


الله

Tawhīd

and its role in wellbeing

According to Imam Al-Ghazali



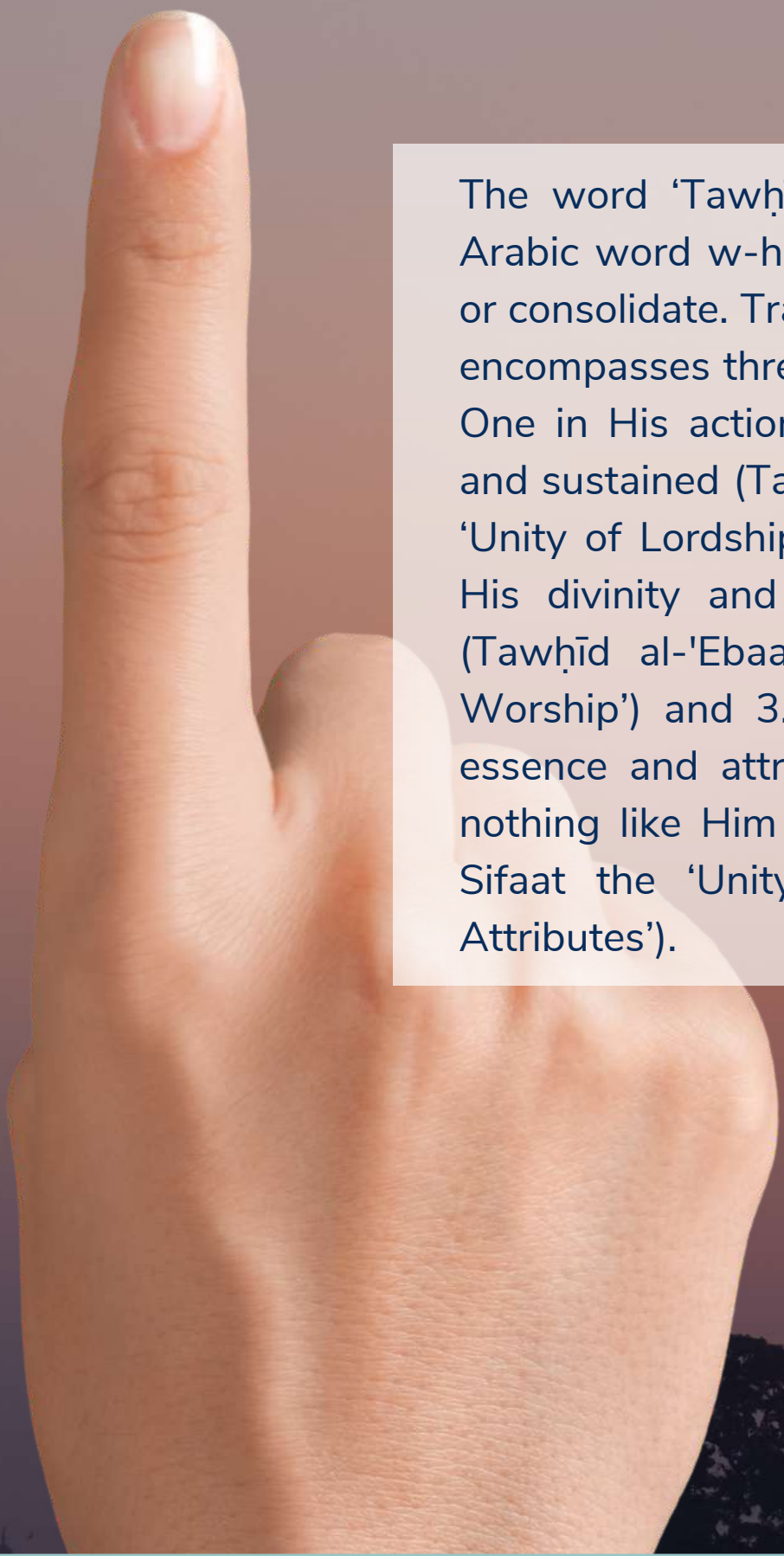


قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ
لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ
لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ
كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Say, "He, God, is One, God,
the Eternally Sufficient
unto Himself. He begets
not; nor was He begotten.
And none is like unto Him."



