livelihood. If you abandon the obligatory prayers, all the fruits of your effort will be restricted to only a worldly, unimportant, and unproductive livelihood. But if you spend your rest periods on the prayers, which allow your spirit to relax and heart to take a breather, you will discover two mines which are an important source, both for a productive worldly livelihood, and your livelihood and provisions of the hereafter.

**First Mine:** Through a sound intention, you will receive a share of the praises and glorifications offered by all the plants and trees, whether flowering or fruit-bearing, that you grow in the garden.<sup>3</sup>

**Second Mine:** Whatever is eaten of the garden’s produce, whether by animals or man, cattle or flies, buyers or thieves, it will become like almsgiving from you.<sup>4</sup> But on condition you work in the name of the True Provider and within the bounds of what He permits, and see yourself as a distribution official giving His property to His creatures.

So see what a great loss is made by one who abandons the prescribed prayers. What significant wealth he loses, and he is deprived of those two results and mines which would otherwise cause him to work eagerly and ensure his morale is strong; he becomes bankrupt. Even, as he grows old, he will grow weary of gardening and lose interest in it, saying, “What is it to me? I am anyway leaving this world, why should I put up with this much difficulty?” He will sink into idleness. But the first man says: “I shall work harder at both worship and licit activities in order to send even more abundant light to my grave and procure more provisions for my life in the hereafter.”

---

<sup>3</sup> This First Station was a lesson for someone in a garden, so it was explained in this way.

<sup>4</sup> *Bukhari*, iii, 135; *Muslim*, ii, 1189; *Ibn Hibban*, v, 152; *Musnad*, iii, 184, 191.

**In Short:** O my soul! Know that yesterday has left you, and as for tomorrow, you have nothing to prove that it will be yours. In which case, know that your true life is the present day. So throw at least one of its hours into a mosque or prayer-mat, a coffer for the hereafter like a reserve fund, set up for the true future. Know too that for you and for everyone each new day is the door to a new world. If you do not perform the prayers, your world that day will depart dark and wretched, and will testify against you in the World of Similitudes. For everyone, every day, has a private world out of this world, and its nature is dependent on the person's heart and actions. Like a splendid palace reflected in a mirror takes on the colour of the mirror; if it is black, it appears black; if it is red, it appears red. Also it takes on the qualities of the mirror; if the mirror is smooth, it shows the palace to be beautiful, and if it is not, it shows it to be ugly. As it shows the most delicate things to be coarse, so you alter the shape of your own world with your heart, mind, actions, and wishes. You may make it testify either for you or against you. If you perform the five daily prayers, and through them you are turned towards that world's Glorious Maker, all of a sudden your world, which looks to you, is lit up. Quite simply as though the prayers are an electric lamp and your intention to perform them touches the switch, they disperse the world's darkness and show the changes and movements within the confused wretchedness of worldly chaos to be a wise and purposeful order and a meaningful writing of Divine power. They scatter one light of the light-filled verse,

*God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*<sup>5</sup>

over your heart, and your world on that day is illuminated through the light's reflection. It will cause it to testify in your favour through its luminosity.

**Beware, do not say:** "What are my prayers in comparison with the reality of the prayers?", because like the seed of a date-palm describes the full-grown tree, your prayers describe your tree. The difference is only in the summary and details; like the prayers of a great saint, the prayers of ordinary people like you or me, even if they are not aware of it, have a share of that light. There is a mystery in this truth, even if the conscious mind does not perceive it... but the unfolding and illumination differs according to the degrees of those performing them. However many stages and degrees there are from the seed of a date-palm to the mature tree, the degrees of the prayers and their stages are even more numerous. But the essence of that luminous truth is present in all the degrees.

*O God! Grant blessings and peace to the one who said: "The five daily prayers are the pillar of religion,"*<sup>6</sup> *and to all his Family and Companions.*

---

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an, 24:35.

<sup>6</sup> Tirmidhi, Iman, 8; Ibn Maja, Fitan, 12; Musnad, v, 231, 237; al-Mustadrak, ii, 76.

