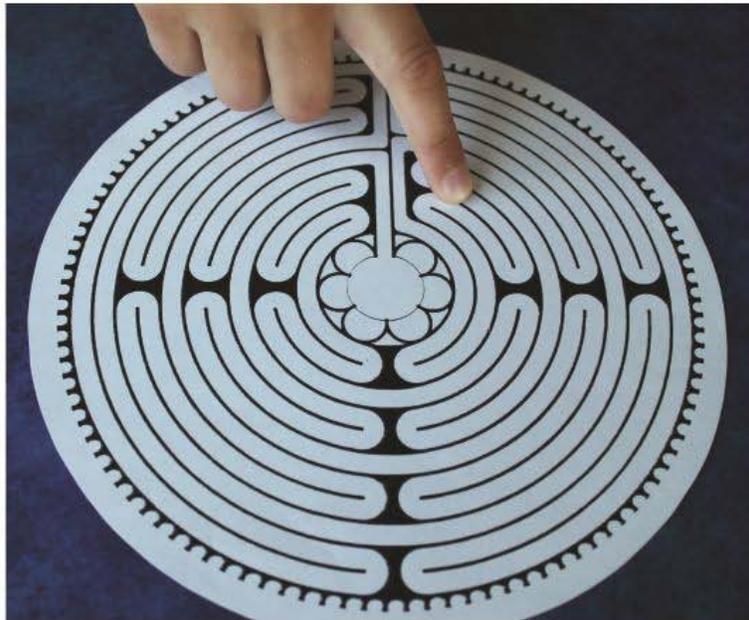


ACADEMY OF SELF KNOWLEDGE

COURSE
ONE
THE SUFI MAP
OF THE SELF



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Book Description

This volume of work corresponds to the entire Course ONE on cosmology of the self that the Academy of Self Knowledge (ASK) has offered in the past.

We have renamed it to “*The Sufi Map of the Self*” and put together all 14 lessons (known as maps in this eBook) of the course into this single eBook for the convenience of the committed reader who would go through the entire course, doing the exercises and quizzes at their own pace.

The course sets out maps of the cosmic design between the outer and the inner, as well as other elements of life and how they work. It offers a description of truth, reality and what life is about and seeks to answer the questions: “Who am I? What is my role in life? What can I do to remain consistently content? How can I live so that I do not deny the world, what is happening in it, and my essential needs?” The maps specifically deal with the following matters:

Charting the Way – Map No. ONE: *Dynamics of Existence and the Nature of Creation*

This introduction to the course presents a context for The Sufi Map of the Self and explores the relationship between timelessness and time describing basic principles of our experience of this realm.

Charting the Way – Map No. TWO: *Inception and Creation*

This map presents the inner and outer journey of embryonic development as the unborn child enters the conscious realm through pregnancy and birth, followed by childhood.

Charting the Way – Map No. THREE: *The First Steps of Our Journey, Early Childhood*

This map explores the development of the self as a baby and the early impact of parenting on the growth of the child.

Charting the Way – Map No. FOUR: *Childhood and the Map of the Self*

This map presents the development of the child through the inner and outer senses to bring the child to an initial stage of consciousness and maturity.

Charting the Way – Map No. FIVE: *Virtues and Vices*

This map presents the way that the self develops through the combined effects of our intentions and actions.

Charting the Way – Map No. SIX: *Patterns in the Map of Existence*

This map describes some of the apparent paradoxes through which human transformation and evolution take place.

Charting the Way – Map No. SEVEN: *Evolving Consciousness*

This map charts the nature of human consciousness in terms of its levels and spheres.

Charting the Way – Map No. EIGHT: *Soul Dynamics*

This map explores the dynamic tension between virtues and vices to the development of the self in relation to the Soul.

Charting the Way – Map No. NINE: *Relationships*

This map describes the inner meaning of interpersonal relationships and their connection to the evolution of the self.

Charting the Way – Map No. TEN: *Mind, Body and Spirit*

This map explores the interrelation of the realms of mind, body and spirit.

Charting the Way – Map No. ELEVEN: *Decree and Destiny*

This map explores the association between perception and perfection and the process of the witnessing of perfection.

Charting the Way – Map No. TWELVE: *Aging and Inner Sight*

This map clarifies the inner meaning of the transition of to older age and the meaning of suffering. The map explores how, as our outer senses and faculties diminish, our insight, awareness and wisdom increase.

Charting the Way – Map No. THIRTEEN: *Life, the Grave and Beyond*

This map explores the meaning of death and processes that unfold for the soul within the realm of relative non-time following death.

Charting the Way – Map No. FOURTEEN: *Light upon Light or the Absence of Light*

In this map the dynamics of the soul in its return to timelessness are explored.

The following is a complete overview of the course.

About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Overview

Broadly speaking, as individuals, we wish to attract that which we think is desirable and repel that which we think is undesirable. However, what we perceive to be desirable changes from minute to minute, day to day, year to year. It may vary according to our physical state, our state of mind or changing circumstances. This constant state of flux is therefore the cause of much of our apparent turmoil.

The key to our inner stability therefore, is by reference to the soul, which is unchanging and eternal. Consequently, the greater our connection to the soul, then the more our experiences and endeavors become sensible, rational, and in perspective. Conversely the less we refer to the soul, the more overwhelming our lives become.

The entire cosmos is fastened together and connected by the unconditional love of the Creator. Our lives are a process of rising through a hierarchy of knowledge that never ends. We start from the material and physical and move on to the mental, to the realms of meaning, to the intellectual. Eventually we reach a point of subtlety that is more intuitive, and has greater inner meaning. The awareness of this higher self increases until such time that we are no longer only temporarily aware of it every now and then – until eventually we enter into a zone of perpetual and spontaneous reference to the ultimate awareness in us – this is called enlightenment.

Everybody is enlightened but is aware of it to a greater or lesser degree. It is a zone that is within us and it is up to us to tap into it. How? The answers lie in this course, but suffice to say that the keys to an enlightened state are worship, adoration and passion. We have the potential to live in perpetual bliss by simply being with our self - meaning with the higher self, because the lower self is destructive.

Therefore self-knowledge is the most vital map that any traveler in this world requires. The knowledge that there is only one truth, and that all paths lead to it by different means, has been shared to varying extents by enlightened people throughout history. In this course we bring together selections of the knowledge of ancient historical and more recent cultures; prophetic

Overview

unveilings and teaching from the various monotheistic religions, the wisdom of the Far East, of Asia, Africa, America, Europe, combined with modern day psychology, physical and social sciences.

