

The 99 Beautiful Names of God – Part 5 – Names 14 - 16

Dear Friends – This is the fifth installment of this online study of the *asma al-husna*, the 99 Beautiful Names of Allah. Welcome to those joining the group.



This edition's Names follow from the three Names of Creation that we covered in the last posting to the attributes of forgiveness, irresistible power, and generosity.

As we examine the meta-meaning of these qualities in their divine infinitude, let us also contemplate their presence in our character, thoughts, and actions. Pir Vilayat always reminded us to inquire: What is it that is trying to come through? What qualities are lying dormant in us, awaiting actualization? Which traits might be over-active and therefore out of balance and inharmonious? What happens when we address the manifestation of these inherited qualities in our being? Forgiveness.....Sovereign Power.....Generosity...

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al-Ghaffâr

الْغَفَّارُ

The All-Forgiving, The Veiler of Sins and Faults

Pronunciation notes: The ‘ghayn’, which makes a sound that is somewhat notoriously difficult to precisely say for most of us, is usually transliterated as ‘Gh’. To say the alphabet name of ‘ghayn’, say ‘rain’ the way a French speaker would, with the ‘r’ in the throat, and add 1 oz. of ‘g’. “Ghawf-far” – note the two ‘f’ sounds. One extends the ‘f’ to correctly indicate the proper intensity of the double consonant.

Allah is all-Forgiving. What is more, and perhaps of even greater comfort than forgiveness, is that Allah has (at Its Divine discretion) the attribute of turning the

heavenly Glance away from our sins -- and this nuance is contained in this particular forgiveness *esma* of Ghaffar.

Al-Ghazali highlights this aspect. "He is full of forgiveness - (He) is the One who makes manifest what is beautiful and conceals what is ugly. Sins are among the ugly things which He conceals, by letting a cover fall over them in this world, and refraining from requiting them in the next. So forgiving is concealing."

Commenting on his interpretation of the entomological roots of *Ghaffar*, Sa'adi Neil Douglas-Klotz says that there is "a constriction (*GhF*) that is released through heat and fire (*AR*)." In contrast, another Name of forgiveness - *Ghaffur* (34) - is said to "work with light and intelligence rather than heat."

"The quality of forgiveness that burns up all things except beauty is the quality of love."
(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

What's with this heart of mine?
With pain and suffering, is filled this heart of mine
Burn up this heart of mine
In burning is the cure for this heart of mine

Burn up this heart of mine
Within this burning is resolution
Just like the turning moth
Love of the burning flame has burned this heart of mine.



(Rifai-Marufi ilahi: N'oldu Bu Gönüm)

Awakening the quality of forgiveness in one's heart and mind is one of the most difficult pathways in this human life. Some might say it is THE most difficult path. Each day, various levels of the *nafs*, the 'self', feel threatened in small and large ways by real or perceived transgressions. If you drive, for example, you won't go far without an opportunity to say "I forgive you." If you work or live with human beings, they will from time to time provoke our entitled self into a state of intolerance and grudge. When more significant betrayals occur such as terrible crimes against our dignity, well-being, or that of our loved ones, the act of forgiveness becomes more a process than a singular 'act', and the 'burning' of the antipathy left by wounding can take many years.



Pir Vilayat talked often of the 'nitty-gritty' work of forgiveness, and often used himself as Exhibit 'A'. Many of us will never forget the times when he spoke, with profound grief and heartache still evident, of how his beloved sister Noor-un-nisa died at the hands of the Nazis -- humiliated, tortured and then shot in a concentration camp.



Here was a great Sufi master, a man of seemingly infinite wisdom and strength, who often confessed that he could still not quite forgive the guards who carried out the awful deed. He found it to be a lifelong crucible to overcome the anger and outrage, and it was only towards the end of his life that Pir Vilayat was finally able to examine his conscience and find that forgiveness had at last come to that formerly embittered and wounded heart.

So what are we to do then, when even the masters fail at times? We must remember that the capacity to forgive which we are either unwilling or unable to find in our own heart is in a never-ending supply from the Divine source of that capacity -- *Al-Ghaffar*.

At those times when our heart is not ready, we can turn our inner gaze towards the Beloved and turn the job over to the Expert. For many decades, Pir Vilayat could not forgive the Nazi guards, but he could turn to the Presence of *Al-Ghaffar* and say: "I can't do this yet - can you please do the forgiving?"

As much as this strategy works beautifully when one is mired in animosity and resentment, one should not become dependent on relying on God to always do the forgiving for us. The Divine parent wants us to grow up as well. When we are very young, we can ask Father/Mother to do what is difficult for us. But as we mature, the responsibility becomes increasingly ours to try to do what the parent once did for us. If we continue to get Mom to do the laundry, and we're 25 years old, there's something wrong with that picture. So a balance should be struck between the mature approach of applying strong effort to subdue the ego's resistance to forgive, and the times when we must turn to Allah to do what we have not found a capacity to do....yet.



