

# ON THE WAY TOWARD THE CROSSROADS CALLED *NEW BEGINNINGS*

Reflecting on three of the ninety names Allah revealed in the *Qur'an*--Allah Al-Baith, Allah An-Nur, and Allah Al-Ghani--the author completes his last leg of his personal journey in the world of Islam toward his ultimate destination: a crossroads named *New Beginnings*.



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At the end, individuals and groups are left to their own devices and choices. More words will do little to pre-empt the choices which individuals are free to make and the actions they will take in their lives. And this was the purpose of the last paper: to underscore that God does not get involved in either public policy or the individual choices we make daily. All the deliberations we go through in directing ourselves in either the public or private sphere we do on our own without any external influences. At the same time, I am not saying that that Allah is totally absent from human affairs. Indeed, He is ever present and is always at our beckon call; He is the silent partner in all our deliberations and choices, ready to exhort, inspire, guide, and direct our every choice and action, but never ultimately undermining our ability to exercise free choice.

It was in light of the above thoughts that I wondered how best to bring this leg of my journey into Islam to a close. And as I looked down the path, which was quickly coming to an end at a crossroads aptly named *New Beginnings*, three of the magnificent ninety-nine names Allah revealed in the *Qur'an* and by which He desired to be summoned and through which the believer can receive His special blessings and His assurance of obtaining paradise, came to mind: Allah *Al-Baith*, Allah *An-Nur*, and Allah *Al-Ghani*.<sup>1</sup>

The name *Al-Baith* literally means “He who awakes”. Thus Allah *Al-Baith* refers to Allah the Awakener. The name assures the believer that death is not the end of our existence and that in the end Allah will awaken us for a resurrection from our own death. In life, the recitation of the name can be used by the believer to summon Allah so as to achieve a fuller awareness through His divine enlightenment.

The second glorious name *An-Nur* means “The Light” focussing the believer’s attention to the fact Allah is “the Light of the Heavens and the Earth,” the ultimate source of all light and is as such the most perfect light that illumines all and radiates throughout all of existence. Through the recitation of this second name the believer is assured that Allah will kindle his inner light.

The third most magnificent name which came to mind is *Al-Ghani*, “The Self-Sufficient”, accentuating that God is perfectly independent and totally transcends His creation. Allah has no need of anything we have to offer: our worship, prayers, adoration, sacrifices, offerings, compliance, and submission. The latter human religious behaviours and choices we make daily are all about us and not about Allah. Striving to be good, to create a civil and just society, offering thanks and worship to Allah are about us and add nothing to God’s Being. We are the ones that stand to gain

when we strive to live according to the noblest virtues possible; we are the ones that lose out when we fail in our efforts to live noble and virtuous lives. There is no added value to Allah, but there is much accrued value that can be realized when men and women strive to live in peace and harmony with their fellows in community.

These three of the ninety-names by which Allah wishes us to summon Him not only highlight His attributes, which exist in Him perfectly and absolutely, but constitute vehicles, constructs through which an individual can, in summoning Him, make Allah present in his or her life. Following closely texts from the *Qur'an*, Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqi describes this act of summoning as a *remembrance*, as a calling to mind of Allah, an act which “brings Divine blessings and a great reward”. In the *Qur'an*, Allah says:

“Therefore, remember Me and I will remember you; and be thankful unto Me and be not ungrateful towards me.”<sup>2</sup>

and

“Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.”<sup>3</sup>

and

“And remembrance of Allah is the greatest ...without doubt.”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, this summoning becomes a means of communicating with Allah and, in the process, of enabling ourselves to tap the most transcendent elements of our being, of our existence. For in the end these attributes are also qualities which we share with Allah, Who, as we are told in Genesis, made us in his own image and

likeness, except that in Allah, these attributes exist in their fullness, absolutely and perfectly. Thus, summoning Allah by the names by which He wishes to be invoked, is a special way by which to seek out and bond with those Divine elements within us which we share with Allah, albeit imperfectly.

As I got closer to the crossroads of *New Beginnings*, I realized that all behaviours which we exhibit, from the most ignoble to the noblest, from the most maleficent to the most beneficent, from the most primitive religious practices to the most refined religious paradigms are exclusively about us. The heights which we reach—be it in the arts and architecture, science and technology, music, and in intellectual and religious thinking—reflect our human efforts at simulating and replicating those transcendent elements which we share with Allah in our own limited and imperfect ways, in our spatio-temporal existence.

As creatures, we also share with Allah all those attributes which relate to his power over all created being. Three key ones include Allah *Al-Aziz* (The Great One), *Al-Muqtadi* (The Powerful), *Al-Qahir* (The Omnipotent), *Al-Wakil* (The Trustee), *Al-Hafiz* (The Preserver) and *Al-Muqit* (The Maintainer). These are also attributes which human beings possess and which they use in their struggle to survive, in their endeavours to acquire and create all the necessary means by which to exist, and to become self-sufficient. These efforts are in the end exerted to achieve and maintain dominion and sovereignty over and for oneself, and if necessary, over others. It is during this latter phase that power relations are established, and political systems emerge by which to navigate and manage these power relations. However it is also during this struggle to manage, expand, and maximize these power relations that individuals and groups lose sight of the transcendent elements of their being and become engrossed



solely with their own self-interest. Moreover they ignore the fact that while they share this attribute relating to the acquisition and exercise of power to maximize the other divine attribute of self-sufficiency, they forget that as creatures their share of these attributes is limited. They forget that even though they may be god-like, they are not Allah.