This course therefore is contextualized within the age we are living in, for anybody with a yearning for higher knowledge, based on eternal truth. It is a means towards the attainment of a level of inner stability in order to deal with and even enjoy the outer instability rather than be constantly resisting it. The course will take us a step at a time, towards the realization that we are not who we thought we were, not by denying our lower selves, but by prioritizing what is higher and more lasting. Grooming the self is the nourishment that every serious traveler on this path will attain.

The Sufi Map of the Self is explored here through time. This course maps the evolution of the self from before birth through life, death and beyond.

CHARTING THE WAY – MAP NO. 1:

Dynamic of Existence & The Nature of Creation

This introductory map corresponds to Lesson ONE of ASK Course ONE and presents a context for the Sufi Map of the Self and explores the relationship between timelessness and time describing basic principles of our experience of this realm.

Charting the Way: Map No. 1 – Contents

- Learning Objectives
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- The Human Paradox
 - * Happiness Within
 - * Denial
 - * Higher Self
 - * Awareness
- The One Essence
- Life is Energy
- Patterns in Existence
 - * Gatheredness and Separation
 - * Connected
 - * Inner and Outer
 - * Heavenly and Earthly
 - * Meaning and Form
 - * Soul Language
 - * Being Human
- The Rise of Consciousness
- Nature of Duality
 - * The Forces of Attraction and Repulsion
 - * Levels of Consciousness
 - * Seeking Essence
- Exercises / Self-Assessment / Multiple Choice Quiz
- Recommended Reading

Learning Objectives

From this map, you will gain an understanding of:

1. The origin of human beings.
2. The relationship between the physical and non-physical worlds and how they interact.
3. The unified nature of all creation.
4. The dual patterns of existence.
5. The two manifestations of energy that govern physical existence.
6. The concept of consciousness.

Introduction

This first map lays the foundation for understanding the dynamics of existence and the nature of creation. It starts by pointing to the longing for eternal bliss and happiness that is an innate quality within every human being. It goes on to discuss the seemingly paradoxical nature of human existence, encapsulated by the fact that while we are born into a physical world of space and time, which is relative (conditioned consciousness), our true nature and essence is of/from an eternal and permanent source (pure consciousness). The map outlines some of the basic patterns in existence that characterize this paradox, including gatheredness and separation, meaning and form, and the heavenly and earthly realms. The map shows how reflecting on these opposites can help us recognize the One Essence that governs the multiple facets of our life.

Exercise One

These questions are to help you focus on some of the concepts in this map. You might like to write your answers down. When you have finished the map, you will be asked to reflect on them again.

1. What is happiness?
2. Why do we desire equilibrium?
3. What do all human beings have in common?

The Human Paradox

Every human being at some time or other has pondered over the creation of the universe, its sheer unfathomable immensity and power. They have also wondered about the meaning and purpose of life, what their direction in life is, and how to bring about lasting contentment and happiness. It is the desire of most people to seek lasting happiness and contentment. But often this search does not come to fruition because people do not have the knowledge of what brings about happiness and contentment and they look for it in the wrong place.

People often tend to think happiness can be found by possessing great wealth, marrying the perfect partner, buying the latest car, owning a beautiful home, becoming famous etc. – but all these are allurements of the outer realm.

Happiness Within

Through suffering and loss, one begins to discover that lasting happiness does not come from anything one can acquire in this world. The realization begins to dawn that true and ongoing happiness cannot be found in the realm of the relative, but can only come from a source of constancy and permanence which lies within our very selves.

Many who have aspired to and achieved immense wealth have discovered to their regret that the fortune they had amassed, though it made them happy at the time did not bring them the lasting happiness they had expected. Rather, in their all-consuming drive for money and power and the ‘good life’, often what initially brought pleasure turned to disappointment, and their relationships with their families, loved ones and friends and even their health suffered.

As seekers of bliss and of the Infinite and the Absolute Truth, we also still have to deal with the relative, which is in time and space. The pursuit of wealth, power, physical beauty and rare and priceless objects is indeed a natural instinct through which new insights – essential to human growth and development – are learnt.

Denial

Paradoxically however, if we deny the desires of the relative, we will be denied access to knowledge of the Absolute, which is timeless and permanent. If, for example, we deny and totally suppress our love of money and power, which is in the realm of the relative, we will be denied access to the greater knowledge that our true desire may actually be for infinite wealth and power, and this can never be attained in this limited realm of time and space. When we realize this, it may lead us to be content with our more modest portion of wealth and power, which in turn may help weaken excessive drives or desires within ourselves. We then benefit and society, as a whole, benefits, by our acknowledgment of something higher than ourselves.

To illustrate further the dynamic between the relative and the absolute, if, for example, I think that I will be content as an executive with a fancy car, a smart office and several secretaries, then that image enslaves me. Rather than focusing on the true contentment that lies within the heart, I pursue the ephemeral “imagined” contentment that is no more than a construct of my mind. Pursuit of the relative, then, will not bring about lasting contentment and happiness, because true contentment comes from access to a zone within us all that is constant and permanent, and that gives us the joy of being alive.

Higher Self

We are influenced in who we are by a range of factors, for example, our parental and family background, our educational and economic opportunities, and social and cultural exposure. We are also influenced by our past experiences, both positive and negative, and our expectations and desires, and all these taken together have a major bearing on our emotional, spiritual and mental make-up.

Although one or more of these factors may have been a constraint in our lives, within us lies what we refer to as a higher self that can guide us to overcome the limitation of these influences.

According to this cosmology, the self is understood as our identity as a person. It is what we mean when we say “I” and which includes our personality, cultural conditioning and biological make-up. This “identity” refers to our conditioned consciousness. Our essential reality, however, is represented by a singular “entity”, which is the soul from which we all emanate, and is pure consciousness–non-delimited, boundless awareness without content; a silent state of inner wakefulness with no object of thought or perception. (See [Glossary](#)) In other words, the “I” in us spans a spectrum; at one end it is pure light – what we refer to as the higher self, which is also equated with the soul – and at the other end is the lower self, which represents the baser tendencies.

The self changes and progresses through numerous stages, much like climbing a ladder. The lowest rung rests upon the earth and the highest rung reaches to the heavenly soul, which is unchanging and eternal.

Awareness

Through awareness and reference to the higher self, we recognize that ultimately access to lasting contentment and happiness lie not without but within. We then are able to transcend what we often perceive to be our limitations.

