

## AL-HĀDĪ, AL-RASHĪD – THE GUIDE (1-2)

*‘But sufficient is your Lord as a guide and a helper.’*

[25:31]



It would have been fitting to start a book on the names of God with the names most frequently used: Allah, al-Rabb (the Lord), or al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm (the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful). However, we will begin with His name al-Hādī – the Guide – as well as the related name, al-Rashīd, because the result of knowing God is guidance to Him, God willing. When reading His names and attributes, in addition to knowing God, our intention should be guidance to Him.

### The Guide

The Arabic root of the word al-Hādī is *hā-dāl-yā* which, in essence, means to incline towards something. This root gives rise to two main meanings: it is used to describe guidance, as well as gentleness and calm. A gift in Arabic is *hadiyyah*, which is from the same root, because it makes the heart incline towards the giver of the gift; it guides the heart to that person. This is why guidance cannot be forced; at its root is gentleness.

When we think of guidance in religious terms, we tend to think of it as all or nothing – you are either guided or you are not. But guidance is a spectrum, a path which should ultimately lead to Allah and Paradise. Until we get there, God willing, we need further guidance – to continue on the path, to deal with the

obstacles, and to not be seduced by the distractions that we may encounter along the way.

Think about it: Why would we go to a guide?

We seek a guide when we are in complete darkness and need someone to guide us out of it.

We seek a guide when we are lost and confused.

We seek a guide when we want a better way.

We seek a guide when we want specific details about the best path.

It is only the arrogant and the heedless who think that they are already sufficiently guided and there is nothing more for them to learn or do; that thought is already a sign that they are in need of further guidance. It takes humility and true intelligence to realize that at every stage, we need to seek guidance from the Ultimate Guide. This is why all Muslims – indeed, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself – recite in every prayer: ‘Guide us to the straight path.’ [1:6

Whatever level we are at, we all need some form of guidance.

As for His name al-Rashīd, in *Lisān al-‘Arab*, it is stated that: ‘Al-Rashīd is the one who directs His servants to what is beneficial for them i.e. He guides them and shows them the way.’ The scholar al-Rāzī stated that this word has two related meanings: one is that *rashīd* is related to the word *rāshid* which, when used to describe someone, means that this person has a clear vision that is informed by wisdom and knowledge; the second is related to *murshid*, which means one who guides or directs. Thus al-Rashīd refers to One who directs to the right path with a clear vision as to the intended outcome, informed by wisdom and knowledge. Allah tells us in the Qur’an that our destination is Him and Paradise, and He shows us the way. The difference between direction (*rushd*) and guidance (*hidāyah*) is that *hidāyah* is also guidance *along* the path. Moreover, there are levels to *hidāyah*, which is why we constantly ask God for

guidance in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah: ‘*Guide us (ihdinā) to the straight path.*’ [1:6]

You can be guided so that you are now cognizant of God, then you can be guided further to better deeds and closeness to Him; ultimate guidance comes in following the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the most excellent manner. *Hidāyah* is also something that penetrates the heart.

Al-Ghazālī states that al-Rashīd is the One who directs you without needing signs. If I have to rely on Google Maps to direct someone, I cannot say that I have this attribute, because I am seeking help to direct someone to the way, but Allah does not need such tools. Thus, God sets us on the path, directing us through His wisdom to our ultimate destination.

In the Qur’an, the words *rushd* or *rashīd* are used in the following contexts: ‘*They said, “Shu‘ayb, does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers worshipped and refrain from doing whatever we please with our own property? Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man (rashīd).”*’ [11:87]

God also tells us that He has made clear the right path from the wrong one: ‘*There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course (al-rushd) has become clear from the wrong.*’ [2:256]

Allah is the One who directs us to the destination because He is the One who best knows the way, without needing directions or signs from any other. If you were lost and seeking directions, you would seek it from someone whom you *know* will direct you not simply to one way, but to the best way to the ultimate destination. There are many different apps that we download in order for us to navigate through the best routes; similarly, we should recite the Qur’an and seek to understand the Sunnah to find out which way to God is best.

## Types of guidance

Allah's guidance is vast and wide. There is, at a very basic level, general guidance for all of His creation to that which benefits them. God says in the Qur'an: *'He [Moses] said, "Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it]."'* [20:50]

According to scholars, this is the natural 'guidance' of, for example, the bees who collect nectar from flower blossoms and gradually turn it into honey, the child who nurses from his or her mother, and even the capacity to learn that which will benefit us, such as cooking food or developing medicine. These are all possible because of the faculties given to us and other living creatures by God in order to guide us to what is best for us. This is the basic, general guidance.