## The Second Station of the Twenty-First Word

[This comprises five cures for five of the heart's wounds.]

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.*

*And say: "O my Sustainer! I seek refuge with You from the suggestions of the evil ones \* And I seek refuge with you, O my Sustainer, lest they should come near me."*<sup>7</sup>

O one afflicted with the sickness of scruples! Do you know what your scruples resemble? A calamity! The more importance they are given, the more they grow. If you give them no importance, they die away. If you see them as big, they grow bigger. If you see them as small, they grow smaller. If you fear them, they swell and make you ill. If you do not fear them, they are light and remain hidden. If you do not know their true nature, they persist and become established. While if you do know them and recognize them, they disappear. And so, I shall explain only five 'Aspects' which, of the many sorts of these calamitous scruples, are those which most frequently occur. Perhaps it may be curative for you and for me, for these scruples are such that ignorance invites them and knowledge repulses them. If you do not recognize them they come, if you do recognize them they go.

### FIRST ASPECT - FIRST WOUND

Satan first casts a doubt into the heart. If the heart does not accept it, it turns from a doubt into abuse. It depicts before the imagination some unclean memories and unmannerly, ugly states which resemble abuse, and causes the heart to declare: "Alas!", and fall into despair. The person suffering from scruples supposes that he has acted wrongfully before his Sustainer and feels a terrible agitation and anxiety. In order to be saved from it, he flees from the Divine presence and wants to plunge into heedlessness. The cure for this wound is this:

O wretched man suffering from scruples! Do not be alarmed! For what comes to your mind is not abuse, but something imaginary. And like to imagine unbelief is not unbelief, to imagine abuse is not abuse either. For

---

<sup>7</sup> Qur'an, 23:97-8.

according to logic, an imagining is not a judgement, and abuse is a judgement. Moreover, those ugly words are not the words of your heart, because your heart is saddened and sorry at them. Rather they come from the inner faculty situated near the heart which is a means of Satanic whisperings. The harm of scruples is imagining the harm. That is, it is to suffer harm in the heart through imagining them to be harmful. For it is imagining to be reality an imagining which is devoid of judgement. Also, it is to attribute to the heart Satan's works; to suppose his words to be from it. Such a person thinks it is harmful, so it becomes harmful. That is anyway what Satan wanted.

## **SECOND ASPECT**

It is this: when meanings arise in the heart, they enter the imagination stripped of form; it is there that they are clothed in an image or form. The imagination, always affected by some cause, weaves images of a sort. It leaves on the way the images of the things to which it gives importance. Whatever meaning passes through it, it either clothes it, or wears it, or taints it, or veils it. If the meanings are pure and clean, and the images, dirty and base, there is no clothing, but there is contact. The man with scruples confuses the contact with being clothed. He exclaims: "Alas! How corrupted my heart has become. This lowness has made me despicable!" Satan takes advantage of this vein of his. The cure for such a wound is as follows:

Listen, O you unfortunate! Just as outward cleanliness, which is the means to the correct conduct of your prayers, is not affected by the uncleanness of the inside of your inner organs, and is not spoiled by it, so the sacred meanings being close to unclean forms does not harm them. For example, you are reflecting on some Divine signs when suddenly you feel ill, or an appetite, or a stimulation like a need to pass water. Of course your imagination will see whatever is necessary to cure the ill or answer the need, and will look at it, weave lowly forms appropriate to them, and the meanings that arise will pass between them. But there is no harm in their passing, nor soiling, nor error, nor injury. If there is any mistake, it is in paying them attention and imagining the harm.

## **THIRD ASPECT**

It is this: there are certain hidden connections between things. There are even the threads of connections between things you least expected. They are either there in fact, or your imagination made them according to the art with which it was preoccupied, and tied them together. It is due to this mystery of connections that sometimes seeing a sacred thing calls to mind a dirty thing. As stated in the science of rhetoric, "Although opposition is the cause of distance in the outer world, it is the cause of proximity in the imagination." That is, an imaginary connection is the means of bringing together the



images of two opposites. The recollection which arises from this connection is called the association of ideas.