So what the above discussion illustrates, then, is that the human being is a paradox, representing the intricate connection between the ever changing material and physical, and the non-changing eternal soul. The mystery is how the earthly and heavenly meet within the same person. This is what we will be examining closely in this program.

Exercise Two

Consider something you desired very much, which you imagined would make your life happier, and which you eventually obtained.

1. Did you feel happier?
2. How long did this feeling of happiness last?
3. Do you still feel the same way today?

* * *

The One Essence

In order to understand the human paradox and its subtle connection with the outer earth and the inner heavens, we need to consider the origins of the human being from its source, the One Essence.

The Absolute is the One Essence from which all existence manifests. The Absolute is also referred to as the Absolute Truth, or Reality, which is permanent and not subject to change. It is boundless and timeless, whereas all creation and discernible existence has a beginning and an end in time and space. All creation is unified by its relationship with the One Essence.

Emerging from the timeless zone into creation and returning to the same zone after death, human beings are bracketed into this intermediate phase called 'life'. This phase is a manifestation of infinite varieties of creation, all energized by the One Essence, which is their source. Again, paradoxically, the human being is the inter-space, timeless in essence but living and embodied in this temporal world of movement and change, which is nothing other than energy (*See box and exercise below*).

Life is Energy



Everything we experience in this existence is based on energy. We know through physics, for example, that the more energetic a thing is, the hotter it is, until it becomes plasma. The inside of the sun, for example, is plasma. In the extreme heat of plasma, there is constant movement and there is no longer a stable balance of electrons. The opposite of this state is absolute zero, which is -273°C , known as the Bose-Einstein Condensate, where all atoms behave the same. There is uniformity in every atom, as though no distinction exists between one atom or molecule and another, because at absolute zero, they have been reduced to a phase of pre-energy, in which everything is uniform. This plasma- Bose-Einstein Condensate dynamic illustrates that there is an underlying unity out of which emerges the movement and activity of life.

Life, then, is experienced in this constant flux of energy. We seek to function at optimal levels of energy. At a physical level, we like to be fit, vital and dynamic; at a mental level, we like to be sound, focused and alert. At a spiritual level, we like to experience the stillness and calm to enable a clear reflective heart so that the light of the soul within illuminates instantaneously what we have not seen before. It is through the stillness beyond the noise of the mind that we see clearly things as they are. Freshness of insight and new knowledge brings forth appropriate action. Ultimately, we cannot but desire to exude appropriate energy towards others and ourselves.

Charting the Way – Map No. 1: Dynamic of Existence & The Nature of Creation

* * *

Exercise Three: You as Energy

Take one day in your life and monitor the quality, quantity and use of your energy in the morning, afternoon, evening and nighttime.

1. How does your energy fluctuate?
2. What is the source of your energy?
3. What external and internal factors affect your energy, e.g. food, exercise, people, events, moods? In particular, notice the connections between you and your environment.

Patterns in Existence

All existence is created in pairs of opposites. These opposites are complementary, and they are the patterns, or imprints, by which all of existence is experienced. These pairings include gatheredness and separation, inner and outer, heavenly and earthly, and meaning and form. All these concepts will become clearer as we proceed.

So divinely is the world organized that every one of us, in our place and time, is in balance with everything else.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832),
German scientist & dramatist

Gatheredness and Separation

All existence may be experienced within the dynamic of gatheredness and separation. In fact, as human beings we are both gathered and in separation. Gatheredness is unity, inseparability. It is that pre-creational state of pure light, or what we refer to as pure consciousness.

Before creation (human or cosmic), there was absolute gatheredness, or unity; there was only the divine Light of lights – the One Essence – with nothing beside it. From this source, separation began with the emanation of movement and energy, then patterns emerged, all of which generated the archetypes of all that exists in creation. Further down this arc of creation, energy, matter and form interlinked. At yet a further stage in this process, separation took place when the opposites in creation, such as day and night, hot and cold, and wet and dry, became clearly distinguishable one from the other.

Human beings came into existence from the gatheredness of the pre-creational source into this world of separation and diverse identities. As we know, every human being is biologically different from another, although there is a common genetic connection going back through time. Even in our personal experience, deep down, we can all discern a shared sense of sameness in what matters most in our life. Our form or color may differ but we all unite in our desire for contentment and happiness. We are the ultimate example of how difference, or separation, meets in sameness or gatheredness.

Connected

With regard to the outer world, then, we are compelled to connect with and relate to the thread of unity that permeates all existence. At the very instant that separation occurs (that is, the cosmic Big Bang or human inception), what comes into being is seeking its gatheredness or original unity. The source of our desire for gatheredness is the soul within us, which replicates the original primal gatheredness and unity. The self, which is shadow to the light of the soul, drifts away to experience separation, insecurity, restlessness and all the opposite qualities beamed out from the soul, such as tranquility, contentment, joy and bliss.

The shadow/self imagines that by acquiring wealth and worldly reputation, for example, it may increase its status and honor. The self imagines this because the acquisition of wealth and reputation is a small reflection of what the soul already has, which is being totally honored and loved by its Creator. The self in its waywardness spends a lifetime trying to imitate the soul by striving to acquire fame, wealth, knowledge, security, and so on, with a modicum of success that is always short-lived and never ultimately satisfying.

When and if the self truly surrenders to the soul, it realizes the folly of its years of being the prodigal child. It sees that people may reject us, but never our soul or our Creator.

Inner and Outer

Human beings have both 'inner' and 'outer' aspects. Everything – a person, atom or fingerprint – has an outer identity of unique characteristics. Our genetic code shapes our identity, and each of

us is different in the outer and earthly sense. In the inner and heavenly sense, however, we are the same as we have all emerged from the One Timeless Essence. Nature interacts with nurture in such a way that we come to realize we are comprised of both heavenly and earthly aspects, and far more besides. For example, the child's early experiences are primarily with the outer earthly and physical environment. Later on, as the child grows and develops, it may then come to discover its inner heavenly nature, which is vast and limitless.

Generally, we all seek the truth and yearn to know the truth. But where did this longing for the truth come from? According to an oft-quoted Islamic tradition, it was revealed that God was a hidden treasure who loved to be known. Therefore, He created humankind and the world so that He could be known. That treasure, that Truth, is latent in every soul – a divine spark within us – and calling to itself. The light of that Truth emanating from within us energizes our experiences and realities. For example, the love of beauty drives us to seek beauty in everything around us, including in our fellow human beings. In truth, what we are seeking is Absolute Beauty itself, which is a divine attribute within the soul.

