

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & PRACTICES**  
***Sacred Laughter of the Sufis: Awakening the Soul with the Mulla's***  
***Comic Teaching Stories and Other Islamic Wisdom***  
**Imam Jamal Rahman**

**Part 1: Our Human Condition**

**Searching for Our True Identity**

At this time, how do you evaluate yourself and others?

What benchmarks do you use for defining personal success or failure?

**Stuck in Patterns**

What is one “cheese sandwich” pattern in your life?

Choose a simple but effective change that you could make to alter this pattern. Try it for a week. Do you notice any positive shifts?

**Overlooking the Obvious**

How would you articulate your mission in life?

**Part 2: Some Shifts in Awareness**

**The Storms in Our Lives**

What changes have you made throughout your life journey as a result of your higher awareness?

What else needs to be done?

**Asking Deeper Questions**

What are some of the awe-inspiring questions that arise in your heart?

**Spirituality Is an Experience**

What experiences in your life have brought you closer to Presence, Mystery, Spirit or God?

**We Foolish Humans**

Do you believe that within you resides a divine essence and that you can connect with it?

Is there someone in your life who can listen and support you when you talk about these topics and experiences?

**Three Stages of Knowing Oneself**

How well do you know yourself?

What steps can you take to develop your relationship with yourself?

### **Part 3: Foibles and Vulnerabilities**

#### **Seeking Approval from Others**

Who are the people and institutions whose approval you seek? Write down their names.

In each case, examine whether this person or institution exemplifies the values and ethics you believe in.

#### **Clinging to an Image**

In which areas of your life do you feel a need to hold on to an image?

Whose approval are you seeking?

Why is it important to you?

Does this image reflect your true identity, or an identity you or someone else has conjured up?

#### **Slavish Dependence on Authorities and Experts**

In what other ways can you “consult your heart”?

#### **Swayed by Outer Forms**

Take honest stock of the kinds of people you choose to befriend. Examine the underlying reasons for your choices, and if they are merely self-serving, take steps to adopt more worthy criteria for your relationships.

#### **Appetite for Praise and Titles**

Can you name a quality in yourself that has been praised by others?

#### **Know and Laugh at Your Eccentricities**

Whose generosity and help do you take for granted?

Do you feel that you have been sufficiently grateful?

What changes in your attitude and behavior might be more optimal?

#### **Excuse after Excuse**

Become aware of your excuses. Reflect on what you excuse yourself from, and how. Take note of how much time, energy and creativity you invest in making excuses for yourself.

#### **Truth of Convenience**

What are some truths of convenience, little or big, that you engage in?

What are some gentle steps you can take, little by little, to substitute unvarnished truth for these truths of convenience?

### **Attached to the Familiar**

What are some attachments that you need to let go of? Write them down and give yourself permission to look at them.

### **Fear Is All You Need**

When you are feeling anxious, a very effective practice is to concentrate on your nostrils and be present with your breath moment to moment. This simple meditation will lower your pulse rate and soften the sharp edge of anxiety.

Make a list of people in your life whom you consciously or unconsciously manipulate through use of fear. Reflect on ways you can minimize the fear tactic and replace it with something more life-affirming.

## **Part 4: Wariness of Religious Institutions**

### **Deferred Spiritual Maintenance**

When do you find yourself in the position of defending the pronouncements of your religious institution, even though you have strong doubts about it?

How do you deal with that?

### **How Some Religious Customs Began**

What are some religious traditions or customs that you are uncomfortable with?

How do you deal with your objections?

### **Belief, Faith and Borrowed Certainty**

Do you espouse any religious beliefs that are rooted not in your personal conviction but in hearsay and “borrowed certainty”?

## **Part 5: Spiritual Practices**

### **Honor the Present Moment**

What are some sad or angry incidents from your past that you revisit often?

### **Strive to Be Grateful**

What are some hidden blessings from a difficult period of your life that have emerged from your own experience?

How has that discernment changed your understanding of suffering?

**Spirit of Prayer**

What practices help you remain conscious of Divinity or Spirit daily?

**Efficacy of Prayers of Supplication**

What are some of your personal supplications?

**Efficacy of Rituals and Spiritual Practices**

What are some spiritual practices you do daily?

**Signs in Nature**

What are some teachings and insights from signs in nature that are especially meaningful for you?

**Part 6: Wisdom for the Inner Journey****Seeking in the Right Direction**

Do you have a special way of dealing with your difficult feelings? What do you do?

**Not All Tears Are Equal**

As a daily practice, recall a time when you felt a life-giving feeling of happiness, joy, passion or beauty.

**Little by Little**

Name any areas of your life where you need to take more radical action.

What might that action be, and how can you accomplish it?

**Blessed Are the Flexible**

Make a conscious effort to become aware of areas in your life where you are rigid and unbending.

What makes you realize that you are stern in those places?

In what ways can you be more flexible without compromising your values?

**A Sense of Balance**

In what areas of your life are you feeling unbalanced or overstepping bounds?

**Web of Interconnection**

Which people have had a major impact on your life?

What are the watershed events in your life?

**Thank God for Diversity**

Think of a time you had to experience something unknown or unfamiliar. What feelings arose in you, and how did you deal with them?

How would you deal with them now?

### **Cultivate Hope through Patience and Faith**

Think of a time you lost hope and felt forlorn. What helpful actions did you take during that time that eventually restored your sense of peace?

### **The True Teacher Kindles the Light**

Do you believe you have within you an inner teacher?

In what ways has this guide manifested in your life, and what can you do to honor it?

## **Part 7: Knowing God**

### **Connecting to Mystery**

Do you find yourself wanting to connect with God only in times of difficulties?

What would be a simple but effective daily practice for you to bond with your Sustainer at all times?

### **If God Wills**

Do you believe it is good or necessary to invoke the name of Divinity in your everyday conversations?

How often do you actually do it?

## **Part 8: Be Engaged in the World**

### **Do What Is Beautiful**

In what ways can you be more gracious and generous with family, friends, colleagues, strangers and people who annoy you?

### **Building Community**

Who are the people in your life who qualify—through mutual love, trust and regard for truth—to be in your circle of love?

### **Justice and Conflict Resolution**

What kind of conflicts are you currently experiencing in your life?

What are some creative ways to heal or resolve them?

### **Revere the Wombs That Bore You**

What kind of gender bias do you see in yourself, in family members and in your community?

What kind of customs does your religion follow that are unfair to women, and what kind of changes would you like to see?

How can you help to make a difference in your place of worship?

### **Advice on Marriage**

If marriage is a sacred union of body and soul, what steps can we take to get to know our partner beyond personality?

### **Honor the Children**

Consider teaching your children two life-changing Sufi practices that will connect them to the mystery of life within and without. These two techniques, which are at the heart of Sufi practices, have been mentioned in an earlier chapter:

- Touch your heart and tell the space of your heart, “I love you” and “I thank you.”
- Focus on your heart and send out light and love to the essence of everything you see.

## **Part 9: It's Time to Return Home**

### **It's Later Than You Think**

What are your personal and spiritual goals?

### **The End Is Coming!**

What are your beliefs about end times?

Do you take scriptural descriptions literally, or do you regard them as allegories and metaphors for the great mystery that lies ahead?

Either way, how do your beliefs affect the way you live your life?

### **It's Not Like You Think It Is**

Imagine that you are going to die soon. Ask yourself:

- What remains unsaid and to whom?
- What remains undone and why?