

Where Do We Find God?

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Since everything manifests God in some way or other, God can be found everywhere, if only we learn how to look. May Allah help us to look properly and to find His manifestations in all things, especially in the best of His creatures Muhammad and his Ahlul Bayt, the immaculate and pure, and in all the prophets and guides He has sent to humanity, and may we, too, in our own humble ways, come to manifest Him in our own lives.

Someone wrote to me: “I need to find God. Where can I find God?” And I thought, “I need to find God too. Don’t we all? Where can we find Him?” This is what came to mind – fourteen places to find God. Of course, there are many more, maybe some which are better or more important than those I’ve mentioned here. Maybe some work better for some people than others.

1. Pascal’s Way: Go to congregational worship, associate with believers, visit shrines, etc. Pascal’s idea is that if you want to believe, you can condition yourself by engaging in the appropriate sorts of behavior. Actually, Pascal was giving advice about how to accept God as a Catholic, but the same principle can apply to believing in God as a Muslim.

It might seem that it is a way of tricking yourself or brainwashing yourself, and Pascal talks as if going through the motions might just get you believing even when no good reason can be found. But we don’t have to look at it that way. By practicing religious activities, we put ourselves in an environment in which we might notice something that will give us good reason for belief.

2. Intellectual Way: Read the books of religious philosophers and theologians and see what they say about God and how to prove His existence, etc. This is just preparatory. The real work comes in trying to think. This was Ibn Sina’s way, or one of his ways. Think through the issues and find God through your own holy reason!

3. Yearning: Wake up for *sahar*, perform the Morning Prayer, and then ask God to help you find Him. Tell God that you are looking and want to find Him so much. Keep on doing this until you find Him. Never give up. Never give up. Never, never ever give up! This is called “importunacy” in English, and is

somewhat similar to *himmat* in Persian/Arabic.

4. Silence: Try to calm yourself and look within. Meditate. Listen. Feel. Many of the scholars say that the hadith is not well supported according to which the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) allegedly said, “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” But it seems to be a very wise saying and has been repeated by Muslims over the centuries.

5. Poetry: Some people find God in listening to religious poetry, especially Hafez, Mawlavi (Rumi), Attar, etc., and especially when it is recited well.

6. Nature: The beauties of nature are also signs of God. God manifests His beauty in natural beauty. I especially find the ocean inspiring, and feel that it manifests God in a special way. Of course, everything is a sign of God in some way, but it isn’t always clear how.

7. Pilgrimage: Suppose you wanted to set out on a journey to find a treasure. What do you do? First, you need to figure out how you are going to get there – in the company of fellow travelers or alone; by plane or bus or on foot; will you trust others to take you with them or do you have a map? Next, you need to figure out what to pack for the journey. There are guides for this sort of thing, like Fayz Kashani’s *Zaad-e Saalek*, and even guides for the etiquette of visitation. What kinds of clothes should you wear? How can you find a good traveling companion?

8. Light: I have met some people who find God through light, a kind of inner light. They say that in certain places and people they find a kind of light, halo, aura, and they keep on following the light toward God. We could call this the Ishraqi way, after Sohrawardi, known as the Shaikh al-Ishraq, the Master of Illumination.

9. Charity: Some people find God through engaging in charitable work. Helping those in need can get us to stop being so preoccupied with ourselves, and if we give in the name of Islam, we can find God by doing service to Him through service to others.

10. Gratitude: God can be found by reflection on natural feelings of gratitude that we experience when we have a good day, find food and shelter, health, see a flower, etc. We feel thankful, but to whom? Where does the thanking lead? Can we see where it points? Some people think this is silly, and maybe it doesn’t prove anything, but I think that thanks and praise, when it comes from the heart, can open a great channel between a person and God.

11. Suffering: Some people find God when disaster strikes. When everything seems lost and we are suffering most, something happens within ourselves, and we find that a way appears and leads to Him. Consider the following verses of the Holy Qur’an:

“And when harm touches man, he invokes Us, lying on his side, or sitting or standing. But when We have removed his harm from him, he passes on as if he had never invoked Us for a harm that

touched him! Thus it is made fair-seeming to the Musrifun that which they used to do.”(10: 12).

Also,

“And when they embark on a ship, they invoke Allah, making their Faith pure for Him Only: but when He brings them safely to land, behold they give a share of their worship to others.” (29:65).

12. Death: Some find God in meditation on death. Visiting cemeteries is recommended, and thinking of those who have passed away and that our lives, too, will end. In thinking, contemplating, and reflecting about these things, one may be drawn to a realization of a reality beyond this life and death. There are many narrations pertaining to this a number of which have been collected by Fayz Kashani in the very last book of his Mahjat al-Bayza, according to which the remembrance of death decreases our attachments to this world and helps us to conquer our passions.

13. Empathy: We can also find God through empathizing with others and finding traces of the divine in them. Of course, these traces are most salient in the Fourteen Immaculate Ones (peace be upon them), but we should look for it in others too. Empathy involves a shift of perspective from “me” to “we”. At its highest stage, one finds oneself on the side of God, so that His will becomes our will.

14. Qur’an: The Qur’an is God’s revelation. Revelation is showing. In the Qur’an God shows Himself. Some people find God in the recitation of the Qur’an, others in meditation on it, others in studying it, discussing it, reading Tafsir, and in the attempt to put its wisdom into practice in our lives.

There are many other places to find God.

Since everything manifests God in some way or other, God can be found everywhere, if only we learn how to look. May Allah help us to look properly and to find His manifestations in all things, especially in the best of His creatures Muhammad and his Ahlul Bayt, the immaculate and pure, and in all the prophets and guides He has sent to humanity, and may we, too, in our own humble ways, come to manifest Him in our own lives.

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