

**The Connection
Between the Absolute
and the Relative**



**A Conversation with
Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri**



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Publisher's Note

This 1990 conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, in which he talks about wide-ranging topics, is as relevant today as it was when it was first conducted, for it presents Islam as the archetypal, universal, Adamic path that began when humanity rose in consciousness to recognize duality and began its journey from the relative back to Absolute Unity.

It was first published as a free booklet in 1992. It is now being published as an eBook, with slight editing, for the sincere seeker who is searching for universality within Islam.

The introduction by John Giancarlo, who had this conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, is being kept in this eBook for historical context.

About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

About John Giancarlo

John Giancarlo, who passed away in 2018 at the age of 90, was an educator in Canada. He began his teaching career in Niagara with the Crowland Public School system in 1949.

In 1956 he was appointed Principal of Maple Leaf School in Welland, and continued his career as a Principal until 1967, when he accepted a position as the Chairman of Humanities at the newly constructed Niagara College, and went on to become Dean of Applied Arts as the College grew and developed.

His great curiosity about our world and the universe led him to enjoy reading books on many topics including science, philosophy, nature, health and medicine. He had a keen interest in other people and showed great thoughtfulness and generosity.

Introduction *by* John Giancarlo

This booklet is presented with the hope that it will help people to better understand the concepts of Islam and to lead them to a higher level of reverence for God and greater level of spiritual fulfillment. Islam signifies submission to God, and a Muslim is one who submits to God. Muslims, Christians and Jews are united by their belief in One Divine Being, variously named God, Jehovah or Allah, who enjoins us to respect life and to love one another. They also share the belief of the survival of the inner self or soul after the body dies.

Unfortunately, the popular media often report the tragic occurrences that tend to cause division among people of different religions, cultures and races, rather than those events which unite us. In this booklet, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri discusses the ideals and practices that, if followed, can enrich and unite all humanity. It was my good fortune to meet Shaykh Fadhlalla, to question him and hear the inspirational message that he delivered during my interview with him.

The initial meeting was arranged by Tayie Rahem, the producer of TV ISLAM INTERNATIONAL. On a rainy morning in May of 1990, I received a telephone call from Tayie to advise me that Shaykh Fadhlalla was visiting in the area, and asked me if I could meet with them.

As Director of Umma Television Productions based in St. Catherines, Ontario, Tayie wished to film my interview with television across Canada. Tayie and I had just returned from a trip to Italy and Spain where we had filmed a series of television documentaries on Islam in Rome and Granada. In Italy, we were invited by the Director of the Islamic Cultural Center in Rome, Abdul-Qayyum Khan, to visit the new mosque under construction just about 3 miles from the Vatican. An indication of the positive changes that are occurring among religious groups is that the Vatican now has an official representative, whose role it is to serve as the liaison official of the Catholic Church with the Muslim community. Our interview with Father Michel at the Vatican revealed the

sympathetic attitude of the Church that now exists towards people of other faiths and Muslims in particular.

As we travelled through countries of Europe by train, Tayie and I had a great deal of time to discuss such matters as religion, values, morality, ethics, the self, and many of the ideas that Shaykh Fadhlalla had written about in his book, *The Journey of the Self*. I had received a copy of this book almost a year before our trip to Europe and had read the book a number of times. It took me some time to get used to the style of writing, terminology and the original ideas it contained.

When Shaykh Fadhlalla talks about the heart being “empty”, for example, he does not mean it is devoid of feeling; rather, he refers to one’s heart being free of the anger, hatred, greed, or envy, that in actuality interferes with the bliss a person is capable of experiencing. The underlying theme of the book is the development of one’s inner-self, right action in this life and the unity of the self with the Infinite.

As we drove to meet Shaykh Fadhlalla in St. Catharines, I jotted down a few questions I wanted to ask him about the thoughts he had expressed in his book on the self. Shaykh Fadhlalla greeted us with very warm welcome. The peace and joy that he radiated put us immediately at ease and the conversation flowed freely between us. As a Sufi teacher, Shaykh Fadhlalla has many followers and has written extensively on the subject of Sufism in his book, *The Elements of Sufism*. There is some speculation on the origin of the word *sufi*, but according to some authorities the term is derived from the Arabic word ‘*safa*’, which means purity. A Sufi is a person who seeks the path of inner enlightenment and purification of the heart. Sufism is “the heart of Islam” according to Shaykh Fadhlalla, and its followers aim at the improvement of their character and behavior as part of their submission to God. Spiritual progress is achieved by abandoning attachments to the material world, and pursuing the awakening of the inner life as a necessary condition to achieving fulfillment as a human being. Shaykh Fadhlalla writes that, “The true art of Sufism leads towards the steady state of being contented, integrated, wise, courteous, kind and at peace”. These are the very qualities that I observed Shaykh

Fadhlalla to have during our meeting that day in May. It was these admirable qualities that he himself had achieved that drew me to a contemplation of his message.