*By loving, forgiving, and serving,
it is possible for your whole life
to become one single vision
of the sublime beauty of God.*

(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

Qur'an: **And He alone is truly forgiving, all embracing in His love, in sublime almightiness enthroned a sovereign doer of whatever He wills.** *The Holy Koran, Al-Buruj 85:14-16*

Though God's forgiveness is infinite and for all, there is priceless value in the asking for that Divine forgiveness:

The first aspect of prayer is giving thanks to God for all the numberless blessings that are bestowed upon us at every moment of the day and night, and of which we are mostly unconscious.

The second aspect of prayer is laying our shortcomings before the unlimited perfection of the divine Being, and asking His forgiveness. This makes man conscious of his smallness, of his limitation, and therefore makes him humble before his God. And, by humbling himself before God man does not lose any virtue. God alone has the right to demand complete humility.



There is another side to this question: although humility is painful to the pride of man, the joy of humility is never known by the proud. The effect produced upon a man's own feeling is as if, by his very humility, he had opened the doors of the shrine of God which is in the heart of man. He who asks forgiveness of his friend, feels a joy that the friend does not know. And it must not be forgotten that it is not pride that gives joy, but humility, which gives a special joy.

(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

While I was roaming through the forest, a thorn pricked my bare foot and cried, "Ah, you have crushed me." I felt sorry and I asked its forgiveness.

A wasp flying in the air stung my arm and cried, "Ah, you have caught me in your sleeve." I felt sorry and I asked its forgiveness.

My foot slipped and I fell in a pool of muddy water. The water cried, "Ah, you have disturbed me." I felt sorry and I asked its forgiveness.

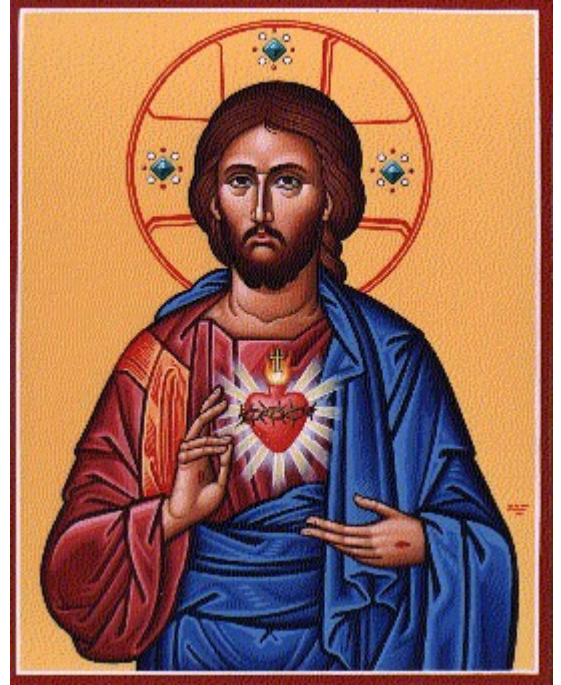
I absently happened to touch a burning fire, and the fire cried, "Ah, you have extinguished me." I felt sorry and I asked its forgiveness.



I asked my gentle self, "Have you received any harm?" "Be thankful," said she, "that is was not worse."

(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

(The one with mastery) overlooks the faults of others, considering that they know no better. He hides the faults of others, and suppresses any facts that would cause disharmony. His constant fight is with the Nafs, the root of all disharmony and the only enemy of man. By crushing this enemy man gains mastery over himself; this wins for him mastery over the whole universe, because the wall standing between the self and the Almighty has been broken down the life of a person is quite changed after being melted in the fire of love. The fire of love will exalt him so that his power will even influence animals and birds; the wise and foolish will be attracted to him alike. Once he is purified, burned in the fire of love, he will become the attraction of every soul, of every being, invisible as well as visible. It is only the advice of Satan that keeps him from that. The master is he who suffers. We often reflect upon how Jesus Christ washed the feet of his disciples. What beauty there is in that service, in that humility! Should we find that beauty in a proud man? Could a proud man win the hearts of the world for centuries and centuries? The proud man is led by Satan, he becomes egoistic, selfish, cold; everyone in his presence will freeze, for his presence is like ice and cannot impart comfort.



(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

But how forgiving is he who has been through all suffering! Was there anything else in Christ's life but forgiveness and tolerance? 'Always forgive, always tolerate,' he said. It was because the love in the heart of the Master was so great that it appealed to everyone. Love was all the philosophy that his fishermen could understand, and if love was placed before philosophy and religion how devoted would the devotees become. The animals and the birds would be attracted by the power of man's heart aflame with love. As it is, man only frightens love away at the least suspicion of its appearance, and so love never wants to come nearer.

