

The text that follows is an abridged translation of one of Dara Shikuh's Sufi treatises, entitled *Risala-yi haqq-numa*, "The Compass of Truth." It was composed in the year 1646.

The Compass of Truth

Prince Muhammad Dara Shikuh

Rendered into English by
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Introduction

In the name of God, the Most Merciful and Compassionate.

God is the First, the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. Praise be to that absolute existence. God's essence manifests so that the seed of perfection, which lies latent within it, may become patent. My friend, the human spirit has entered this framework of the body so that which is potential may become actual, and may return, enriched with all experiences, to its original source.

On a night of inspiration, I was commanded to write this treatise for the benefit of those who are returning to God. It is based upon four truths and consists of four chapters. Each chapter contains a description of one of the four worlds.

For your heart to become a flower garden you must search for the Beloved. As a compass points to the pole, and through it men find their destination, so this treatise points to the Truth, and through it you may find the Self.

Whatever has been expressed in this treatise is a blessing from God for the benefit of humankind. In the practices described herein there is no pain or difficulty.

There is no asceticism in it. Everything here is love and affection, pleasure and ease.

'Alam an-Nasut

The physical plane is the world of sensation and perception. It is variously called the visible world, the world of waking consciousness, or the world of awareness. This is the realm in which existence has reached its culmination and in which pleasure is the deepest and most vivid.

My friend, when your troubled soul searches for truth in this physical plane, you should first find a solitary corner, and sit there alone in meditation. Sitting quietly in this place, try to form an image in your mind of a holy saint for whom you have great regard and respect. Or if you do not have such a saint, try to form the image of someone with whom you are bound by a tie of love. The method of meditation is this. Close your eyes and fix your attention on your heart. With the eyes of the heart observe the image of your master or beloved. The thought-forms that you create and witness with the eyes of your heart constitute the world of ideas or the plane of counterparts (*'alam al-mithal*).⁷ This plane of thought-forms lies midway between the physical plane and the next plane (the astral plane). When you meditate in this manner you will find that gradually the thought-form will correspond more and more with the original of which it is a picture, and the life of the original will begin to flow into this picture. When you exercise this form of meditation persistently, you will begin to see images that you have never seen before, and nothing will remain hidden from you.

‘Alam al-Malakut

This plane is also called the world of the spirits, the invisible world, the subtle world, and the world of dream. While the forms of the physical world are transitory, the forms of the astral world, which are the archetypes of those of the physical world, are eternal.

Do you know what a dream is? It is a miniature of death.

Do you know what death is? It is a dream prolonged.

Everyone who enters sleep wanders about in the astral plane. One does so by the soul taking up a very refined body that is the exact counterpart of the physical body, with eyes, ears, tongue, and all the internal organs.

Anyone whose heart has become refined sees in this astral world beautiful and refined forms, hears exquisite music, and tastes delicious viands. But when the heart is burdened with coarseness, one sees horrible forms and hears dreadful sounds during ones wanderings in sleep. One sees only the things that exist on the physical plane and feels no pleasure and delight.

There is a general rule that when the attractive power of the corporeal body overwhelms the soul, the soul becomes coarse like the body. On the other hand, if the attractive power of the soul brings the corporeal body under its control, the body in turn becomes subtle like the soul.

As an illustration, the soul of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had such control over his body that it became extremely rarified and refined—so much so that no fly ever sat on it, and it did not cast a shadow on the earth. His body was like air, which is also refined, and on which a fly cannot sit and which casts no shadow. Because of this refinement, the Prophet was able to make his famous night journey to heaven in his physical body. And Jesus (peace be upon him) still lives in heaven in a physical body. For in truth our souls are bodies and our bodies are souls.

In the astral plane you may meet the form of your master, who will lead you to the holy prophets (peace be upon them), the saints and friends of God. If you have any difficulties, you can ask for their advice, and you will receive a reply from them. In this manner the faith of your heart will increase and you will feel more at home in this astral world.

My friend, if you practice with diligence and perseverance the methods of meditation that I describe, the rust will be removed from your heart and the mirror of your soul will become bright. And from every side you will see reflected in it the face of the Beloved.

