

# ***The Extraordinary Human***

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People tend to notice what they consider the weaknesses or flaws in someone else. It is easy for us to see what is “wrong” with someone else. Psychotherapy usually focuses on how to fix what is considered wrong. Therapies involving strength-based perspectives do try to see strengths, but still provide a very limited view of human possibility.

Abraham Maslow (1968) wrote about how people had two approaches to life --- one was of constantly trying to fill an empty hole. The other was of climbing a mountain. We all have a few such holes, small or large, and usually they involve interpersonal relationships of some sort. We have all experienced, to a greater or lesser extent, the losses, the put-downs, the unfair calamities of life. How often do you hear about them from others? These are the kinds of things people tell their therapists about. Let’s change our perspective. Rather than looking down and trying to fill up the holes in our lives, instead, let’s look up to the possibility of climbing the mountain.

The concept of persons functioning at a different and higher level than that of the ordinary person is a very ancient one. The idea is presented in Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Artists, philosophers, scholars, and everyday people for thousands of years have expressed in a multitude of ways that it is possible for humans to attain a state of being which is far more advanced.

Such people are considered to have a profound and positive effect on their society, and ultimately, the world. The characteristics of people who have achieved this extraordinary dimension have been described, and they have been called myriad names, including Prophets, Saints, and the Enlightened.

Through centuries of history, various groups have developed types of training designed to assist human beings to attain this state, to reach their maximal potential, to become all they were capable of becoming, to develop to their utmost capacity. In the Western World, the Christian Gnostics, the Egyptian and

Greek Mystery Schools, the Islamic Sufis, the medieval Christian Mystics, and the Kabbalah all were devoted to this developmental process. However, with one exception, all of the groups gradually disappeared, and all that remains are remnants of their manuscripts. Various contemporary groups have attempted to resurrect these various approaches, but they do not possess the basic elements which were the basis for the ancient teachings. The one exception is Sufism, which has both a well-documented history of producing extraordinary human beings, and has maintained an unbroken lineage of heart to heart teachers, for more than 1400 years.

As disciplines, philosophy, theology, and the social sciences have all attempted to describe such a state of being, and in literature, both poetry and prose provide ample portrayals. Given numerous names, it has been called Cosmic Consciousness, Fully Functioning, Nirvana, Ultra-Consciousness, Satori, Self-Actualized, Samadhi, and Enlightenment. However, as Gertrude Stein famously stated, "A rose by any other name is still a rose."

Probably the most famous and oft-repeated list of characteristics of people who were thought to have attained this state is Maslow's (1968) delineation of the characteristics of self-actualized human beings.

1. Efficient perception of reality: They judged situations accurately and honestly and noticed the fake and dishonest.
2. Acceptance: of self, others, and nature. They accepted their own shortcomings as well as those of others and the contradictions of life.
3. Spontaneity: They were uninhibited, not concerned with what others thought, alive and engaged.
4. Goal Orientation: They had a mission, task, goal or problem outside of themselves to pursue.
5. Autonomy: They were relatively culture-free, resourceful, and not dependent on others or on external authority.
6. Freshness of Appreciation: They had the innocence of vision of a young child, constantly renewing appreciation of life's gifts.
7. Fellowship with humanity: They identified deeply with the human condition, and with others in general.

8. Deep Interpersonal relationships: They had deep, loving bonds with a select few people.

9. Unhostile sense of humor: They could laugh at themselves, and life's amusing events.

10. Peak (mystic or oceanic) Experiences: These occurred frequently.

Later in his life, Maslow differentiated between two degrees of self-actualizing people, those who were clearly healthy but without transcendent experiences, and those for whom transcendent experiencing was important. Maslow gave the following description of transcendents:

- Peak and plateau experiences are the most important and precious aspect of life.
- They speak the language of poets, mystics, seers, and better understand art, music, paradox, parables, etc.
- They perceive the sacredness in all things and also see them at the practical, everyday level.
- They somehow recognize each other, and develop rapid intimacy and mutual understanding.
  - They are more responsive to beauty, and beautify.
  - They are holistic, beyond cultural, geographic differences.
  - They are synergistic --- what they do benefits themselves and others.
  - They are lovable, awe-inspiring, saintly, easily revered.
  - They are apt to be innovators and discoverers.
  - They perceive the sacredness of every living thing.
  - They retain a strong sense of awe and mystery.
  - They are more apt to be reconciled with evil, understanding its inevitability and necessity.
  - They tend to regard themselves as carriers or instruments.
  - It is easier for them to transcend the ego, to be selfless.