(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

Qur'an: *And He alone is truly forgiving, all embracing in His love, in sublime almightiness enthroned, a sovereign doer of whatever He wills.*

Al-Buruj 85:14-16

Hadith:

The Prophet said: "Allah, praise be to Him, brings His servant close and hides him and asks him: 'do you know such and such sins?' The servant says, 'Yes, my Lord.' And He asks him again until he admits all his faults. Allah then says, 'I have concealed them in your life and today I forgive them' And he is given the book of his good deeds."

Al-Bukhari, Muslim



al-Qahhâr

The Ever-Prevailing, The Conqueror, The Dominant

Pronunciation notes: The esma of 'Qahhar' begins with a different alphabet letter than 'Ghaffar' ('qaf') but makes (more or less) the same sound. The 'h' is aspirated, and both 'h's are pronounced.

The universe is laid out and operates according to the laws of the One who created it. If we try to live our lives outside those laws and break them, we naturally suffer. So the counsel of the prophets is to submit to the self-evident truth that we are not in charge. The submission to the laws of Allah, which ultimately is involuntary, is one meaning of "Islam."

Qur'an: And to Him has surrendered whoever is in heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they shall all be returned."

(6:17)

The name al-Qahhar has perhaps been assigned more translations than the other Names. The root q-h-r has the connotation of overcoming, of dominance, prevailing, subjugating, subduing etc. The translation "The Crusher" is found, an example I enjoy if only for the startle effect. "Qahhar" is found in the origins of the name of Cairo.



Only He, may He be exalted, may force the natural phenomena to behave in an unusual manner. The Prophets' miracles are examples of this: "We said, 'O fire, be cool to Ibrahim and keep him safe.'"

(Samira Fayyad Khawaldeh)

Pir Vilayat worked with *Qahhar* as a wazifa in tandem often with *Qadir*, another Name of Divine Power. His approach to *Qahhar* was, I believe, more intuitive and esoteric than the more traditional definitions. He likened this attribute to cosmic Sovereignty, in contrast (and balance) to the force of *Qadir's* power. The practitioner of the wazifa *Qahhar* becomes "an ambassador of the spiritual hierarchy", he said, and gave as suggested archetypes Melchizedek and the archangel Gabriel.

(The goal is) the discovery of the traces of the King of Kings within oneself, a spark of that divine light which is the illumination of one's own heart, a ray of that sun which is the Light of the whole universe. - Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan

As is the law of balance in the Universe, God balances the dominating force of *Qahhar* with the clemency of *al-Latif*, gentleness and sensitivity. In our human inheritance of this quality of dominance and control, we too must set the scales so tenderness and kindness are practiced in a way that tempers the inclination to gorge on being overpowering, or being the alpha-anything.



Sheikh Tosun: "If a person with a sincere wish in their heart to free themselves from the domination of the ego and from the overwhelming worldly ambition remembers and recites "Ya Qahhar" as often as one can, one may be able to control the ego."

A practice (from Sa'adi Neil Douglas-Klotz):

Center again in the heart. Imagine the moment of the beginning Of the universe, when everything, including the "laws of the universe," Unfolded from a single point, which some scientists have called the "big bang." Feel this fireball of power clarifying and purifying your Heart, connecting you with the power that began the universe.

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al-Wahhâb

The Bestower, The Giver of Bounty

Pronunciation notes: In contrast to Qahhar, the 'h' in Wahhab is not aspirated, so it is simply "wa-hawb"

Allah is the One who continually pours out blessings, 'baraka,' giving freely and endlessly without any expectation of return. The root w-h-b in Arabic has the connotations of giving a gift, a donation, a grant, an endowment. *Wahhab* is an intensive form of *Wahib* ('giver')

Qur'an: Let not our hearts deviate now after Thou has guided us, But grant us mercy from Thine own Presence; For Thou art the Grantor of bounties without measure.
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A variant of *Wahhab* that Pir Vilayat loved as a sound practice was "*Wahhabo*". With the additional vowel at the end, the Name becomes animated and denotes more the bounty that comes with movement and progress. He gave as an image a stream running right to left as the sound was made *Ya Wah-ha-bo-o-o-o-o-o.....*

Ya Wahhabo - to make things go on which have stopped in their movement to cause movement in affairs.....

Ya Wahhab - to develop in a person's nature activity-in-movement

Ya Wahhabo - the word of progress....One must picture sometimes with

Ya Wahhabo the flowing life or running water, because that symbolizes progress in life.

(Hazrat Inayat Khan, Sangita/Sangatha papers, unpublished)

Poem by Tukaram (translated by Jonathan Star)

Now is the treasure unending
Laid open to all –
Come, take, and be rich.
Do not argue as to where
That treasure may be,
Or what jewels lie therein –
Come, take, and be rich.