The taping of my interview took place at Niagara-on-the-Lake at the home of Dr. Sahin, an eminent physician, and a major supporter of TV ISLAM. Tayie Rehem filmed almost continuously for about 4 hours, stopping only to reload the camera periodically.

No part of the interview was rehearsed. Shaykh Fadhlalla spoke completely extemporaneously and with great enthusiasm. Some of the questions I addressed to him were those that I had planned to ask, but as Shaykh Fadhlalla spoke most of my comments and questions arose spontaneously. The result was a message that came completely from the heart as sincere and inspirational as one could ever wish to hear.

When Tayie produced the tapes to be aired on national television during the month of Ramadan in 1991, I was amazed as I heard once again the voice of Shaykh Fadhlalla. His words had an even greater impact as I heard them again. It occurred to me that the tapes should be transcribed and made available in a booklet for convenience and easy reference so that one might read and reflect on the words of this renowned spiritual teacher. The idea received the unqualified support of Shaykh Fadhlalla and his friends.¹

Ultimately, a Sufi teacher has written, “enlightenment is a gift from Allah”. We can compare ignorance to darkness and knowledge to light or enlightenment. In the translation of the Qur’an by Abdullah Yusuf Ali we find the following commentary on Light: “So men of God who preach God’s truth are themselves illuminated by God’s Light and become the illuminating media through which that Light spreads and permeates human life”. Shaykh Fadhlalla is a Sufi teacher who has been given the gift of enlightenment, and in turn strives to illuminate the path for others.

Love and Peace were chosen as part of the title because of their prominence in Shaykh Fadhlalla’s thoughts. He has written, “It is by love that we are propelled towards contentment and fulfillment”. Love takes many forms but the most satisfying is the love of God. It is through this love that we achieve peace.

¹ At Shaykh Fadhlalla’s suggestion, it is now being published as an eBook under the title, *The Connection Between the Absolute and the Relative*.

Introduction by John Giancarlo

One of the divine names of God is “As-Salaam”, or Peace. The achievement of true peace within ourselves is accompanied by a great joy and a love for all creation. The other equally important aspect of love is the love of humankind and indeed for all that God has created. It is written in the Qur’an that, *“Everyone in heaven and earth entreats Him; every day He is at work.”*²

In this passage we observe the word ‘shine’ which denotes God’s light. God is ever merciful and compassionate. Shaykh Fadhlalla notes that another of the divine names of God is “*Al-Jamal*”, the Beautiful. A prophetic Muslim proverb states: “Allah is beautiful and loves beauty”. Shaykh Fadhlalla is also realistic in acknowledging that the world, though beautiful, is beset by problems, tragedy, and strife. There is among its people competition for, as well as waste of, food, water, and natural resources. Poverty, ignorance and many evils abound. These problems, however, cannot be laid at the doorstep of God. They are the inevitable results of man’s inaction and unwillingness to work together with others in solving human problems. Shaykh Fadhlalla writes, “As long as there is injustice there will be agitation and turmoil preventing the possibility of lasting peace”. It behooves us, all enlightened persons of all faiths, therefore, to do all within our power to help in eliminating prejudice, hate, and injustice and promoting understanding, brotherhood, and peace. Such is the aim of Shaykh Fadhlalla as his words and actions testify. In the words of the Qur’an: *“But as for those who believe and do good deeds, their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Streams will flow at their feet in the Gardens of Bliss. Their prayer in them will be, ‘Glory be to You, God!’ their greeting, ‘Peace,’ and the last part of their prayer, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.’”*³

May the words of Shaykh Fadhlalla in this booklet bring light to your life, love to your heart and peace to your soul.