In the 1970's, the Human Potential Movement grew out of Humanistic Psychology, and tried to focus on this state of being, attempting to enable people to reach their full potential. A large variety of exercises and activities were developed in hopes of reaching this goal. During the same period, Humanistic Psychology and later, Transpersonal Psychology emphasized positive human growth, producing numerous books and a journal.

Today Positive Psychology has shifted the direction, focusing on flow, on being in the zone, and on increasing happiness. Peterson & Seligman (2004) developed a classification of 6 virtues and 24 character strengths which they hope would do for positive psychology what the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association does for psychological disorders. They believe that developing these virtues is a goal toward which one should strive. But they are not able to successfully teach people how to develop these virtues and characteristics.

### **Six Virtues**

Knowledge & Wisdom	Courage	
	Humanity	
Temperance	Justice	Transcendence

### **24 Character Strengths**

Creativity	Curiosity	Open-Mindedness	Love of Learning
Wisdom	Bravery	Persistence	Integrity
Vitality	Love	Social Intelligence	Kindness
Fairness	Leadership	Teamwork	Forgiveness
Mercy	Humility	Prudence	Self-Control
Gratitude	Hope	Appreciation of Beauty	Spirituality

Certainly these are virtues, and character strengths. These are all steps in the right direction. But neither the fields, or their practitioners, have been able to successfully and repeatedly teach people how to attain this enlightened state.

Neither have the thousands of self-help books. The Positive Psychologists simply do not know how to produce the results both they and the world admire.

How can one attain this state of being?

For more than 1400 years, MTO Shahmaghsoudi, School of Islamic Sufism® has systematically taught people how to attain this state. There is a well-documented history of many who achieved a transcendent, extraordinary state of being and had a strong, beneficial effect on their society. For all these centuries, Sufis have been known for their capacity to enable people to develop to their ultimate potential, encouraging the blossoming of all the innate, undeveloped capacities and talents that lie within us. A spiritual base is essential.

What characterizes this “superhealthy”, extraordinary state, which is attainable through the teachings of the contemporary Master, Molana Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha, Pir of the Oveyssi School of Islamic Sufism? Take a moment to read over and think about the following various characteristics listed. Look carefully over these aspects, considering their manifestations within you and within others you know or have known.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY HUMAN

### PHYSICAL

No addictive behaviors  
Excellent condition, limber and flexible  
Extraordinary physical control  
Need little sleep  
Need little food  
Rapid healing of any physical problem  
Truly relaxed

### MENTAL

Highly Creative  
Efficient perception of reality  
Focused concentration  
Great productivity  
Spontaneous, active, alive, engaged  
Resourceful  
Freshness of appreciation, like the wonder & innocence of a young child  
Intelligence beyond intelligence tests

### EMOTIONAL

Free of anxiety  
Tranquil and serene  
Enjoy life  
Inner Contentment  
Self-Accepting  
Focused beyond personal ego  
Balanced, stable  
Harmonious  
Experience Ecstasy

### SOCIAL

Quiet assertiveness  
Independent of others and of “experts”  
Independent of cultural norms or expectations, culture-free  
Experience oneness with humanity  
Possess humor  
Giving, generous

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### SPIRITUAL

Kindness  
Genuine Humility  
Healing of Self  
Submission to a Higher Power  
Selflessness  
Cognition of the Divine Beloved  
Ultimately: Union with the Divine

### INTUITIVE

Clairvoyance (seeing objects, people, or events that cannot be perceived by the physical senses)  
Telepathy (communication from one mind to another by extrasensory means)  
Precognition (knowledge of a future event through extrasensory means)  
Psychokinesis (movement of physical objects by extrasensory means)  
Multilocation (being present in two or more places at one time)  
Healing of Others

Now focus on the characteristics you would like to attain.

If you are honest with yourself, do you know how to attain them?

If so, what has stopped you from doing so?

If not, how can you attain them?

The first three areas are the basic realms that must be developed: the physical, mental, and emotional realms. They form the basis for full development in the social realm. The characteristics of the mental, emotional and social

realms are often found in lists of the characteristics of fully developed or actualized human beings.