Soon, like a pot broken and worn,
This body will grow old
But what the Master has to give
Remains forever new –
Come, take, and be rich.
No miserly doling of gifts with Him;
Like floods of water in a drought,
All that thy deepest soul needs
Is thine for the taking –
Come, take, and be rich.



It is easy from our limited viewpoints to see, when we choose to look, the gifts that we are naturally grateful for - our health, our food, the love in our lives, the goodness and sweetness. With spiritual maturation, we can become increasingly conscious of God's generosity and blessing coming in forms that we don't reflexively welcome. This can be perhaps most palpably felt in the atmosphere of blessing that surrounds those in transition from this physical plane. When first given the diagnosis of an illness which ends our physical body, we may not leap to the thought of "Oh, what a blessing." But in the end, as no doubt all of us have said in times of trouble and sorrow, 'it' turns out to be a blessing. Or to paraphrase the bad boys of rock, "You can't always get what you want - but sometimes, or maybe all the time, you get what you need."



The parent-child relationship illustrates this change of a perception of hardship into one of blessing. For example, my wife's family are hikers extraordinaire, and the children in the family have been indoctrinated in the ways of long walks up and down mountains from birth. Do you think the child who is struggling up the rocky mountainside is conscious of the blessing being given? No, they are often in a state of complaint, rejection, and wish for comfort. But just ask any of those children about some of their greatest blessings bestowed by family, and those nature walks will be near the top.

Now, can we think about what God gives us in the same way? This is where we need Khizr perhaps more than Moses to explain to our mind that pain, tragedy, and loss can hold a blessing.

When we become the *abd-al-Wahhab*, the servant of Wahhab, we become the benefactor, one who gives altruistically and with love rather than ego. The opportunities for this service are, of course, endless. The children's book "Miss Rumphius" comes to mind. It is about a rather simple and nondescript woman who blesses the world by sowing flowers around the countryside near the end of her life, leaving a profound gift of beauty to live on after an unassuming life as a librarian.

With regard to mankind's role in giving, Abû Hâmid al-Ghazâlî notes that:

Whoever bestows gifts with an eye to some interest to be realized by it sooner or later, be it appreciation, affection or release from blame, or acquiring distinction of mention - he is neither a giver nor generous, but rather engaged in transaction and recompense. ... But the one who sacrifices all he owns, even his life, for the sake of God alone - such a one is worthy of being named giver and generous.

Such a 'one' is Father Yuhanna:

From National Geographic, June 2009, by Don Belt:

On a mountain overlooking the Mediterranean near Beirut, a hermit rises at three in the morning, reaching for a flashlight amid the lumpy familiarity of books that are both his life's work and his lifelong bedmates. The hermit, who's 73, long-bearded, and known by the name Father Yuhanna, works there until dawn, translating ancient Christian hymns from Aramaic, the language of Jesus, into modern Arabic, copying them into a giant, leatherbound volume the size of a seat cushion. Then he prays, eats a piece of fruit, pulls on his black habit and cloak, and merrily sets off to deliver 10,000 blessings to every place in the world.



His first stop, always, is Alaska, where he “stocks up on fresh air.” Then he drifts down through North and South America, jumps to Africa, moves up through the Middle East, sweeps across Europe, then heads east into Russia and Asia before working his way south to Australia. Everywhere he goes, he distributes blessings, counting them off one by one on a string of woven rosary beads that fly through his fingers like doves. This daily trip takes three or four hours, and most days – if he doesn't linger too long over the trouble spots – he's back home by noon. To the untrained eye, he's just an old man walking around in a garden. To his friends and followers, who come by the hundreds to hear his teachings about Jesus, he's a saintly figure, a descendant of influential hermits like Simeon the Elder – a fifth-century ascetic who lived atop a stone pillar in the Syrian countryside for more than 30 years, attracting the pious devotion of locals.

Stories like this inspire us to bestow blessing in our own unique way. There are the innumerable ways that we can offer the attribute of *Wahhab* to all, through acts kindness visible and invisible, random and not so random. Simply the way that we make contact, such as our glance and tone of voice can be the vehicle for meaningful blessing on others. Then there is bringing blessing into our own lives for ourselves, in our cooking, in the way we light the incense, in the way we say a prayer, in a little song. “Let the beauty we love be what we do” is the wise counsel of Rumi.

It is my sincere prayer that you each feel the blessing being offered in this course on the 99 Names.....

The Irish poet and mystic John O'Donohue, who recently passed away, left a legacy of beautiful poems of blessing in several volumes. “Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings” is one I highly recommend. In this posting on the *esma al-husna*, I leave you with one of his blessing poems:

Beannacht
("Blessing")

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

And when your eyes
freeze behind
the grey window
and the ghost of loss
gets in to you,
may a flock of colours,
indigo, red, green,
and azure blue
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
in the currach of thought
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.

~ John O'Donohue ~