For example, while performing the prayers or reciting supplications before the Ka'ba in the Divine Presence, this association of ideas takes hold of you and drives you to the furthest, lowest trivia, although you are reflecting on Qur'anic verses. If your head is afflicted with association of ideas in this way, beware, do not be alarmed. Rather, the moment you come to your senses, turn back. Do not say: "I've done a great wrong," and keep playing with the trigger, lest through your attention, that tenuous connection strengthens. For the more you feel regret, the more importance you give it and that faint memory of yours becomes ingrained. It becomes an imaginary sickness. Do not be frightened, it is not a sickness of the heart. This sort of recollection is mostly involuntary. Especially in sensitive, nervous people it is more common. Satan works the mine of this sort of scruple a great deal. The cure for this wound is as follows:

The association of ideas is mostly involuntary. One is not answerable for it. In association there is proximity; there is no touching or intermingling. Therefore the nature of the ideas do not pass to one another and do not harm one another. Just as Satan and the angel of inspiration being in proximity to one another around the heart, and sinners and the pious being close to one another in the same house cause no harm, so too, if at the prompting of the association of ideas, dirty imaginings come and enter among clean thoughts, they cause no harm. Unless it is intentional, or by imagining them to be harmful, one is over-occupied with them. And sometimes the heart becomes tired, and the mind occupies itself with anything it encounters in order to entertain itself. Then Satan finds an opportunity, and scatters dirty things before it, and eggs it on.

#### **FOURTH ASPECT**

This is a scruple arising from searching for the best form of an action. Supposing it to be fear of God, the more rigorous it becomes, the more severe the condition becomes for the person. It even reaches the point that while searching for even better forms of action, he deviates into what is unlawful. Sometimes searching for a Sunna makes him give up what is obligatory. He says: "I wonder if my act was sound?", and repeats it. This state continues, and he falls into terrible despair. Satan takes advantage of this state of his, and wounds him. There are two cures for such a wound.

**The First Cure:** Scruples like this are worthy of the Mu'tazilites, because they say: "Actions and things for which a person is responsible are either, of themselves and in regard to the hereafter, good, and because of this good they were commanded, or they are bad, and because they are bad they were prohibited. That means, from the point of view of reality and the



hereafter, the good and bad in things is dependent on the things themselves, and the Divine command and prohibition follows this.” According to this school of thought, the following scruple arises in every action which a person performs: “I wonder if my action was performed in the good way that in essence it is?” While the true school, the Sunni School, says: “Almighty God orders a thing, then it becomes good. He prohibits a thing, then it becomes bad.” That is, goodness becomes existent through command, and badness through prohibition. They look to the awareness of the one who performs the action, and are established according to that. And this good and bad is not in the apparent face which looks to this world, but in the face that looks to the hereafter.

For example, you performed the prayers or took the ablutions and there was a cause that of itself would spoil them, but you were completely unaware of it. Your prayers and ablutions, therefore, are both sound and acceptable. However, the Mu’tazilites say: “In reality it was bad and unsound. But it may be accepted from you because you were ignorant and did not know, so you have an excuse.” Therefore, according to the Sunni School, do not say about an action which is conformable with the externals of the Shari’a: “I wonder if it was sound?”; do not have scruples about it. Say: “Was it accepted?”; do not become proud and conceited!

The Second Cure: This is: “There is no difficulty in religion.”<sup>8</sup> Since the four schools of law are true; and since realizing a fault which leads to the seeking of forgiveness is preferable –for the person afflicted with scruples– to seeing actions as good, which leads to pride, that is, it is better if such a person sees his action as faulty and seeks forgiveness, rather than considering it to be good and falling into pride; since it is thus, throw away your scruples and say to Satan: “This state is a difficulty. It is difficult to be aware of the reality of things. It is contrary to the ease in religion expressed by: There is no difficulty in religion. It is contrary to the principle, Religion is facility. Certainly such an action is conformable with a true school of law. That is enough for me. And at least by admitting my inability to perform the worship in a way worthy of it, it is a means of taking refuge with Divine compassion through humbly beseeching forgiveness, and to meekly supplicating that my faulty actions be accepted.

