

The background of the entire page is a warm, golden sunset over the ocean. A person is silhouetted on a cliff edge, looking out at the sea. The sky is filled with soft, glowing clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

THE Tranquil SOUL

*Practical Steps for Achieving
Happiness and Success*

ABBAS AL HUMAID

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The Tranquil Soul

**Practical Steps for Achieving
Happiness and Success**

Abbas Al Humaid

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Practical Steps for Achieving Happiness and Success

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY THIS AUTHOR:

1. Islamic Strategy – How to Participate in the Development of the Muslim Nation
2. How to Plan Your Career - Develop your Business Portfolio
3. The Journey of a Toiler (Novel)
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Contents

Prologue	6
Who are You?	12
What is your vision in life?	15
Reality in Life	20
What are our goals in life?	30
How are our Selves Formed?	37
The way to Allah.....	41
Common misconceptions	46
Principles of the march to Allah	57
Practical steps to Allah.....	69
Epilogue	110

Prologue

The complexity of contemporary life, its rapid tempo, its ever-accelerating rate of change, its relentless and intense orientation towards materialism, sex, lust and sensual temptations and the falling apart of social and familial life have led to the widespread increase of psychiatric illnesses across the world.

According to Lutfi Abdil Aziz al Sharbini¹, figures released by the World Health Organization indicate an enormous increase in psychiatric illnesses across the world due to a number of interacting factors. Such illnesses are affecting large numbers of people at various stages of life and from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and they are leading to the deterioration and suffering of individuals, families, and communities.

In this regard, al Sharbini mentions that these psychiatric illnesses affect more than one half of the world; one third of people have anxiety, 7% depression, 1% schizophrenia, 3%

¹ http://www.almostshar.com/web/Subject_Desc.php?Subject_Id=1055&Cat_Id=5, (14 June 2016)

obsessive compulsive disorder, and the rate of suicide due to depression is approaching 800 thousand cases per year.

In view of this grim situation, self-help books and activities for combating anxiety and depression seem wholly inadequate for improving outcomes and helping people, despite the huge sales of this kind of literature and its popularity among people.

Writers of these books offer the best advice they know to help people. Sometimes they succeed, and people find them useful for treating their problems and altering their fates; but these writers, at the end of the day, remain people, and are limited in their knowledge of human beings.

Using simple logic, you know that if you purchased a car and then did not maintain it properly - the way the manufacturer recommended in the manual - then you, not the manufacturer, would be the reason for any problem that arose in the car. Even in such a case, you would rush the car to the manufacturer's garage to fix the problem and follow their advice.

If you went around asking other users of the same make of car and following their advice, despite it being contrary to the recommendations of the manufacturer, then you would be regarded by wise people as an imbalanced person and would

end up bearing full responsibility for the damages in the car as a result.

By the same token, Allah created us; He knows our make-up and knows what will bring happiness or misery to our lives, not just in this life, but in all of the coming worlds. **“And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein”** (50:16). He, glory be to Him, did not leave us to guess our way out: **“Does man think that he will be left neglected?”** (75:36). He left us a guidebook that outlines the way we should maintain ourselves: **“This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion.”** (5:3). On top of that, He warned us of the consequences of not following His guidebook and brought to our attention that as a result, we would be afflicted with innumerable problems both as individuals and societies: **“So whoever Allah wants to guide - He expands his breast to [contain] Islam; and whoever He wants to misguide - He makes his breast tight and constricted as though he were climbing into the sky. Thus does Allah place defilement upon those who do not believe,”** (6:125), and also said **“And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind”** (20:124).

Yet, despite all these warnings from our creator, we seek refuge in people just like us, who do not know how even we came to this world and who created us. In fact, some of them believe we came to existence by chance and that nature is in control of the universe. Would it not be strange to ask these people how we are supposed to take care of ourselves? **“And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah. They follow not except assumption, and they are not but falsifying”** (6:116).

When I started facing challenges in life, I was not familiar with any of these self-help books. I faced these challenges, as I reflected in my novel *The Spiral Life*, with “what my humble understanding can comprehend of the wonderful values, concepts, and practices of Islam that are embedded in the Islamic texts and embodied in our Islamic doctrines... These concepts and techniques have enabled me to enjoy happiness and peace of mind in a life that is like a raging ocean, with increasingly violent waves.”