Then, there is the guidance to God and His straight path. We are told in the Qur'an: *'There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book, by which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darknesses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.'* [5:15-16]

God is the One who guides us to know Him and His way. The use of our faculties should lead us to this conclusion, and God places signs in the universe, through His Words, and His people.

Many of us may think that it stops here. Once we are guided to believe in God, and perhaps fulfil the basic requirements that the path to Him involves, we may think that we are sufficiently guided. But God tells us that guidance increases: *'Indeed, they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance.'* [18:13] Allah also says: *'And Allah increases those who were guided, in guidance.'* [19:76]

Guidance does not stop. This increase in guidance means increase in faith, tranquility and steadfastness, increase in good deeds, and increase in understanding. A person who has discovered that there is a path may stop there, reaching out to the Guide only when he or she has strayed or feels lost. But when you have access to the Guide,

who can not only show you better and more beautiful ways, but can be with you throughout the journey, why would you not seek His guidance throughout? Indeed, why would you not want this Guide to accompany you throughout your journey?

Finally, there is guidance to Paradise:

*'And they will say, 'Praise to Allah, who has guided us to this; and we would never have been guided if Allah had not guided us. Certainly the messengers of our Lord had come with the truth.' And they will be called, "This is Paradise, which you have been made to inherit for what you used to do." [7:43]*

Ultimately, God guides us to Paradise. That is where the Straight Path leads, and we can only reach there with His aid.

### The ways of guidance

While we know that God is the Guide in the abstract, *how* does Allah guide us to Him?

Allah guides us to Him and His attributes firstly through the universe. He tells us in the Qur'an: *'He causes to grow for you thereby the crops, olives, palm trees, grapevines, and from all the fruits. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who give thought.'* [16:11]

There are many such verses in the Qur'an, pointing to the signs in the universe. These signs, if properly pondered, should lead us to Allah; who else brought the universe into being, and everything in it? Scientists try to find out the 'how' – the Big Bang theory, for example – but they cannot expand upon a 'why' without recognizing that there is a 'who': God Himself, the Originator. Indeed, the natural guidance that God bestowed us with should enable us to recognize that all things come into being because someone brings them into being – they have a 'creator'. No one assumes that a phone, for example, came into existence because a perfect storm of factors and circumstances led to its invention,

without a human hand; it is a basic function of a human's cognitive abilities to recognize that *someone* made the phone.

Indeed, this type of reflection also leads to an understanding of some of His attributes. For example, we can understand that He is the Creator, that He is all-Powerful, that He is the Provider, and that He shows Mercy. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, in a society that worshipped multiple idols, retreated to the Cave of Ḥirā to reflect. He reflected on the heavens and the earth, and became more resilient in his conclusions that the idols could not be real; they were not God. That is when he received revelation.

This revelation is the detailed guidance. God tells us: *'Indeed, this Qur'an guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a great reward.'* [17:9]

While reflecting on the universe may bring us to the realization of the existence of God and some of His attributes, it is His book that further guides us to the details. It informs us of His attributes that we may not reach through reflection, such as His attribute of answering the supplications of His creation. It exhorts us to think, teaches us the meaning of the world around us, and shows us how to worship Him. This is the guidance of His book.

But, as human beings, we may misinterpret some of the guidance that is in the Qur'an. Due to limited knowledge, we may define words differently to what they are intended to mean. And many of us may not connect to words, but rather need to see guidance in action. And that is why God sends us His people: *'Those are the ones whom Allah has guided, so from their guidance take an example.'* [6:90]

The ones whom Allah has guided are, first and foremost, His Prophets, and then those who follow them. Through them, we see guidance and faith in action; when we are truly guided, they are the ones to whom we aspire.

Combining the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, they teach us both to pray and how to pray, to speak

well, to fast and how to fast, to help others, to give charity and the best way of giving charity, to establish justice, and so on. And this is also the secret to asking for more guidance in *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*; we want to be more like the Prophets, and hence we must constantly be learning and improving.