Hazrat Miyan Jiv[®] used to tell to some of his disciples, “The name of Allah should be recited very slowly, mentally and without the movement of the tongue. By constant repetition of this great and blessed name, one reaches a stage in which one’s heart remains awake even in sleep.”

This is the highest and best of all names. It is common both to those who believe in Islam and those who do not. It is a collection of all names, and there is nothing that exists in the universe that is outside this name. The meaning of this ineffable name is, “The One who is Lord of three attributes: creation, preservation and destruction.” The whole of creation and every atom of matter have these three attributes within them. But no one knows the inner mystery of this great name, except some of the great teachers.

The method of practice, which this writer has adopted and has found to be the best, is the regulation of the breath. This is a method without which success cannot be obtained. So everyone ought to practice this method of breath control. Sitting in a retired spot, place your elbows on your knees. Close the holes of your ears with your thumbs so that no air may pass through them. With your index fingers shut your eyes in such a way that your eyelids remain fixed without pressing the

fingers against your eyeballs. Place your ring and pinky fingers on your upper and lower lips in order to close your mouth. Place your two middle fingers on the two wings of your nose: the right middle finger on the right wing, and the left middle finger on the left wing. Having assumed this posture, first close your right nostril with your finger to prevent air from coming through it. While reciting *la ilaha* ('no god'), breathe in slowly through your left nostril and draw air down to the heart. Next, with your left middle finger close your left nostril also, thereby retaining the air within your body. Keep the breath confined so long as you can do so easily and without feeling suffocated. Then, by opening your right nostril, exhale slowly while reciting the words *illa'llah* ('but God').

Some have carried this practice to such an extent that they can pass the entire day drawing only four breaths. The teacher of this writer, Hazrat Mulla Shah⁹ (may God prolong his life), used to inhale at the time of the evening prayer and exhale at the time of the morning prayer, holding his breath for the entire night, and regardless whether it was the long night of winter or the short night of summer.

My friend, when you have practiced this noble practice of breath control for some time, you will feel a sensation of heat, a great delight, and a subtle illumination in your heart and throughout your body. All of your coarseness and tiredness will completely vanish, and you will feel great zest and immeasurable ecstasy. The taste of this practice, once acquired, will keep you away from all idleness.

When you practice this method of breath retention, fix your attention on your heart, because during this practice a sound can be heard coming from within you. This sound is sometimes like a big boiling cauldron or sometimes like the buzzing of a nest of bees. Do not imagine that this sound is a hallucination of your senses. The entire universe, inside and out, is filled with this sound. It is the great voice of silence.

All sounds are of three kinds. The first is the sound of two objects striking together. For example, when the palms of the hands strike against one another, we hear a clap. This sound is called the transitory or compound sound. The second kind of sound is produced inside a human through the workings of the elements of fire and water. It is called the physiological or subtle sound. The third kind is the sound is boundless and infinite; it is self-existent from eternity and not caused by anything. This sound has one unchanging pitch and tone that neither increases nor decreases. It existed before the creation of the worlds, exists now, and will continue to exist when the worlds enter into nonexistence. This sound is called the infinite and absolute sound. There is no practice higher than that of hearing this sound.

My friend, when you desire to commence this practice, you must do as follows. Go, by day or by night, to a deserted place that is distant from the haunts of humans, or to a cloister where no sound can reach. Sit there and direct your attention to your ears. Your mind must be very attentive because in the beginning the sound will be very subtle and to observe it will require your utmost concentration. After you hear it, the sound will slowly become so powerful and overwhelming that it will draw your mind in and absorb it. Afterwards there will be no place or time when this sound will not be with you. But this sound is merely a drop from the ocean of the sound that rings through the eternity and infinity of time and space.¹⁰

From many authentic traditions we learn that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was devoted to this practice, both before and after attaining the rank of prophethood. A story is related from our blessed lady Khadija that the Prophet, before he received revelation, used to go to a cave outside Mecca. He used to take bread with him, because he would stay there for days absorbed in this meditation. In that cave, he would practice hearing this sound. The result of this practice was that the form of Gabriel appeared before him, and that was the commencement of revelation.

Once they asked Muhammad, "In what manner does revelation come to you?" He replied, "I hear a sound, sometimes like the sound of a boiling cauldron and sometimes like the sound made by

bees, and sometimes I see an angel in the form of a man, who talks with me, and sometimes I hear a sound like silvery bells or the beating of a drum.”