When, later on, I read some of these self-help books, I found they contain a small fraction of the techniques and concepts we have in the Islamic literature. What’s more, some of the techniques and values in the self-help books are in contradiction to what Allah called for: **“Does He who created not know, while He is the Subtle, the Acquainted?”** (64:14).

The aim of this book is to present the divine Islamic concepts, values and techniques that, when practiced and realized, can help us live happily and safely both in this life and the afterlife.

Before we start, to avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to stress that Islam does not prohibit enjoyment of life; on the contrary, Islam encourages us to live fully: **“It is He who made the earth tame for you - so walk among its slopes and eat of His provision - and to Him is the resurrection”** (67:15). Aversion to life will deprive us of the opportunity to improve and integrate ourselves: **“O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life”** (8:24). Allah calls upon us to enjoy the good things in life: **“Say, “Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?” Say, “They are for those who believe during the worldly life [but] exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection”** (7:32). He calls upon us to live life in reality and not according to the illusions of our lust and covetous desires, those that look deceptively beautiful due to the act of Satan.

It is good to entertain ourselves every now and then, in our spare time, and to share the joy of PlayStation and similar pursuits with our friends; however, if the game takes over and we cannot stop playing, resulting in us neglecting our duties or

work, then this is a pathological state and a sort of loss against which Allah warned us.

To get the best out of this book, I recommend that you begin by reading my novel *The Spiral Life*, though a few sections from that novel are quoted here without any reference being made.

Who Are You?

Let me ask you - do you know who you are, or what are you? You are a human being, but do you realize what does it means to be a human being? The human being is the greatest creature ever to exist; it is the center of the universe. Allah made humans His successors because of the qualities of free will and awareness that humans enjoy. The human being has attributes that make them unique in this status - attributes that were not even granted to the angels, despite their desire for them. Allah made the angels and all other creatures submissive to humans to help them in their path towards Allah: **“And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one that causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know," (2:30).** You are the human being that Allah honored and for whom He made all the angels kneel. The sin of Satan was that he refused to kneel for man and envied him for his God-given status. He was egotistical, and hence deserved his everlasting damnation: **“[So mention] when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I am going to**

create a human being from clay (71). So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration (72). So the angels prostrated - all of them entirely (73). Except Iblees; he was arrogant and became among the disbelievers (74),” (38:71-74).

You are not just any individual; you are the chosen one out of trillions of sperm and ova that competed to the death to make you up. You are THE ONE.

But wait a minute; inherently, you are nothing. You are nothing but deficiency, insufficiency and nihility, and whatever glory you have is given to you by virtue of your relation to Allah and you being His effect and creature. It is because He is your God, Lord, and Owner, and because you can get in touch with Him directly whenever and wherever you are, and because He is in perpetual contact with you and is nearer to you than the veins in your neck.

Your esteem is not inevitable; rather, it is tied to your choices and decisions in life. You can increase it, or you can degrade your status to become the meanest of all, equal to Satan in his lowliness and meanness - or even meaner.

Everything is linked to two axes, the first measuring your view of life and existence - the way you think and what you believe - and the second measuring the responses you make in life.

These two axes interact to a great degree, but your creed and doctrines remain the backbone that determines your fate: **“To Him ascends good speech, and righteous work raises it...”** (35:10). We shall examine these axes in more details in the coming chapters.

What Is Your Cosmic View?

Probably the main reason you are reading this book is that you are searching for ways to attain happiness and tranquility in your life. The question we are asking here is: Are these the goals of human beings according to the divine manual created for man? Or are they no more than part of the greater goal we are to pursue and for which we are created, much like pursuing Paradise? When you want to buy a car, for example, you may look for safety, luxury, and spatial capacity, but these do not represent your ultimate goal in acquiring the car, which is to commute from one point to another. If you lived in a desert area, you would likely turn down even the safest, most luxurious and spacious car if it was not also a four-wheel drive.