I had been walking all night toward the cross-roads named *New Beginnings* and all signs seemed to indicate that a new dawn was soon approaching on the horizon. And suddenly at a distance I heard a chant which sounded familiar, a chant that I had heard many times before during my stay long ago in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. It was the chant which the Mu'adhhdin of the local mosque sang five times a day, calling all the believers in the neighbourhood to prayer. The chant was channeled unto the air waves through several speakers secured around the minaret of the

mosque. I remember well that on several occasions I even woke up early before dawn, around 4:30 a.m., to listen to what had become for me an awesome, blessed event in which a leader from the local Muslim community was awakening, summoning, asking fellow believers to recall, to remember in prayer once again:

*Allaho Akbar*

Allah is the greatest

*Ash-hadu an la ilaha ill-Allah*

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah

*Ash-hado anna Muhammad-ar Rasulullah*

I bear witness that Muhammad

is the messenger of Allah

*Hayya 'ala's-salah*

Come to prayer

*Hayya 'ala'-l-falah*

Come to success

*Allaho-Akbar Allah is the greatest*

La ilaha ill-Allah

There is no god but Allah  
*As-salato Khair'un-min-an-naum*  
Prayer is better than sleep<sup>5</sup>

For me it had become an occasion to experience a kind of spiritual ecstasy. It was not just an impersonal sounding of the church bells every noon hour calling upon Catholics to recite the *Angelus*, which I had experienced everyday growing up in a small village in southern Italy. It was a personal summoning to the believers by the local Mu'adhin to awake and to remember Allah, and to affirm Him as Lord of all creation.

Even though the call to prayer had come to an end, I could still hear its melodious tones reverberate in my ears. As the resonance began to dissipate, it was gradually replaced by the noise of streaming water coming from a brook which flowed parallel to the path leading to the crossroads named *New Beginnings*. Its rippling sounds beckoned me to veer off the path and to dip my

hands into its soothing, cleansing, refreshing waters.

As I got closer to the crossroads of *New Beginnings*, I suddenly felt compelled to get on my knees and pray for all Muslims worldwide; a prayer which in the end became a prayer for all my fellow human beings. The crossroads I was about to reach and whose threshold I was praying that all Muslims could cross in our times was also a critical juncture in human development which I knew all human beings had to cross if they were to realize any meaningful progress in the human condition. And so, I prayed:

*All-Compassionate and Great Allah Al-Baith, awaken us all from our spiritual slumber before we lose ourselves completely in the darkened labyrinths of our inner self. Use whatever promptings or forces that are necessary to wake us so that we may become aware of your*

*presence and be reassured that we are not alone in this seemingly endless struggle to escape these shadowy mazes of our souls. Awake us so that we may remember you and in so doing also remember our way out of our spiritual prison.*

*Allah An-Nur, "The Light," the source of all light, which illuminates both visible and invisible realms of being, rekindle the light within us and enlighten our path. Help us to discern right from wrong, good from evil so that we can become empowered to make wise and prudent choices as we inch closer to this crossroads of New Beginnings. More importantly, give us the courage and strength to make this important crossing beyond which new possible futures await us and our children.*

*Allah An-Nur illuminate the path before us not only so that we can avoid pitfalls, obstacles, or distracting detours, but more importantly so that we can clearly see this new axis of our existence, execute a safe crossing and come to understand deeply how to travel through this path of new beginnings.*

*Allah Al-Ghani, Allah “The Self-sufficient”, you are totally independent of us and are in no need of anything we have to offer, help us to understand and appreciate that we have to execute this new path on our own, that this path and all its myriad of possibilities, challenges are all about us. They have nothing to do with you. Help us to realize that while the latter may be true, it is also true that we human beings need each other in traversing this path of new beginnings.*

*Unlike you, Who are perfectly self-sufficient, the same cannot be said about us.*

*While it is true that at the end of the day, we each have to walk our own unique path in life, the journey cannot be made alone. We need each other, not only in securing all the necessary means by which to survive and experience more fully all that human existence and this journey have to offer, but also in moving forward in pursuit of our evolutionary destiny. Then perhaps we will come to comprehend your words of praise You lavish on us, your creation, in the Qur'an: "Ye are the best Of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God".<sup>6</sup>*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The names of Allah used in the development of this Epilogue and their interpretation originate in their excellent and inspiring treatment by Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqi, *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah*, Delhi, India: Adam Publishers, 1990. The reader should also note that, except for direct quotes, my own use of some of the ninety-nine names and the accompanying personal thoughts and reflections start with Mr. Siddiqi's interpretation in accordance with the Islamic tradition.

<sup>2</sup>*Qur'an* 2:152

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, 13:28

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, 29:45

<sup>5</sup>Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, *Salat*, Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf Printing, 1991, pp, 12f.

<sup>6</sup>*Qur'an* 3:110