TAWHĪD



The word 'Tawhīd' comes from the root Arabic word w-h-d, which means to unify or consolidate. Traditionally it is believed to encompass three aspects: 1. That God is One in His actions and thus self-efficient and sustained (Tawhīd ar-Ruboobeeyah or 'Unity of Lordship'), 2. That He is One in His divinity and thus worshipped alone (Tawhīd al-'Ebaadah or 'Unity of God's Worship') and 3. That He is One in His essence and attributes and thus there is nothing like Him (Tawhīd al-Asmaa was-Sifaat the 'Unity of God's Names and Attributes').



HE IS...

According to Al-Ghazali, God is not only One in the singular sense but unique. Al-Ghazali describes God as; not being bound by time or space, both the first and the last, having no beginning and no end, He is both the revealed and the concealed, far but near, unlike anything and nothing is like Him, understood only by His own essence, not comparable to anything, The Knower of all things, He is aware of the movement of the ant on a black stone, in the depths of darkness, aware of every intention, hope and desire, nothing happens without His permission, no movement, no good or bad, no belief or disbelief and so, He is, in essence, the *only* reality.



THE FOUR STAGES OF TAWHĪD, IN RELATIONS TO YOUR WELLBEING

Al-Ghazali uses the analogy of a nut to explain the four stages of tawhīd and its associated effects on wellbeing, presented below:



STAGE 1

The outer husk of the nut is compared to the declaration of faith 'there is no god but God' uttered by the tongue whilst the heart is heedless of it' or does not believe in it. Al-Ghazali argues that this is the tawḥīd of a hypocrite and offers protection and benefit in a social context, He gives the example of someone who utters it to protect themselves from religious persecution.

In the context of wellbeing, this form of tawḥīd offers a protection to the body, in a physical sense and offers benefit that comes from feelings of belonging, inclusion and gratification and so, can lead to hedonic understandings of wellbeing i.e. wellbeing concerning positive psychological effects, due to feelings of inclusion and praise. However, since the Islamic philosophy is not concerned with matters of hedonic endeavours, this type of tawḥīd would be framed as a state of heedlessness within the Islamic context, Al-Ghazali describes it as being 'ugly' and of 'no benefit because it does not consider God.




STAGE 2

The second stage, according to Al-Ghazali, is the state that most Muslims are in, in which tawḥīd is an utterance of the unity of God with conviction in the heart, however the depths of conviction does not give rise to the associated feelings of peace or calm, typically present with true conviction, and therefore is lacking. Al-Ghazali, describes this state of tawḥīd as being the inner husk of a nut, slightly better in its demeanour than the outer husk but bitter in taste, its benefits are the same as the outer husk but in addition, it provides protection in the afterlife. It is the layer closest to the nut, which in this analogy is the third stage of tawḥīd and so, it is closer to the truth of tawḥīd.

Al-Ghazali states that true tawḥīd can be achieved through knowledge, worship and good action. Al-Ghazali makes reference to the following verses to validate the argument for feelings of peace and calm as indications of correct belief in God:






أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَى نُورٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ

What of one whose breast God has expanded
for submission, such that he follows a light from
his Lord?

(Qur'an:39:22)





فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ

Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He
expands his breast for submission...

(Qur'an 6:125)



In the translation of the above-mentioned verses (39:22 and 6:125) the Arabic word 'Islam' has been translated to the literal meaning of the word 'submission,' in other translations the word remains as 'Islam' (i.e denoting the religion) and the Arabic word 'Sharaha' or شَرَحَ has been translated to the English word 'expand.' In both contexts the verse is explained to mean that through submission to God or to the message of God 'Islam,' one experiences feelings of peace, here, denoted by 'expands his breast.' In reference to the above verses, Al-Ghazali states that when the breast is in the state of expansion the 'light of truth shines within'.