We must remember that the way of the Prophet ﷺ was the way of moderation. When some Companions came to the Prophet ﷺ to inform him of their acts of worship – praying all night and not sleeping; fasting every single day without a break; never getting married – the Prophet ﷺ corrected them. Putting in effort for the sake of Allah is commendable, but not to the extent that you do not give your body or your family their due rights. Indeed, giving them their rights is part of the worship of God.

In *Sūrat al-Kahf*, the youth of the cave made the following supplication to God: *'Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance (rashadan).'*' [18:10]

They were being persecuted for their beliefs and had nowhere to turn for refuge but the cave. There, they asked God to show them the best way out of their predicament. In that story, God caused them to sleep for over 300 years, and then showed them that they were on the right path. The tyrant died and the people were then able to follow the youths' example without fear. Thus, remember that sometimes wisdom and direction are not rewarded or appreciated by people, but the fruits will show later, God willing (*inshā'Allah*).

Finally, Allah guides us through His direct actions with us. We can all point to at least one incident – if not many – in which we have felt God being directly with us. Sometimes it is the response to a verbalized prayer or the actualization of a silent hope. It can be an answer to a question only God knew you had asked, or the coming together of events so perfectly they could only be planned by Him. Or it could be in the biggest test you ever had to endure that forced you to turn to Him.

Regardless of all these means of guidance, we are still required to put in the effort and make that choice to follow guidance. A Guide would not force you to be guided. A Guide will show you the path, and you can choose whether to take that path or not. As Allah tells us: *'The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve.'* [18:29]

### **But I feel lost...**

Sometimes this feeling of being lost can bring us closer to God.

At times, we *need* to feel as though we do not know where we are going, because that is when we start searching. And that is precisely when Allah shows you that He is The Guide (al-Hādī), and how life changes when the Light of God is in it.

Perhaps you started out something with a sense of purpose, but in your journey, you were knocked off the path towards the greater goal. You need al-Hādī. Maybe you are having some sort of mid-life crisis. You need al-Hādī. It could be that you are confused about what path to take in your life that would benefit you in this life and the next. You need al-Hādī. And we cannot for one moment believe that there is no way out and no right path. Allah says in a revelation from God expressed in the words of the Prophet ﷺ (a hadith *qudsī*): *'O My servants, all of you are astray except for those I have guided, so seek guidance of Me and I shall guide you.'* [Muslim]

Guidance can come in numerous ways. It can even come in the so-called 'coincidences' that we experience – which are not coincidences at all – that cause us to reflect or to turn to Allah. How many of us have experienced guidance from where we did not expect it? Indeed, the Prophet's ﷺ Companion 'Umar was on his way to kill the Prophet ﷺ, when he was stopped by someone who said to him that his own sister had accepted Islam. That detour was Allah's guidance. He angrily went to his sister's home, and in a fit of rage, hit her and caused her to bleed. His guilt at that moment

– and guidance can come in a moment – softened his heart to the extent needed for him to hear the message.

So, guidance can take place over time, or in can come in a moment. It can be in sincere advice someone gives you, or in a verse of the Qur'an that you happen to hear or recite, or through an unexpected detour. Our knowledge of Allah's name al-Hādī should cause us to always have our hearts open to His guidance, as well as the conviction that His guidance *will* come, especially for those who seek it.

As Allah gave Himself the attributes of Guidance and Light, how can we ever believe that we will be in darkness for too long?

**What about misguidance? Does God misguide too?**

Some might say, 'perhaps I am not guided because Allah has misguided me.' They point to such verses in the Qur'an: *'If God so willed, He would have made you all one people, but He leaves to stray whoever He will and guides whoever He will. You will be questioned about your deeds.'* [16:93]

If we do not understand the nature of guidance, and if we do not read the Qur'an holistically, it is easy to misinterpret this verse and other similar verses. As we mentioned above, there are different stages and levels to guidance. At a very basic level, everyone has been sent some of the means of guidance, whether that be through the universe around us, or His books, or His people. Thus, God has guided us by giving us these means. We are told in the Qur'an: *'As for Thamud, We gave them guidance but they preferred blindness.'* [41:17]

The people of Thamūd were given guidance, but they *chose* not to follow it. By nature, a guide does not force us, but shows us the way. Following the Guide is up to us.