“To be a successful man or woman,” is a response uttered by some of us when we think about our goal in life – and this is relatively true. It is also true that the pursuit of success and achievement is the driver for human motion; however; if we take a moment to reflect on the meaning of success, we find that success has no independent meaning, but is always measured in relation to a specific goal we wish to achieve.

Illusions and inherited false notions portray life to us in an incorrect way - and that's before we even consider Satan, who misses no opportunity to suggest to us erroneous notions and illusions as standards of success.

In her bestseller *Thrive*, Arianna Huffington highlights the two classic measures of success in today's society: money and power. Based on her personal experience, she believes we need a third metric to define success - one that also takes into account our wellbeing, our ability to draw on our intuition and inner wisdom, our sense of wonder and our capacity for compassion and giving.

However, are money and power real measures of success? Would this not mean that most of the great people throughout history - those who managed to affect the fate of humanity, including the geniuses and prophets - would be losers according to this scale? On the other hand, what about those who have no financial wealth, but who are more happy and tranquil than many of the world's most wealthy and powerful people?

Even the notion of happiness, about whose desirability for human beings no two people would disagree, has been contaminated by fallacious ideas and notions. One might be tempted to think it is all relative; happiness may be money to

one person, fame to another, knowledge to a third person and capacity to give and compassion to a fourth. But is it really like this? Is success relative; different from one person to the next? Or is there a realistic, rigid and existential truth that determines how happiness can be achieved by humans, whoever that human is, much like the truth that a thirsty person cannot quench their thirst with anything other than water, and a hungry man cannot reach satiety without eating?

The horrifying spread of psychological turmoil in mankind and the scarcity of happy people are clearly indicative of the fact that realizing happiness is not a relative matter, but an external and real truth. The fact that we are oblivious to this truth is what brings about the haphazardness that we live in and the wide spread of psychiatric illnesses.

Allah, the creator of man, life, and the universe, tells us decisively in the Quran that success and happiness consist in one external fact, namely heading straight on the path of Allah, and that anything else is merely an absolute loss and failure. Contemplate the words of Allah in the following verse: **“And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly attained a great attainment,”** (33:71), and, **“Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has**

attained [his desire]. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion,..." (3:185). In contrast to that, listen to His words in the following verse: **"By the afternoon, (1) Indeed, mankind is in loss, (2) Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience,...(3)"** (103:1-3). It's not just about happiness and success in the afterworld, but also in this life. Consider the following verse, **"And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind."** (20:124), and **"So whoever Allah wants to guide - He expands his chest to [believe in] Islam; and whoever He wants to misguide - He makes his chest tight and constricted as though he were climbing into the sky. Thus does Allah place defilement upon those who do not believe,..."** (6:125).

Uprightness in the path of Allah is only a means to an end, the end being the goal of creation, and all forms of benevolence and happiness, including Paradise, are just byproducts and manifestations of this goal. This ultimate goal is to get as close to Allah as possible: **"Indeed to Allah we belong and indeed to Him we will return,"** (2:156). He talks about the goal of creation in the following verse: **"Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you**

would not be returned?" (23:115). The notion of “proximity to Allah” represents the strategic vision of man in this life; it is very hard to measure it objectively. This would require us to shed light on this strategic vision, which would in turn enable us to outline our objective goals in life in the context of this vision.

Perhaps most of the Muslim readers of this book will not reject this strategic vision - not theoretically, at least - but our established convictions and mental maps will have us believe otherwise. As Huffington said in *Thrive*: “Over time, our society’s notion of success has been reduced to money and power.” This becomes especially true when we see clearly that those with money and power have all the pleasures that we do not, the pleasures that enable them to be happier, so far as we can understand it.

This established conviction controls our views and responses in life and hence the magnitude of our happiness or misery. For this reason, it is of paramount importance to first discuss the extent of overlap between the delusions that give rise to our mental patterns of behavior and the various layers of surrounding reality, before we go onto further discussion and analysis of the strategic vision of proximity to Allah.

Realism in Life

Illusion and Reality

The truth about many of our pressing needs in life is that they are just illusions or distorted facts, whether these be related to desires, emotions or reactions.