Our search for Absolute Beauty is Truth seeking itself within us.

...Each thing in the universe is a vessel full to the brim with wisdom and beauty. It is a drop from the river of His beauty. It is a hidden treasure because of its fullness. It has exploded and made the earth more brilliant than the skies–

Jalaluddin Rumi (1207 – 1273),

Persian Sufi master, born Balkh, modern Afghanistan

Heavenly and Earthly

As mentioned earlier, human beings comprise both ‘heavenly’ and ‘earthly’ aspects. The heavenly aspect is subtle and lies within the domain of the unseen and non-material. It is indiscernible. Its rules and patterns contrast greatly with those of the earthly aspect. It is in the earthly domain that things happen based on cause and effect, and due to opposites meeting and either complementing or opposing each other.

The human being, whilst earthly in the outer sense, constantly tends to look towards the heavenly, seeking answers to the purpose of life and the meaning of existence. Angels, however, are heavenly in essence yet focused on the earthly. We can see in this example that existence manifests as one of two opposite aspects whilst intrinsically containing both aspects.

Our tendency to look towards the heavenly is ultimately a desire to experience durable peace that is beyond time and space. We have the inner ability to momentarily freeze movement and thought, which enables us access to that zone of peace within, which is a state we all yearn for. We tap into that timeless zone, which is within us and has no movement or flux, no beginning and no end; it is a state similar to deep sleep. It is in sleep that we have a taste of this. This deep inner peace is part of a pre-creational pattern, which is imprinted within the soul.

The stillness in stillness is not the real stillness. Only when there is stillness in movement can spiritual rhythms appear, which pervades heaven and earth.

Ts’ai-ken t’an,
A First Zen Reader

Meaning and Form

In the way that we, as human beings, constitute ‘heavenly’ and ‘earthly’ aspects, we are also both ‘meaning’ and ‘form’. We must accept our form – which is the human body – and its limitations. At the same time our physical form embodies that which has never ever been subjected to any limitation – the soul. This is why many people love extreme sports that take

them to the very edge of safety. It is because in truth there is no edge – the soul is forever free, without limitations, and the self wants to imitate the soul.

Soul Language

Our meaning, as humans, is conveyed by the soul within, which is our true nature or essence. The soul of the human being, as we have discussed, is a light that originated from the One Source, or One Essence, and as such, just as a droplet of water contains the entire ocean, so is the soul a holographic image of all existence. In other words, the meaning of the human being is that s/he is a reflection of the entire universe and further has the potential to manifest all of the qualities and attributes that we associate with the soul's perfections.

A rose, for example, radiates its meaning through its vibrant color, its perfumed scent, the velvety touch of its petals, and its generosity of simply being, as a source of beauty and pleasure to the beholder. Gazing upon a rose can evoke in one a deep sense of beauty, serenity and joy.

Heavenly and earthly, inner and outer, meaning and form, they all meet within us, and by these opposites we experience gatheredness or separation. In order for us to realize this gatheredness or unity in us, we have to experience the opposite, which is separation and disunity. Absolute accord is in us, but it can only be realized or attained by experiencing its opposite, which is relative discord.

Being Human

Regarding our human qualities, we swing in varying degrees between two extremes: generosity and meanness, peace and violence, love and hate, virtue and vice. These extremes are like two arms projecting from, and yet part of, one torso. The soul is one, and we can manifest in varying degrees or shades – either as a reflector of that soul, or as a deflector of that soul.

Exercise Four: Raising your awareness of opposites

Reflect on a day in your life: when did you feel 'gathered' and when did you feel 'separated'?

The Rise of Consciousness

In order to grasp the subtle concepts of gatheredness and separation and the other patterns of complementary opposites in existence, we need to consider the story of Adam in the garden of paradise, as related in the teachings of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the story, Adam has no knowledge of boundaries or opposites nor does he experience time, as he resides in the realm of eternity. In other words, he has no perception of beginnings or endings, love or hate, or good or bad. Adam was in the ultimate state of gatheredness as there was no separation or duality. The tree of knowledge represents all the complementary opposites of existence, whilst its roots are sunk deep in the eternal garden of unity. Then Adam, who had been in a state of pure bliss, begins to experience both pleasure and displeasure after having approached the tree.

The exposure of Adam to all the patterns of existence allows him to appreciate the ultimate treasury of the Creator. His ‘descent’ to the world of separation and duality (that is, ‘heavenly’ and ‘earthly’, ‘meaning’ and ‘form’, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’), enables him to recognize and awaken to his origins in the pre-creational realm of gatheredness, for he can only know anything with certainty by experiencing its opposite. Therefore, the so-called ‘fall’ of Adam can also be seen as a metaphor for the rise of consciousness in all humankind.

Nature of Duality

In our own experience, this nature of duality can be seen as complementary. The opposites in existence may seem to clash in our limited perception but do not at all in their absolute perfection. All the snapshots of our life show our oscillation from one opposite to the other – for example, from total darkness to total light—with multitudes of shades in between. We constantly experience good and bad times whereas we desire unchanging or absolute goodness and perfection in our lives. Actually, there is only absolute goodness and there is no such thing as absolute badness. Absolute badness is akin to non-existence, as anything in existence must contain two opposites. In other words, no bad alone can exist in this world.

The Forces of Attraction and Repulsion

All existence is energized through movement and change, which emanated from the One Essence, and manifests as two opposite but complementary forces called attraction and repulsion, a subject we will look at in much greater depth later on in this course. We have also discussed how human beings come into this world innately wanting – generally – to attract deep inner peace and stability. Equally, we are repulsed by chaos, ignorance and meaningless activity. Our worldly existence and experiences are shaped to a large extent by the need to attract what is considered desirable and to repulse what is undesirable.

Respect for life essentially is an expression of love of the source of life, which begins as energy: as soon as energy and movement manifest, the force released must be one of two, either attraction or repulsion. It is only attraction and repulsion that creates movement in existence.

It is creating harmony between the forces of attraction and repulsion that enables us to achieve that state of inner contentment of the soul that we all so deeply desire. The desire for equilibrium, in turn, is about wanting to maintain that state of ongoing constancy. In this quest for equilibrium, we are all motivated by a certain hierarchy of external needs such as wanting to maintain safety, security, health and wellbeing. This quest leads to a point when we primarily want to maintain the inner joy that calls to us from within our hearts.