John Giancarlo, January 22, 1992

² Qur’an 55:29

³ Qur’an 10:9-10

The Meaning of Islam and Muslims

Q: I wonder if you could begin by giving us the definition of the words “Islam” and “Muslim”, for those of us who do not know the meaning of these words?

The Arabic language is one of those unusual languages that can communicate things that are not easily communicable. It is not unlike Aramaic or Sanskrit, and the roots of most terms are made up of three letter clusters. Whoever takes up Arabic for spiritual awakening or enlightenment, or for the unfathomable in the Qur’an, will find an incredible delight in its discovery. The word *islam* usually is thought to have originated from the three letters: “*sin, lam, mim*”, from “*salama*”; which means *to be at peace, to be saved, to be wholesome, to be in a state of tranquil submission – acceptable submissiveness*. It is the path of ease and of integration; it is the path of submission to reality because we are part of that reality, we are not separate from it. It is the way from time immemorial; it is not something that occurred some 1400 years ago. It is the “*din*”, it is the only way to be, which has been expounded by every prophet, messenger and sage. It is how to integrate into physical beingness, visible beingness, with the invisible, because we have emanated from it. It means to know in order to unify with the occurrence as we experience it and as we interact with it.

The outer courtesy of it is to have every creation safe for Muslims who practice Islam, to interact with the rest of creation courteously, harmoniously, joyfully, correctly, with barriers, not accepting transgression. It is not that everything is all right outwardly; everything is not all right outwardly: if I transgress, there must be containment and those containments are only in order to have nature and natural situations to take care of themselves, for us not to transgress.

One Unitive Source

Q: You speak of the law of opposites and complementarity. Would you elaborate on this law?

It is basically based on faith and trust, that there is one source, one essence from which every visible and invisible creation has emanated – one essence, which is beyond time and space, which encompasses experiential time and space, from that unitive source, which is God, which is the divine essence, Allah.

This passage in time and the realization of the other dimensions, such as space, begin to occur and in it all creational, visible and invisible realities have come about. They are all encompassed in that unitive totality. It is for this reason that we, even in our day-to-day existential experiences, want to relate, interact, connect, and understand.

Understanding is in fact a manifestation of the adoration of the unitive factor. We want to inter-link. The fact that we do not understand is a deterrent; it is something we do not like, which means that what we like is that which connects, understands, knows and relates. We do not like disconnection, we like connection, and this is a proof of that unitive force at play at all times.

Unity & Duality

Q: Regardless of our differences of religion, nationality, race, political beliefs, as people, we have derived from one source and that there should be a link and goodwill among human beings. What are your views on this matter?

If there is any deprivation or any negligence of that unitive awakening, it is because of our own lack of evolverment. In life we experience every physical or sensual situation as one of two. Anything that manifests, or has come about, been born or brought about, created in time and space, is one of two forces. There is always duality: man/woman, day/night, good/bad, healthy/unhealthy, breathing in/breathing out, sleep/awake, generous/mean, whether it is values or physical matters, such as hard/soft, and so on. Whatever manifests itself is one of two opposites, and we constantly seek a balance, constantly seek to be in the middle, whether it is in health or wealth. We constantly want to be in equilibrium. Therefore, outwardly there is a struggle, which is unavoidable, and yet inwardly we seek peace, tranquility, calmness, love, serenity, and centrality – what we call “beingness”. We all, as human beings, are inadvertently caught in what appears to be a contradiction: outwardly, we are subjected to these opposites; and yet, inwardly, we seek a state that transcends these opposites.

In your question, you say there are differences in religions: there are no differences if they have emanated from the same source. If they are pseudo-religions or human-made religions or human-made laws, then it is something else.

If they have emanated from that same original unitive source, then there are no differences in religions. There can be differences between religiosity and religious people, but it is us who have created them, either because of cultural, historical or linguistic differences.

As you know, even now, if what we are speaking about is translated or related by a third party it is bound to be, even with the best of will, somewhat changed – not necessarily completely distorted, but relayed with different emphasis, especially if that

Unity & Duality

third party comes from a different culture and language, from a language that was not a prophetically revealed one and therefore not a *transmittive* teaching.

Differences were to do with the presence of that prophetic being; they were not factually, describable, physical events, they were transformative realities. A being like the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), whose heart was beyond time and space and who functioned amongst people, to help them evolve to that inner reality is not something you and I can imbibe from a book or from a film made on him.

eBooks By Zahra Publications

General eBooks on Islam

Living Islam – East and West

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Ageless and universal wisdom set against the backdrop of a changing world: application of this knowledge to one's own life is most appropriate.