This deceptive appearance is the work of the evil-enjoining self and the seduction of Satan, and that is why Allah commanded us to consider Satan an enemy: “[Satan] said, **“My Lord, because You have put me in error, I will surely make [disobedience] attractive to them on earth, and I will mislead them all,...”** (15:39), and also in **“Whom Allah has cursed. For he had said, “I will surely take from among Your servants a specific portion (118) And I will mislead them, and I will arouse in them [sinful] desires, and I will command them so they will slit the ears of cattle, and I will command them so they will change the creation of Allah .” And whoever takes Satan as an ally instead of Allah has certainly sustained a clear loss (119) Satan promises them and arouses desire in them. But Satan does not promise them except delusion (120)”** (4:118-120).

When we see kids make desperate efforts to win a videogame and treat it like a real life or death matter, we feel it is childish and ridiculous - but then, we glorify rich people who make desperate efforts to increase their wealth in much the same way.

This illusion is the driver that makes us desperate to grow our wealth, because practically, we do not have that money; the bank does, and hence, that money has no more value than the scores a child earns in a videogame.

It is illusion that makes us feel great when we bump into a celebrity or public figure. It is illusion that makes us wear expensive brands to show off and express our self-worth: **“They are not but [mere] names you have named them - you and your forefathers - for which Allah has sent down no authority. They follow not except assumption and what [their] souls desire, and there has already come to them from their Lord guidance,...”** (53:23).

In fact, even our perceptions of our desires are distorted by illusion. A man’s perception of sexual desire, for instance, is greatly amplified by the image he holds deeply in his mind of sex as a symbol of manhood and virility and because we as humans submit to the notion that sex gives one unimaginable and unparalleled pleasure.

This is what Satan wants us to succumb to, and this is what Allah warns us against: “Say, [O Muhammad], “Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? (103) [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work (104)” (18:103-104), and “Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children - like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion (20)” (57:20).

The importance of realizing this truth lies in the fact that reality will continue to be reality and that illusion will not become real just because we imagine it to be so. You can keep thinking that fire is cold for as long as you want, but it will remain hot, and if you place your hand in it, it will burn you, no matter what you believe.

Levels of Reality:

Our perception and knowledge of reality enables us to handle it in a wise and balanced way and to maximize our benefits and joy in life and minimize pain and suffering.

However, reality does not exist at a single level; rather, it comes in multiple levels and layers. In order to maximize our happiness and joy in life, we have to be able to get a grasp on these levels and deal with them properly.

To better understand this concept, imagine you are relaxing on your bed, in your room, in a ship full of tourists in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Your bed and blanket are the closest forms of material reality to you at this moment and at this particular level of reality, your comfort is determined by the softness and coziness of your bed and blanket.

Your second material level of reality is your room: Its spaciousness, luxury and tidiness determine your happiness at this level. If your room smelled bad, your cozy mattress would not help alleviate your discomfort in this regard.

Your third material level of reality is the ship, the fourth the ocean, the Earth the fifth, and so on. Now imagine your ship is the Titanic, the greatest and most luxurious kind of ship at

that time, and you feel happy and safe, especially with the delusional idea that it is unsinkable. I bet all the happiness you would feel at being aboard such a ship would not equal a fraction of the pain and suffering you would have gone through if you were among the great majority who died in the frigid cold water of the ocean when it hit the iceberg. The ship's crew was not aware of the iceberg because it was at the fourth level of reality, the ocean, and because of the commonly held delusion that the ship was unsinkable. If the crew had been attentive and had not submitted to the grandiose delusion of the unsinkable ship, they may have been able to spot the iceberg in time and avoid the collision. The crew needed to break free of the illusion and see reality in order to save all those innocent souls and maintain their happiness.

Let us imagine that this is what indeed happened and that the Titanic moved on in due course without hitting the iceberg. Is it not possible that the ship would have met a tsunami due to subsurface explosions or due to comets falling nearby (events at the fifth level of reality)?

We cannot perceive this level of reality and prepare for it easily, but that does not change anything; it surrounds us and, like it or not, affects us directly. Let us now expand on the layers of reality around us. The sixth level would be the solar

system, the seventh level the Milky Way galaxy, and the eight level the entire universe. All these levels are ones we cannot do anything about, and therefore we ignore them.