Levels of Consciousness

Under an overall umbrella of consciousness, there are multiple layers through which human beings develop. For example, the consciousness of a kitten is not the same as a fully-grown cat. Nor can the cat exceed its ultimate individual consciousness. It cannot, for example, become ten times more intelligent or more aware than a cat. Our innate tendencies and qualities that ultimately define our humanness are stimulated by the external environment to develop different levels of consciousness; when this development reaches its optimum level, our humanness looks for the next level of consciousness.

There is no great mystery in all of this. Life is an infinite variety of resonances and consciousness, all interlinked, interactive, interdependent and yet totally dependent on the One Source, or One Essence, which is beyond time and space.

If it were not for the body, soul or spirit could not manifest. The human being is composed of a boundless light (soul consciousness), embodied within it, in order to activate and unite the seen (body) and the unseen (heart). The rest is all relative reality because it does not last; it changes. Now it smells good, now it is wilting, now it is there, now it is dead. Now it is a flower, now it becomes fertilizer. But the Truth, the One Essence, is forever.

Truth is eternal, knowledge is changeable. It is disastrous to confuse them.

Madeleine L'Engle,

author

As we develop higher consciousness, we realize that most things are ephemeral and fleeting, yet we can see beyond the form to its meaning and essence. The beautiful object we love may fall and break, yet Beauty will always be there. It is Beauty we seek – and majesty, and light, and freedom; we seek everlasting perfections.

Seeking Essence

We start with a little passion for clothes or jewelry, pets, cars or houses, money, sex, or wives, husbands and families. Then comes a time when we realize that these objects of our desires are transitory and not permanent, and what we found appealing was not the object itself but its meaning and essence. For example, a loved one may one day suddenly turn away from us, and then we realize that what we loved were in fact their qualities of kindness, beauty and compassion – these inner qualities of light. Then we realize that boundless passion was calling us

along these small little steps through the pull of our desires to awaken us to the higher. Therefore, to renounce desire is unreal. Desire is the door to higher realization.

In our earthly existence, there is only 'two', veiling the One and yet indicating the One. Every manifestation is one of two, good or bad, virtue or vice, desirable or undesirable. Nothing can be experienced except by attraction or repulsion, emanating from the One. So, in truth, there is only One. That's all it is, and nothing else. The rest is all fantasy; the fluttering of a leaf in the wind.

Charting the Way – Map No. 1: Exercises to Deepen Learning

(Dynamic of Existence & The Nature of Creation)

Title:

What drives us to seek bliss? Why must we experience the opposites?

Word Length:

Between 500 and 1000 words.

Criteria:

Please refer to the following criteria for guidance in answering the question. The exercise should:

1. Show an understanding of the love for divine and absolute qualities, and how we can never attain them. (Give at least two examples of such love).
2. Give a brief explanation of heavenly/earthly, meaning/form, inner/outer, and gatheredness/separation.
3. Explain the drives of attraction and repulsion.

Exercise Five: Self-Assessment

Reconsider your answers to the questions in Exercise One. Would you add or change anything in the light of the map?

Charting the Way – Map No. 1: Multiple Choice Quiz

(Dynamic of Existence & The Nature of Creation)

*In each case choose the **best** answer according to your understanding of this map:*

Questions:

Q 1: Human beings

- A. Can never find lasting happiness
- B. Can only find happiness by dealing with the relative
- C. Can be happy if they recognize and follow their desires
- D. Can find happiness through access to a zone of eternal reliability

Q 2: Human beings cannot deny the relative because

- A. They have to live with it
- B. They need to experience the relative in order to understand the absolute
- C. The relative represents reality
- D. The relative is in time and space

Q 3: A human being consists of

- A. An ever-changing self and an unchanging soul
- B. A higher self and a soul
- C. Consciousness and unconsciousness
- D. Body and mind

Q 4: Creation

- A. Only exists in this temporal world
- B. Comes from a timeless zone and will return there
- C. Is absolute existence
- D. Is the only reality

Answers:

1: D.

2: B.

3: A.

4: B.

Recommended Reading for Map No. 1

(Dynamic of Existence & The Nature of Creation)

Haeri, Shaykh Fadhlalla (1989). [*The Journey of the Self*](#). San Francisco: HarperCollins.

CHARTING THE WAY – MAP NO. 2: Inception and Creation

This map corresponds to Lesson TWO of ASK Course ONE and presents the inner and outer journey of embryonic development as the unborn child enters the conscious realm through pregnancy and birth, followed by childhood.

Charting the Way: Map No. 2 – Contents

- Learning Objectives
- Introduction
- Inception and Creation
 - * The Basis of Creation
 - * Emergence
 - * Inner Dependence
- The Nature of Human Beings
- Soul and Self
 - * Entity and Identity
 - * The Unifying Source of Creation
- Unfolding of the Self
- Eternal Ongoingness and the Sublime
 - * Potential Energy
 - * The Primal Blueprint
- Exercises / Self-Assessment / Multiple Choice Quiz
- Recommended Reading

Learning Objectives

From this map, you will gain an understanding of:

1. The development of the self through love.
2. The basis of the creation of human beings.
3. How the unseen (pre-creational realm) initiates our creation.
4. The nature of human beings (soul and self; entity and identity).

Introduction

This second map focuses on the emergence of the human being and outlines the factors that characterize and influence its full manifestation in this world. The map points out that the birth of each child is rooted in the pre-creational, unseen realm, and is founded on divine love. Human beings comprise both earthly and heavenly elements, such as the self and soul. The soul contains all of the heavenly or divine patterns while the self is earthly because it defines our individual identity during life in this world. The map goes on to discuss that the true purpose of life, which is to know the One Essence that is the source and essence of all existence, can be achieved by recognizing and yielding to the divine patterns encoded within us.

Exercise One

Before studying the map please reflect on the following questions. At the end of the map reconsider your answers:

1. What is the purpose of creation?
2. Why do young children see themselves as the centre of the world?
3. What is the relationship between the permanent and the transitory within each person?

Inception and Creation

The Basis of Creation

The foundation of creation is love. Love is the primal divine power that permeates all creation and holds the universe in dynamic balance. It is the cause of all actions, desires, connections, relationships, dispersions and unifications. Creation's purpose is to know the source and essence of its existence, which is why we humans continue to contemplate meaning and being, and to seek to know with absolute certainty. Or we can say, creation's purpose is to know that love is the foundation and essence of existence, which is why we all love absolute certainty. The mind is designed to drive us on until we come to be sure.