The Elements of Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

An introduction to Islam through an overview of the universality and light of the prophetic message.

The Qur'an & Its Teachings

Beams of Illumination from the Divine Revelations

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Insight into the last *Juz'* of Qur'an, with the objective of exploring the deeper meanings of Qur'anic Revelations.

Commentaries on Chapters One and Two of the Holy Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The first two chapters of the Qur'an give guidance regarding inner and outer struggle. Emphasis is on understanding key Qur'anic terms.

Commentaries on Four Selected Chapters of the Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Shaykh uncovers inner meanings, roots and subtleties of the Qur'anic Arabic terminology in four selected Surahs.

Journey of the Universe as Expounded in the Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Qur'an traces the journey of all creation, seeing the physical, biological and geological voyage of life as paralleled by the inner spiritual evolution of woman/man.

The Essential Message of the Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Teachings from the Qur'an such as purpose of creation, Attributes of the Creator, nature of human beings, decrees governing the laws of the universe, life and death.

The Family of `Imran

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A commentary on the third chapter of the Qur'an, the family of `Imran which includes the story of Mary, mother of `Isa (Jesus).

The Heart of Qur'an

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Commentary on chapter *Yasin*. This is traditionally read over the dead person: if we want to know the meaning of life, we have to learn about death.

The Qur'an in Islam: Its Impact & Influence on the Life of Muslims

`Allamah Sayyid M. H. Tabataba`i

`Allamah Sayyid M. H. Tabataba`i shows in this gem how the Qur'an contains the fundamental roots of Islam and the proof of prophethood as the Word of God.

The Qur'anic Prescription for Life

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a contemporary outlook on Sufi sciences of self knowledge, exposing the challenge of our modern lifestyle that is out of balance.

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Fasting in Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a specialized book on spiritual journeying, offering the sincere seeker keys to inner transformation.

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Compiled By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Translated By: Asadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate

Carefully translated into modern English, a selection of this great man's sayings gathered together from authentic and reliable sources.

Transformative Worship in Islam: Experiencing Perfection

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri with Muna H. Bilgrami

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This workbook explores the entire cosmology of the self through time, and maps the evolution of the self from before birth through life, death and beyond.

Ask Course TWO: The Prophetic Way of Life

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This workbook explores how the code of ethics that govern religious practice and the Prophetic ways are in fact transformational tools to enlightened awakening.

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Shaykh addresses many topics that influence Muslims at the core of what it means to be a Muslim in today's global village.

Songs of Iman on the Roads of Pakistan

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A series of talks given on the divergence between 'faith' and 'unbelief' during a tour of the country in 1982 which becomes a reflection of the condition occurring in the rest of the world today.

The Connection Between the Absolute and the Relative

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a 1990 conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, in which he talks about wide-ranging topics on Islam and presents it as the archetypal, universal, Adamic path that began when humanity rose in consciousness to recognize duality and began its journey from the relative back to Absolute Unity.

**The Spiritual Path: A Conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri On His Life,
Thought and Work**

Professor Ali A. Allawi

In this wide-ranging conversation with Professor Ali Allawi, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri talks about his life story and the spiritual journey that he embarked on and the path he has been on ever since.

Poetry, Aphorisms & Inspirational

101 Helpful Illusions

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Everything in creation has a purpose relevant to ultimate spiritual Truth. This book highlights natural veils to be transcended by disciplined courage, wisdom and insight.

Beyond Windows

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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Bursts of Silence

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Inspired aphorisms provide keys to doors of inner knowledge, as well as antidotes to distraction and confusion.

Pointers to Presence

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A collection of aphorisms providing insights into consciousness and are pointers to spiritual awakening.

Ripples of Light

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Inspired aphorisms which become remedies for hearts that seek the truth.

Sound Waves

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A collection of aphorisms that help us reflect and discover the intricate connection between self and soul.

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Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani

Spiritual nourishment extracted from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's existing works.

Autobiography

Son of Karbala

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

Health Sciences and Islamic History

Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2

Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh

Edited By: Munawar A. Anees

Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Health Sciences in Early Islam is a pioneering study of Islamic medicine that opens up new chapters of knowledge in the history of the healing sciences. This two volume work covers the development of Islamic medicine between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.