It is common to describe feelings of joy and positivity in the Middle East as 'feeling an expansion in one's chest', this is equivalent to the Western saying that the chest/heart feels like its 'going to burst' when describing happy feelings.

The 'expansion of the breast' can be taken to mean positive feelings or an indication to positive wellbeing, which is in line with the message of God being described as 'glad tidings' or 'happy news' in the Qur'an, an example of which is presented below:

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى
لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

Say, "The Holy Spirit has brought it down from thy Lord in truth, to make firm those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who submit."

(Qur'an 16:102)



STAGE 3

The feelings of peace and wellbeing discussed above is that associated with the third of the stages of tawḥīd as explained by Al-Ghazali, he likens this stage to 'the nut', where one reaches the ultimate goal and thus experiences the full benefits of tawḥīd. According to Al-Ghazali this stage is attained through mystical unveiling or 'Mukashafa', inspired in the heart and can only be acquired through spiritual worship and striving for knowledge, where the more an individual increases in spirituality and good deeds the more the secrets of the truth of tawḥīd are unveiled to him/her. According to Al-Ghazali in this stage a person is aware that everything originates from God and thus there is only one reality, that of God. At this stage of tawḥīd a person is at peace.



STAGE 4

This last stage and ultimate level of tawhīd is known as 'Fanaa' which translates to 'annihilation'. Al-Ghazali describes it as 'drowning in The One.' It is a unity with God that does not include multiplicity, that is to say that one does not see oneself as separate to God. Al-Ghazali describes it as being united in the same way that an individual is made up of different parts but is still regarded as one entity. There is not much detail given on how a person reaches this stage, as it is regarded as a divine secret, the disclosure of which, Al-Ghazali believes, equates to blasphemy.

The concept of fanaa can be controversial within Islamic circles due to reluctance in accepting the suggestion that mortal and God can unify in any way. However, it was observed that the concept resonates with a widely accepted tradition of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) that exists within the mainstream/traditional Islamic discourse, that states:





قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: إِنْ اللَّهُ قَالَ مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ آذَنْتُهُ بِالْحَرْبِ وَمَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّى أَجِبَهُ فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا وَرِجْلَهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا وَإِنْ سَأَلَنِي لِأَعْطِيَتْهُ وَلَئِنْ اسْتَعَاذَنِي لِأُعِيذَنَّهُ

“Verily Allah (Glorified may He be) has said: ‘Whosoever shows enmity to a wali (friend) of Mine, then I have declared war against him. And My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than the religious duties I have obligated upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to me with nafil (supererogatory) deeds until I Love him. When I Love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask (something) of Me, I would surely give it to him; and were he to seek refuge with Me, I would surely grant him refuge.’

(Hadith 38, Nawawi, 1999)





In summary, the significance of tawḥīd to wellbeing lies in its requirement, as a prerequisite, to warrant anything to qualify as being 'Islamic' and inline with Islamic belief. It is consequently, the most significant aspect of any wellbeing philosophy and practice, within the Islamic context. To put it simply, the One God must be at the core of any wellbeing practice or philosophy for it to be capable of bring a human peace,

Salaam! I'm Sara and I have a PhD in "Mindfulness and psychological wellbeing from a Qur'anic perspective". Much of my research relied upon the works of Imam Al-Ghazali in his book "The Revival".

I launched 'INsane' after noticing people were genuinely interested in my research. The INsane logo has a double meaning, it can also be read as the Arabic word for human 'insan'. You can find more about the project and me on my podcast, the link for which is on the website.

I am passionate about informing Muslims on wellbeing from an Islamic perspective. I see this as a duty and a privilege.

This guide will be the first of many (insha'Allah). You can download it free from the INsane website.

I pray that the knowledge i share brings you clarity and courage. Because finding peace takes courage.



Feel free to contact me for collaborations, feedback or thoughts on: the insane website or on twitter @imsarakay

Sara K