Emergence

The point of emergence and the beginning of human life resembles the birth of a star. For both the human being and the star it all begins with the act of conception and birth. From the dark void of the womb emerges the light of consciousness. This human consciousness interlinks with its environment and to time and space, and is related to existence before and after it, in the same way that the star is interlinked with, and relates to, the infinite cosmos.

Astrophysicists point out that a great deal occurred in the first few seconds after the cosmic Big Bang occurred; then, in the millions of years that followed, far less happened. In other words, the initial brief stage was truly momentous and many more events took place in the duration than subsequently. That initial stage of a few seconds was effectively equivalent to the millions of years of 'unfolding' that occurred later.

The same situation is substantially true of the inception and creation of a human being. The development of the embryo in the womb immediately after its conception is rapid. Within the first few weeks of life it is virtually formed and the remaining months of its life in the womb are the process of a gradual completion of its development.

Inner Dependence

In the same way that the outer cosmos has its own built-in laws, which cause it to expand and develop, the human child or the micro self, once conceived, will also develop through its own built-in process. The mother has little say in the biological development of the embryo and once this inner unfolding has begun it takes over. After this, there results an ‘inner dependence’ of the fetus (micro self) upon its own innate primal laws.

Both macrocosm and microcosm are dependent on a separate inner life of their own that directs their development during this phase of what we may term ‘inner dependence’. The condition of the mother during the nine months of pregnancy - her stability, security, confidence, optimism, and her external environment - influences the child in subtler and more significant ways than simply by the quality of her food intake or something similarly extraneous.

The Nature of Human Beings

Human beings are the ‘middle people’ or the inter-space between what appears tangible and what is beyond the material. All world faiths acknowledge this. One aspect of us relates to existential realities on earth, while another keeps us attuned to our origins before time. There is a thread of unity that runs through all of creation or existence. What we see as creation is a unified field that rests upon an unstructured invisible foundation not subject to time and space as we know it. We are in this world to interact and engage with our environment, its inhabitants, and the world at large, in a way that is best for us. The avoidance or denial of this interaction or engagement becomes escapism. It is by interacting with the world that we begin to access more than just the material world.

One man is a world in miniature. One man is equivalent to all creation.

Albert Pike (1809 – 1891),
American journalist, lawyer

Soul and Self

One way of relating the material world to its underlying invisible realm is by recognizing the relationship between the self and the soul. This can be illustrated by using light as a metaphor of the ‘self’ and the ‘soul’. Nobody knows the nature of light except by taking cognizance of its two aspects: particle and wave. The particle is a photon, which has mass and dies out once it has touched a place. But the underlying characteristic of the photon is a wave, which remains forever. The photon is born and dies, yet continues forever as a wave. The wave is not limited physically and may penetrate through matter. The photon, then, is light’s identity while the wave is its actual entity.

Entity and Identity

It is the same with the self and the soul. The self, the individual being, is our identity whereas the soul is our true entity, which remains forever. Identity differs from person to person, while entity is the same in everyone. One may be different and unique as an individual but essentially most human beings have the same aspirations and potential. All human souls emanate from the One Essence and are similar but selves differ and change constantly. So the make-up of a human being comprises an energy source or energy bundle, the soul, which is impregnated with patterns or attributes containing the original design before creation, and which energizes the individual, also known as the self. We are both the individual self-form and the eternal soul. This is the true gift from before our birth.

We are energized and vitalized by the soul, which is neither discerned nor defined except through aspects of its qualities or attributes that manifest in the self. For example, each self acts as though it is central to all that goes on around it and everything else is peripheral to it. An illustration of this would be that many people, especially children, wish to be noticed and to be at the centre of attention. Each individual thinks he or she is something special and seeks acknowledgement.

The Unifying Source of Creation

The key fact here is that each of us reflects the same aspect of truth that resides within us. The soul of the human being contains the truth of the Absolute One, the source of all creation. The soul emits the light of the primal essence behind all life. That truth is at the core of all creation. Because we all inherently and potentially contain that hidden truth, or secret of all creation, we sometimes tend to see ourselves at the center of creation.

Behind all this seemingly childish behavior – this wanting to be the center of creation - there is clearly a unifying source. The unconscious, innocent motivation behind such childish behavior is related to the nature of the source of creation, which is represented in us as the soul. Most such behavior stems, intentionally or otherwise, from the love of the soul and its attributes of the all-Powerful, all-Present, all-Loving, all-Seeing, all-Knowing, and the myriad other attributes of the One Source behind all creation.¹

Unfolding of the Self

As noted in the previous section, the self manifests and evolves in this existence in tandem with the growth and development of the body from birth. The self comes into being at the moment when the soul becomes embodied. In other words, the soul emerges from pre-existence – the timeless zone – and moves through in time and space. The self ‘unfolds’ as the body develops, each growing towards its fullest potential. As the self moves towards cognizance and awakening the body also moves towards physical maturity. Each self is a living creature: an animate being of inclinations, appetites and desires and a personal identity.²

As far as this present existence is concerned, the self is characterized as a personality within a physical body that dies and decays, whereas the soul is immortal. So the self comes into

¹ For example a child’s spontaneous often irrational behavior is reflective of the soul, which is ever free and boundless.

² *Self* translates from the Arabic word *nafs*. The word is derived from the root, *nafasa*, which means to breathe, inhale and exhale, as well as precious or priceless, and also to compete or vie, and to comfort or relieve. Other words derived from the same root mean gem (*nafisa*), a state of mind (*nafsi*), disposition (*nafsiya*) breath or liberty (*nafas*), psychology (*nafsaniya*). The study of psychology is called ‘*ilm al nafs*’, the science of the self.

existence with the body, which is destructible, but its continuation after death is with the soul, which is indestructible.

Eternal Ongoingness and the Sublime

There lies within all of us a deep recall of our eternal essence that calls us to perpetuate our ‘ongoingness,’ our true nature of going-on. As we have seen in [Map One](#), the pre-manifestation of energy is primal consciousness; that source of creation without any manifest creation, pure and utterly simple. Human beings contain both the total, utterly indiscernible, pure, sublime source as well as its manifestation. If we truly yield to the source in its manifestation, in other words to the program we call ‘life’, then we are fulfilling our purpose.