As for the person who goes to the Guide and says 'help me to follow the signs and remain on the path', the Guide will be with him or her even more. That person may feel more motivation,

closeness to the Guide, and certainty. That is another level or stage of guidance. But it needs a person to make the choice – to *will* – to be guided, and that is the person who will then taste the sweetness of guidance. The person who, out of his or her own volition, *chooses not* to follow God's guidance, will not taste the sweetness of faith – that is the person that is left to stray. Allah tells us about the hypocrites in the Qur'an: *'Why are you divided in two about the hypocrites, when God Himself has rejected them because of what they have done? Do you want to guide those God has left to stray? If God leaves anyone to stray, you [Prophet] will never find the way for him.'* [4:88]

God is careful to tell us that He rejected the hypocrites *'because of what they have done.'* They did not want to be guided and committed acts of treachery; if people do not want to be guided, then *we* cannot put the sweetness of guidance in their hearts. That only comes from Allah. There is the guidance that one chooses to follow, in which one is given the choice, and then because of that, God puts the sweetness of guidance in one's heart, which is itself a form of guidance.

Moreover, while many translations capitalize 'He wills' in the verse above to indicate Allah, in Arabic it can be read in another way: the 'he' in lowercase, referring to the person, not to God. Thus, some scholars understand the 'he' to be not Allah but the person, affirming that if that person *wants* (hence 'he wills' in lowercase) to be guided, then God will help him. God tells us: *'It is not (attributable to) Allah that He should lead a people astray after He has guided them; He even makes clear to them what they should guard against; surely Allah knows all things.'* [9:115]

It is crucial to remember that God's names are al-Hādī – the Ultimate Guide – and al-Rashīd – the One who Directs to the Right Path – so no one who seeks Him will ever be turned away, and everyone is given signs. But we are given the choice in whether we wish to follow the Guide or turn away.

## Living with these names

### 1. Put in the effort to be guided

Take the first step of realizing that He has this attribute, and have the certainty that Allah will not turn a seeker away. Then, ask Him with certainty. Supplicate to Him, pray the prayer for guidance (*ṣalāt al-istikhārah*) and talk to Him. Finally, use the means around you. Re-assess your goals, seek people's advice and take the steps needed to try to find an answer. When we feel an internal instability, these steps may be hard, but God tells us '*And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways.*' [29:69].

Moreover, Sheikh Rātīb al-Nabulsī stated that the closer a person is to God, the more likely he is to have this attribute of *rushd*. Allah says in the Qur'an: '*God has endeared faith to you and made it beautiful to your hearts; He has made disbelief, mischief, and disobedience hateful to you. It is people like this who are rightly guided (rāshidūn) through God's favor and blessing: God is all knowing and all wise.*' [49:7-8]

### 2. Be gentle in guiding people to good

Guide people to the Guide. The Prophet ﷺ said '*by Allah, were Allah to guide a single man through you would be better for you than a herd of red camels.*'<sup>2</sup> [Abū Dāwūd] When Moses and Aaron were sent to Pharaoh, they were told '*speak to him gently so that he may take heed, or show respect.*' [20:44] We should show people the truth in our words and in our actions, and we should do so out of love. This religion is a truly a gift with which God blesses the one who has it, so we should want to spread God's gifts to others because we truly care.

Moreover, Ibn al-Qayyim says: '*God is rashīd and He loves rushd, and so He makes whom He loves like that [i.e. gives them this quality].*' God tells us that He gave the Prophet Abraham,

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<sup>2</sup> 'Red camels' denotes great wealth.

peace be upon him, this quality: *'Long ago We bestowed right judgment (rushdahu) on Abraham and We knew him well.'* [21:51]

The Prophet Abraham was given wisdom and direction, and thus he was able to direct others in the way that suited them best. He knew how to make his people think when he destroyed all of the idols (21:51-67), and he was able to debate the tyrant in a way that was suited to him (2:258). A person can have this quality in its limited human form by asking God and seeking knowledge in order to gain wisdom (and not simply to 'know a lot').

### ***3. Remember that you cannot force people into guidance***

God says in the Qur'an: *'You [Prophet] cannot guide everyone you love to the truth; it is God who guides whoever He will: He knows best those who will follow guidance.'* [28:56]

While we should inform others about our faith, and show them its beauty in our words and deeds, God will put the light of guidance in the hearts of those who choose guidance; we cannot do that. The uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, Abū Ṭālib – who had stood by the Prophet ﷺ through so much – wanted to remain on the ways of his ancestors. He made that choice, and God allowed him that. The Prophet ﷺ could not force him to choose otherwise. Thus, our responsibility is to be people of guidance through our speech and action, all the while knowing that we cannot and should not force people.