It is also said that Plato once had a debate with Moses (peace be upon him). Plato began, “You say your God speaks to you, when in fact God is above holding any such conversations.” Moses replied, “Yes, I do claim God speaks to me, because from everywhere I hear a sound, which is ceaseless and continuous, and is not composed of syllables.” When Plato heard this he believed that God did speak to Moses.¹¹

My friend, when you hear this voice, you must continue to listen to it. Try to hear it not only in the solitude of the desert and the cloister, but also in the bustle of the marketplace and the meetinghouses of humankind. And when you have accomplished this practice, this sound will overpower the sounds of timbrel and drums, trumpets and bells, and all the loudest instruments ever invented, because this sound is the origin of them all, and all other sounds come to manifestation through it. Many disciples of Miyan Jiv used to go and sit in the marketplace amidst the bustle in order to test whether they had reached perfection in this practice.

‘Alam al-Jabarut

This world is called the plane of unity and the plane of contentment. Abu’l-Qasim Junayd¹² is one of the few teachers to have described this plane to the public. He says, “Sufism is when you can remain for even a single moment without the slightest sorrow and pain.”

A person enters the plane of bliss during a sound sleep, when there is no dream nor any perceived object from the physical or astral planes. On awakening from such a sleep a person generally remarks, “How peacefully and happily I slept.” This shows that in dreamless sleep, though one is unconscious of every external object, one is conscious of bliss because one remembers it on awakening.

But there is a difference between someone who unconsciously enters the plane of bliss and someone who consciously travels there. The first enters the plane of bliss only when he goes into sound dreamless sleep, and not voluntarily but from fatigue. The latter enters into this plane whenever he wishes and with his own free will; for whether he is asleep or awake, he can enter the plane of bliss at any time.

When you want to enter the plane of bliss, the sitting posture is this. All of your body’s limbs should be at perfect rest and refrain from every kind of motion. Both eyes must be closed, the right palm should be placed on the left, and your heart should be emptied of all forms from the physical and astral planes. You must sit with perfect quietness and ease. No form must rise before your physical or inner vision. When you can sit without any thought or thought-form crossing your mind, you are in the plane of bliss.

‘Alam al-Lahut

This plane is called the plane of essence and the absolute plane. It is the origin of the three lower planes and it envelops all three. The other planes relate to it as body parts relate to the soul. The other planes merge into it at the time of dissolution and come out of it at the time of creation. This plane always remains uniform in its essential nature and never undergoes any modification or alteration. When compared with this world of Truth, the other planes are like words compared with their meanings, or waves compared with the ocean.

My friend, when the ocean of reality begins to move, waves and bubbles appear on its surface. These waves and bubbles constitute the earth and the heavens. But they cannot be separated from the ocean. Therefore, although everything has a separate name and form, in essence everything is all one.

I will tell you the secret of monism: Nothing exists but God. All that you see as other than God is one with God in essence though separate in name.

Beware of thinking that God is purely impersonal and free from all qualities. If you think of God in this way you will miss the blessing of seeing God in all forms and relations. Similarly, beware of limiting the conception of God to mere personality, in which case you will miss the blessing of God's impersonality. For God is both personal and impersonal.

My friend, when your knowledge of this plane allows you to understand the great truth of monism you will transcend ordinary consciousness. When you have realized that everything is God, it will inevitably follow that you will know yourself as you are in reality. And you will no longer remain within the confines of the consciousness of 'I-and-you.' It is here that you will find the truth of unity.

If any problem or distracting thought arises, consider it to be your own self. Then it will become perfect and cease to be a problem. When you reach this perfection, wherever you look you will see yourself, and wherever you seek you will find yourself.

The last and most useful method of meditation in this noble system is this. Sit, and in spite of all limitations, consider yourself as the very absolute and the true and only existence. Recognize that everything that appears to you as other is actually your self. In this way throw open the curtains of separation. See everything as one essence, and realize the joy of self in the Self.

My friend, once you obtain knowledge of your own true self, which is the great elixir of life and the philosopher's stone, you will become united with the eternal existence. All grief and fear, duality and separation, will be removed from your heart and the fear of punishment and the anxiety of reward will leave you.