The next level of reality (formed of several levels, but for the purpose of discussion, we will regard it as one level in this book) surrounds the whole universe, but affects us directly and perpetually during our lives in a huge way. We also affect it more than anything else around us. It is closer to us than our first level of material reality. We call this level “*aalam al Ghaib*” (“The realm of the unseen/unknown”).

The unseen realms to which we will eventually move include the “al Barzakh” and “hereafter” realms, and they are real and existing worlds that surround us. We shape our fate in them directly through our will and interactions in this life. We are soon to meet those worlds, a fact we cannot ignore or afford to forget unless we are simply fools.

Imagine that someone takes a plane to another country and purposefully does not bring their passport. This will be foolish because they will not even be admitted to the plane, let alone their destination.

Similarly, we are headed towards the heavens and shall soon find ourselves at the gates. If we are not carrying with us our “passports”, we will not be allowed in.

There is a reality that is realer still than all of that, one of which no place or time is void, and which is closer to us than we are to ourselves. That reality is Allah: “...and **We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein,...**” (50:16).

Allah is reality, reality is Allah. We are merely his manifestations and creatures, so how could we be blind to his presence? Reflect on this part of the supplication of imam Hussain on the day of *Arafat*: “**How can You be figured out through that whose existence relies on You? Can anything other than You hold a (kind of) manifestation that You lack? and thus it may act as an appearance for You? When have You ever been absent so that You may need something to point to You? When have You ever been far-off so that traces may lead to You?**”

Our lack of attention to this fact causes us to overlook the value of the most beautiful and greatest things available to us and deprives us from enjoying their pleasure and savoring their greatness, and that is why we unwittingly move away from them. How else could we overlook the magnificence and grandness of having real (not illusory) contact with the absolute power, beauty, and greatness of Allah? How could our ongoing communication with Allah and the communication of Allah with us not give us happiness, power and tranquility? Allah is existence itself; He is the beauty, the

grandeur; He is capable of everything, and He created us and everything else, and He loves us very much: **“Blind be the eye that cannot see You watching it and losing is a servant’s deal that does not dedicate a share to the love for You.”** How could we not enjoy and savor the magnificence of the relationship with the greatest apostle Mohammed ^(PBUH) and his household, whom Allah has made the path to Him?²

Our realization and understanding of this reality, and our interaction with it on the basis of it being real, is what changes our lives totally in this life and the hereafter and gives it a special meaning and flavor beyond any imagination. This is what the greatest apostle called for in his supplications: **“O Allah, do not make this life the greatest of our concerns, nor the pinnacle of our knowledge,...”**; similarly, in the saying of imam Ali: **“Work for your life as if you will live forever, and work for your hereafter as if you will die tomorrow.”** The way to Allah is nothing other than our capacity to perceive this reality and understand it and deal with it on the basis that it is real. The prophet said, **“That who knows himself, knows his God².”**

The most effective mechanism for developing our capacity to perceive reality is habitual thinking and contemplation, whether on the cosmos and existence, the social and

² *Al Bihar*, 2/32.

humanitarian relations around you or on your emotions, reactions, behavior and whatever decisions you may come to.

Since most of the reality around us is of the *Ghaib*-type (unseen/unknown), and since the knowledge of man is limited - **“And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little”** (17:85) - we are unable to perceive reality without the help of the great Quran and the supplications narrated by credible sources from among the apostles and the *Imams* of *Ahl al-Bâit*.

Before we go back to discussing our goal in life, I want to highlight the following great verses from the chapter *al Qasas*, which discuss the concept of reality very expressively in their narration of the tale of Qarun: “So he came out before his people in his adornment. Those who desired the worldly life said, "Oh, would that we had like what was given to Qarun. Indeed, he is one of great fortune. But those who had been given knowledge said, "Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient. And We caused the earth to swallow him and his home. And there was for him no company to aid him other than Allah, nor was he of those who [could] defend themselves. And those who had wished for his position the previous day began to say, "Oh, how Allah extends provision to whom He wills of His servants and

restricts it! If not that Allah had conferred favor on us, He would have caused it to swallow us. Oh, how the disbelievers do not succeed! That home of the Hereafter We assign to those who do not desire exaltedness upon the earth or corruption. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous” (28:79-83).

(This part of the book is not displayed in the free preview)