Most of us are addicted to perpetuation. We want to perpetuate that to which we have become accustomed. We are habit-forming creatures. We develop a habit of inertia, for returning to where we were or staying where we are. It is the fear of yielding to life that we are very uncomfortable with. This fear of life’s dynamism has its roots in our desire to perpetuate the pure and sublime state of primal consciousness. We fail to realize that being the interspace we will return to the One Essence – to the state we were in before we were born. In fact, we ought to move away from hankering after the sublime state before our birth and look forward to the sublime state beyond this temporal existence.

Love is what we were born with. Fear is what we learned here.

Marianne Williamson (b.1952 –) ,
American author

Exercise Two

1. Reflect on the many ways in which you seek perfection in your environment and in yourself.
2. Study the behavior of a small child and consider how such behavior stems from the love of the attributes of the soul.

* * *

Potential Energy

We are frightened of the dynamics of manifestation because embedded in our subconscious is a recollection of our original state of non-creation, non-movement. One cannot say that the star or child in that state before its birth has no energy, nor can one say that it is energy, for energy only manifests with creation. The pre-creational state is potential, unrealized energy. The new life in the egg or the sperm is potential energy; potential life. It has its own cosmology but is not yet manifest.

We all yearn for that minimum expenditure of energy to the point of the pure sublime, beyond even the meditative level. This is ultimately what we all strive for: a state in which we exist but cannot discern any boundaries or existence. That source of pure energy is always there in the soul. The electricity is there but without current or charge. Once it moves then it becomes an electric flow.

I can say that energy is my slave, and I, too, am its slave. Energy is my slave in that as I mature, consciously and through reasoning, I can control the expenditure of it. But equally I owe my existence to it. The same is true of my soul. The soul is my slave. This light, this divine light, is my slave. I have got it. I have a soul, but in reality it has got me. I have got it, but I would not be here without it. I am giving it an ‘identity’, my limited being, my race or culture, my language, me as speaker, or son, or father, and it is giving me my true ‘entity’.

My identity, my limited being, is entirely based on an entity that is boundless. So I owe everything to it and it owes acknowledgement of itself to me.

The Primal Blueprint

Every child is born in a state of equanimity with the ‘primal blueprint’ of a perfect soul. The primal blueprint has its roots in the cosmic soul, or supreme consciousness, or One Essence which acts out through the individual soul, or soul consciousness, within the heart. The cosmic

light manifests as the light of the soul, which in turn illumines the self. Good or bad conscience implies reflecting a beam of this light, or not. If the heart is well enough to send the right signals, then a clear vision and an unfailing ability to discern between what is harmful and what is of benefit become easy. Spiritual development, then, is the growth of the conditioned or personal consciousness towards soul consciousness and unison with it.

“Dear friend, your heart is a polished mirror. You must wipe it clean of the veil of dust that has gathered upon it, because it is destined to reflect the light of divine secrets.”

Abu Hamid Mohammed al Ghazali (1058 – 1111),
Muslim jurist, Sufi master,
born Tus, Iran

However, the environment and social factors impact upon this blueprint as a result of which each person behaves and acts in a particular manner. In effect, the divine imprint with which each child is born is neglected and often forgotten as the self begins to develop. Throughout its life, the self then develops over several stages.³ For example, according to the tradition of the seven stages of the self, we come into the first stage of the ‘commanding self’. The name implies that this self ‘commands’ one to act on whatever impulse comes to mind. This is the state of the newborn baby.

Another way of considering the self is through the three levels of being described as the natural being or sensing being, the self aware being, and the rational being. Within this model the newborn baby is the lowest level of self, and consists of the physical aspects of the body and its mechanisms, including the entire spectrum of the outer senses such as sight sound and so on. It is based on physicality and the senses, which are in a constant state of decay, and is eventually followed by death.

³ Throughout life the self develops through stages. A basic system of classifying the self as consisting of three levels or aspects is described by many writers; the physician and philosopher Avicenna describes these three levels as the vegetal self, the animal self, and the rational self.

Although this stage is primarily associated with early childhood, it can continue into adulthood and is the stage of one who is not sufficiently developed on a deeper, inward, level. It describes someone who is crude, childish, base, egoistic and selfish, with little concern or connection to anything other than self-gratification. As the self unfolds, it has the possibility of developing to its true potential – as a faithful companion of the soul.

“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Teilhard de Chardin (1881 – 1955),
American Jesuit priest

We will examine these concepts in greater depth in forthcoming maps.

Charting the Way – Map No. 2: Exercises to Deepen Learning

(Inception and Creation)

Title:

What is the role of nurture (i.e., environmental and other influences) with respect to nature, in the development of the individual?

Word Length:

Between 500 and 1000 words.

Criteria:

Please refer to the following criteria for guidance in answering the question. The exercise should:

1. Show an understanding of divine imprinting from the unseen.
2. Refer to earthly influences, especially in the earliest phases, and the importance of optimizing exposure to these external influences.
3. Differentiate clearly between the eternal soul and the transitory self.

Exercise Three – Self-Assessment

Reconsider your answers to the questions at the beginning of this map in the light of what you have read.

Charting the Way – Map No. 2: Multiple Choice Quiz

(Inception and Creation)

*In each case choose the **best** answer according to your understanding of this map:*

Questions:

Q 1: Human beings can understand the purpose of their existence by

- A. Listening to their selves
- B. Recognizing their Divine origins
- C. Living a full life in this world
- D. Being linked to their environment

Q 2: The development of the human child is based on

- A. The mother's state
- B. Inherited patterns
- C. An inner dependence on a primal pattern
- D. All these three

Q 3: The soul can only be discerned through

- A. Its energy patterns
- B. The behavior of the individual
- C. Manifestations of its qualities in the self
- D. Being acknowledged

Q 4: Optimal spiritual development is when

- A. The self develops over several stages
- B. The soul is given an identity
- C. The self acts in tune with the soul
- D. The soul is slave of the self

Answers:

- 1: B.
- 2: D.
- 3: C.
- 4: C.

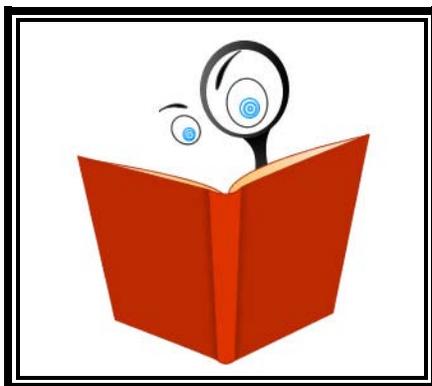
Recommended Reading for Map No. 2

(Inception and Creation)

Haeri, Shaykh Fadhlalla (1989). [*The Journey of the Self*](#). San Francisco: HarperCollins.

