

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Spiritual Gems of Islam Insights & Practices from the Qur'an, Hadith, Rumi & Muslim Teaching Stories to Enlighten the Heart & Mind

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Gem 1

From “Selected Qur’anic Passages and Hadith” (page 216), choose at least one Qur’anic verse that could serve as a guide or inspiration for the next few days. Why does the verse appeal to you?

Gem 2

From the life of the Prophet Muhammad (or any other prophet with whom you are familiar), choose a spiritual practice that you would like to try for at least a month. For example, like the Prophet, you might meditate regularly in a quiet, secluded place, or fast one day a week, or pray at least once a day. How does your sustained adoption of this practice enhance your understanding of your tradition’s sacred text?

Gem 3

The rigors of the spiritual journey can bring periods of sadness and depression. There is sacredness in these times of burden and confusion. Where do you find spiritual support? How can you offer it to others? How can you be gentle with yourself?

Gem 4

What experiences in your life have brought you closer to God? What events have separated you from God?

What sustains your faith in God?

Gem 5

Can you identify at least one “cheese sandwich” pattern of behavior you are stuck in?

What are two negative traits in yourself that you would like to diminish?

What are two beautiful qualities that reflect your authentic self and that you want to expand?

Gem 6

Prophet Muhammad’s challenge to “die before you die” means that we have to do the inner work of dying to all that is false in us so that we can give birth to our divine essence. This is the way to fully experience joy, peace, intimacy, and fulfillment. Rumi reminds us of the existential importance of this task. He tells us that we might know the value of every item of merchandise, “but if you don’t know the value of your own soul, it’s all foolishness.” What are the personal qualities that you most value in yourself? in others?

Gem 7

What excuses do you make to avoid the spiritual journey? What are some things you can do to make a conscious commitment to begin the journey, one wing-flap at a time?

Gem 8

When thinking about a sacred name, the key is to find one that brings up feelings of mercy and gentleness, something like “Sweetheart,” “Dear One,” “Brother / Sister _____” (for example, “Brother Jamal”), or whatever feels genuine and evokes compassion for yourself. What would you choose to be your sacred name?

Gem 9

Consider the spiritual need to distinguish between *behavior* and *being* in dealing with someone difficult in your life. How does this impact your speech or actions?

Gem 10

Amazingly, the “little by little” application leads eventually to a quantum leap, and then the cycle starts again. There is incremental progress and then yet another quantum leap. It truly pays to persist little by little. Can you think of a time in your own life when persistent practice led to a major shift in your awareness?

Gem 11

Try a contemplative group practice: Close your eyes and bring your attention to rest on your heart. Go deeper into that space, and begin to connect with your heart. Listen to your heartbeat and repeat a life-affirming word or verse with gratitude for the present moment. Stay with this for a few minutes. When each person feels ready, discuss your experience. What felt right? What was frustrating?

Gem 12

Have you ever felt an unexplained sadness, loneliness, or yearning inside you? How do you embrace the feeling with compassion and mercy for yourself?

Gem 13

What ritual of purification and release have you created to diminish the ego qualities that you saw yourself manifesting?

Gem 14

When moved to “speak your truth,” do you find that it is kind and necessary, and are you speaking from the little self of ego or the higher self of compassion and justice?

Gem 15

During a typical day, how do you deal with difficult feelings? Do you tend to avoid or deny them?

Gem 16

Recall the primordial covenant between God and humanity (*Alastu bi Rabbikum*) described in Gem 3 and contemplate the Islamic belief that our work in this lifetime is to bring that cosmic state of surrender into consciousness and live it day by day here on earth. What prevents you from surrendering your ego to God?

What is one simple step you can take right now to move you forward on the path of surrender?

Gem 17

In a hadith reported by Ayesha, during good times the Prophet used to say, “Praise be to God, whose grace brings all goodness to perfection,” and in difficult times he said, “Praise be to God under all conditions.” Can you create a personal prayer of gratitude to use regularly?

Gem 18

Keep your tongue forever moistened with the name of Allah. (Hadith)

Call upon your Sustainer humbly and in the secrecy of your hearts. (Qur’an 7:55)

Can you think of a sacred word or sentence that, when repeated in the heart, evokes for you a unique connection with Mystery?

Gem 19

What actions do you perform regularly that qualify in your mind as good deeds?

Gem 20

From your pool of family members, relatives, friends, and acquaintances, who would you choose to be members of your outer Circle of Love?

Gem 21

Can you think of times in your life when, despite personal inconvenience and opposition from others, you chose to be just and equitable? How did it feel? If you suffered difficult consequences, how did that affect you?

Gem 22

Examine your attitude about little lies and truths of convenience. What is on your list of small prevarications you concoct in the course of the day?

Gem 23

Describe an incident where you overreacted to a comment about religion. How did you overreact and why?

Are there areas of your faith tradition that you feel particularly sensitive about when challenged? If so, what are they?

Gem 24

Ask the group for help resolving conflict in your life. Sit together in silence for a few moments. When you are ready, have your Circle of Love summon the soul of the person with whom you are having a difficult issue that you would like to resolve. The person's soul arrives and asks you to experience whatever feelings his or her presence evokes. What is it you want or need in relation to this person?

Gem 25

Which of your beliefs come from personal reflection, explorations, and experiences, rather than hearsay and tradition? Are these ever in conflict with one another?

What do you do when you experience a conflict between conventional interpretation and your personal understanding of some aspect of a sacred text?

Gem 26

In your life, what events and circumstances deepened your faith in God?

When have you mistrusted your faith? What happened to restore your faith?

Gem 27

What are some gender biases you notice in yourself?

What are some gender biases you notice in others, especially family members?

Gem 28

Do you have personal and social relationships with people who differ from you in religion, color, culture, political affiliation, and / or economic status? If so, when feelings of discomfort arise in you, what do you do about these feelings?

Gem 29

When you intend to forgive someone who has wronged you, or seek forgiveness from someone whom you have wronged, what difficult feelings surface?

How can you remember to embrace these difficult feelings with mercy for yourself?

Gem 30

Have you ever had an experience with an angel, a *jinn*, or the energies of Satan? If so, in what ways did the encounter impact you and your life?

Gem 31

What are some dramatic situations in your life that you can laugh about now?

Gem 32

What are your personal beliefs about Heaven and Hell? How do they guide your actions?

Gem 33

What epitaph would you like to be inscribed on your grave?