## FIFTH ASPECT

In matters of belief, what occurs to one in the form of doubts are scruples. The unhappy man suffering from scruples sometimes confuses conceptions in his mind with imaginings. That is, he imagines a doubt that has occurred to his imagination to be a doubt that has entered his mind, and supposes that

---

<sup>8</sup> Bukhari, i, 16; Ibn Hibban, *Sahih*, i, 280; *Kanz al-‘Ummal*, iii, 33, 36, 47; vi, 42, 47.

his beliefs have been damaged. Sometimes he supposes a doubt he has imagined to have harmed his belief. Sometimes he supposes a doubt he has imagined to have been confirmed by his reason. Sometimes he supposes pondering over a matter related to unbelief to be unbelief. That is, he supposes to be contrary to belief his exercising his ability to reflect in the form of understanding the causes of misguidance, and his ability to study and reason in impartial fashion. Then, taking fright at these suppositions, which result from the whisperings of Satan, he exclaims: "Alas! My heart is corrupted and my beliefs spoiled." Since those states are mostly involuntary, and he cannot put them to rights through his faculty of will, he falls into despair. The cure for this wound is as follows:

Just as imagining unbelief is not unbelief, neither is fancying unbelief, unbelief. And just as imagining misguidance is not misguidance, so too reflecting on misguidance is not misguidance. For both imagining, and fancying, and supposing, and reflecting, are different from confirmation with the reason and submission of the heart, they are other than them; they are free to an extent; they do not listen to the faculty of will; they are not included among the obligations of religion. But affirmation and submission are not like that; they are dependent on a balance. And just as imagining, fancying, supposing, and reflecting are not affirmation or submission, so they cannot be said to be doubt or hesitation. But if they are repeated unnecessarily and become established, then a sort of real doubt may be born of them. Also, continually taking the part of the opposing side calling it unbiased reasoning or being fair reaches the point that the person involuntarily favours the opposing side. His taking the part of the truth, which is incumbent on him, is destroyed. He too falls into danger. A state of mind becomes fixed in his head whereby he becomes an officious representative of Satan or the enemy.

The most important of this sort of scruple is this: the person suffering from it confuses something that is actually possible with something which is reasonably possible. That is, if he sees something which is of itself possible, he imagines it to be reasonably possible and reasonably doubtful. Whereas one of the principles of theology (*kalam*) is that something which is of itself possible is not opposed to certain knowledge and does not contradict the demands of reason. For example, the Black Sea sinking into the earth at this moment is of itself possible, but we judge with certainty that the sea is in its place, and we know this without doubting it, and that possibility which is actually possible causes us no doubt and does not damage our certainty. And, for example, of itself it is possible that the sun will not set today or that it will not rise tomorrow. But this possibility in no way damages our certainty that it will rise and gives rise to no doubt. Similarly, unfounded suspicions arising from possibilities of this sort about, for example, the setting of

the life of this world and rising of the life of the hereafter, which are among the truths of belief, cause no harm to the certainty of belief. Furthermore, the well-known rule, A possibility that does not arise from any proof or evidence is of no importance is one of the established principles of both the sciences of the principles of religion and the principles of jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

**If you say:** “What is the wisdom and purpose in scruples being visited on us, which are thus harmful and an affliction for believers?”

**The Answer:** On condition they do not lead to excess or overwhelm a person, essentially scruples are the cause of vigilance, lead to seeking the best way, and give rise to seriousness. They banish indifference and repulse carelessness. Therefore, in this realm of examination and arena of competition, the Absolutely Wise One put them in the hand of Satan as a whip of encouragement for us. He strikes it at our heads. If it hurts excessively, one must complain to the All-Wise and Compassionate One, and say: “I seek refuge with God from Satan the Accursed.”