GLOSSARY

Please note that other texts or reference sources may use these terms in different ways to the way in which they are used here; for example the term self can be used to denote the soul.



Consciousness: “Pure consciousness” is non-delimited, boundless awareness without content, a silent state of inner wakefulness with no object of thought or perception. “Conditioned consciousness” is a person’s perception, experience and state, at a particular moment in time. Consciousness is commonly used as synonymous to “awareness”, but this is a popular rather than scientific usage. A useful metaphor for consciousness is that of a cinema screen and film. Consciousness can be likened to the light from a film projector, as it shines onto a screen. The images that appear on the screen are like our perceptions, sensations, dreams, memories, thoughts and feelings, which are the “contents of consciousness.” “Personal consciousness” consists of my self and the outside, phenomenal world, and the relationship between them as it appears to me. “Self-consciousness” refers to a form of reflexive consciousness in which the object is the self or some aspect of the self. “Collective consciousness” is that consciousness that belongs to a group as a whole, e.g., the collective mind of a society or culture.

Cosmology: Science or theory of the universe.

Energy: Is a measure of ability within the physical realm to manifest change. It can be quantum (transformative) or Newtonian (cause and effect).

Gatheredness and Separation: Polarities that manifest in our conscious experience of existence. Gatheredness is the conscious recognition of inseparability or unity, of the coalescence of all aspects of existence into the ultimate one essence, the source of creation. Separation is the recognition of the diversity and specificity, the identifiable discreteness, of creation. According to this Course's teachings of self knowledge, any outer physical earthly activity will be unstable unless balanced with the opposite intention: e.g. a person in a state of separation or dispersion must consciously balance it with awareness of gatheredness. In practice this means remembering that one's present state is only a flash in time, reflecting one's origin in gatheredness, beyond time.

Heavenly / Earthly: Heavenly is the unseen, non-worldly, subtle, subatomic or astrophysics realm, and beyond. Non-discernable; its rules and patterns are in great contrast to that of the world. Earthly: Realm of duality; based on cause and effect and the opposites meeting and complementing each other or clashing.

Identity: The personality. The sum of one's genetic heredity, cultural and environmental influences. The self is different in everyone.

Knowledge: Can only come from the soul. Divine Knowledge is not accumulative. "I have a lot of knowledge" is *information*. Knowledge of the soul is intrinsic, latent, and potential. As absolute, or universal, knowledge is beyond time and space, one cannot learn this knowledge. An enlightened person knows that he/she knows nothing, yet there resonates an echo within that they will come to know what they need to know at the time they need to know. That is enlightenment.

Life: The sum of one's experience. Animate existence, the root of which is changes in energy.

Lights and Veils: Lights are multitudinous patterns that exist in the soul, transmitted to activate numerous systems. Some systems are earthly, e.g., the material world or genetics, and others are heavenly, e.g., the subtle or angelic realm. The human being is the meeting point of rich and

potent lights and shadows. As the self is a mirror of the soul, when that mirror faces towards the soul, it reflects harmony and contentment, and one is in unison. When the self faces away, it becomes veiled to the “light of the soul.” The mirror of the self is not fixed and, according to its relationship to the soul, it is either veiled in shadow or reflecting light. Similarly, the relationship of sun and moon; viz. the brightly lit moon reflects the sun’s light, and when the moon is dark, the sun is still there, but not evident. The self, like the moon, has no independence, no light of its own. A pure person is like the full moon.

Person: Encompassing every aspect of the human being. Soul, heart, mind and ego. A mask, cover, or shell that encompasses the subtle and the gross, the seen and the unseen. Like a mask, it changes every second, according to one’s moods, or modes. Expressed as “I”. The “I” of the previous minute is not the same as the “I” of now.

Pleasure / Joy: Pleasure is acquirable, sensory, worldly. Joy is extra sensory - to do with the heavenly realm.

Pre-Creational: The One Source from which we come. Primal consciousness. Allah. Potential energy. The singularity.

Self: The *nafs* (Arabic); our identity. Ego. Personality. Ever changing. Different levels of consciousness. The self develops along different stages; the further away from the soul and the One Source, the baser the self is and, conversely, the nearer to reflecting its pure origin in the One Source, the higher it is. It is the self that has the potential to transform itself by reflecting attributes of the soul.

Soul: The *ruh* (Arabic); our true entity. Beingness. The Divine Breath within us which bears the imprint of pre-creation and all Divine attributes; it is boundless and cannot be seen or defined – only aspects of its qualities may come through the self.

Truth: Reflects that which is eternal and everlasting – therefore a virtue. Its opposite, or vice, is falsehood, a lie.

Unity: Foundation of all existence is unity, or gatheredness. Truth is absolute gatheredness. As dispersion occurs, the further away from that moment of creation, the less easy it is to see unity of the origin. The heart is the centre wherein resides divine truth. If one refers to the heart, one sees only unity in the midst of chaos, e.g., love at the peak of violence.

Virtue: All desirable qualities that have durability. Qualities that are universal and self-evident. Virtues can be seen as reflections of the perfect Divine, or soul, attributes. Capability and Power are divine attributes. Wealth, too, is considered virtuous, since God possesses the ultimate treasures and is thus wealthy. The perfections of these qualities are desirable, therefore, to be wealthy, powerful and capable is virtuous, and brings with it responsibility and accountability to use these qualities virtuously.

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Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 3: Commentary on Surah Yasin

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Commentary on chapter *Yasin*. This is traditionally read over the dead person: if we want to know the meaning of life, we have to learn about death.

Keys to the Qur'an: Volume 4: Commentary on Surahs Al-`Ankabut, Al-Rahman, Al-Waqi`ah and Al-Mulk

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Shaykh uncovers inner meanings, roots and subtleties of the Qur'anic Arabic terminology in these four selected Surahs.

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`Allamah Sayyid M. H. Tabataba`i shows in this gem how the Qur'an contains the fundamental roots of Islam and the proof of prophethood as the Word of God.

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An exposition of the Qur'anic verses relating to the nature of physical phenomena, including the origins of the universe, the nature of light, matter, space and time, and the evolution of biological and sentient beings.

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These aphorisms of Ibn `Ata'Allah, a Shadhili Shaykh, reveal the breadth and depth of an enlightened being who reflects divine unity and inner transformation through worship.

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Translated By: Asadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate

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