The Intuitive area can be a dangerous one, for trying to develop these characteristics may actually impede your progress in the other realms. Focusing on development of the intuitive characteristics, particularly for personal gain, will ensure that you never attain the characteristics of the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual realms.

Modern psychology and science have found no solid proof that the characteristics listed under "Intuitive" actually exist. In other words, psychologists and other scientists have not been able to devise a means by which to measure them. It is rather difficult to devise a scientific experiment requiring the use of the physical senses to measure something which is by definition not detectable by the physical senses. Because something cannot yet be measured, is not proof that it does not exist. Literature dating back centuries repeatedly describes the existence of these characteristics.

These are obviously very positive characteristics. The key question is, How can one develop these? What is necessary in order to develop them? First of all, just as in every discipline, a teacher is necessary. In Sufism, the teacher is introduced through the heart, and instructions are individualized. The student does not have to personally be in the presence of the teacher. Molana Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadeqh Angha , the grand teacher of MTO Shahmaghsoudi, tells us that "... unless with inner aspiration your carnal soul is trained under the wing of the Pir, with the command of God the Cherisher and the Sustainer, it will be impossible for you to see the Divine Light through the veil of the self, and for your path to be lighted (1986, p. 3)." My teacher is Molana Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha, Pir, Oveyssi, known to students as Hazrat Pir.

Second of all, one must truly know oneself. Self-knowledge is essential for development. The Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon him) stated: "He who knows himself knows his Creator." In order to attain self-knowledge, one must develop in the spiritual realm, and the gateway to the spiritual realm lies in the heart. Amir al-Moemenin Ali stated: "He who takes care of his inner life, God will take care of his outer life." Sufism considers the

source of life in the heart, the gateway to the spiritual realm; hence, the point from which the positive characteristics, love, kindness, hope, joy, creativity, etc., , flow.

Even people who revere Hazrat Pir, and who recognize that they must come to know themselves, repeatedly ask exactly what they should do to attain the state of superhealth, the state of transcendence. For many years, I have listened to or read the words of Hazrat Pir and he has repeatedly given us the answer in myriad different ways, as have the prior Pirs. The instructions are not difficult, but following them is not easy. The Principles of Sufism, called *Irfan* in the original Persian, have been repeatedly presented (Angha,N, 1996, pp. 27-28):

#### **PRINCIPLES OF SUFISM**

ZIKR	(to remember) - remembering God at all times
FIKR	(to think, meditate) - being in the state of wondering
SAHAR	(to awaken) - awakening of soul and body
JUI'I	(to hunger) - having exterior hunger (mind) and interior hunger (Heart) to persist in the search and to obtain the truth.
SUAMT	(to observe silence) - ceasing to think and talk about worthless things
SAUM	(to fast) - fasting of body, mind and Heart
KHALVAT	(to observe solitude) - praying in solitude, externally and internally
KHIDMAT	(to serve) - dissolving in the truth of the master and dissolving in the truth of existence, God

Molana Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Angha (Professor Angha) states that:

The ascent of man lies in his effort, as the flight of the bird depends on its wings; therefore, endeavor to purify your heart so that the splendor of the Almighty will be reflected therein without question or doubt, and in the constancy of zikr (remembrance of God), the Face of the Beloved will be revealed and witnessed (1986, p. 4).

In more practical everyday terms, if we wish to attain the desired results, it would be wise to begin by following the specific instructions which have been repeatedly given:

1. Perform the five daily prayers. The remembrance of God includes saying the prescribed prayers five times a day, with a quiet mind, concentrating in our heart. “The Arabic word for prayer, *salat*, literally means “call”, and to perform it is to seek closeness to God (Angha, SMS, 1986, p. 31).” In *Al-Rasa’el*, Professor Angha (1986) carefully and poetically describes the importance and meaning of the various parts of the prayers, including ablution and the postures. Yet Hazrat Pir recently stated that most people do not perform the prayers, which are a pillar of Islam. They are essential, no matter what our tricky mind tells us to do instead.
2. Read the Holy Qur’an in the morning. The Holy Qur’an itself instructs us: “Establish regular prayers --- at the sun’s decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer, and reading: for the prayer and reading in the morning carry their testimony (*al-Isra* The Night Journey 17:78).” As with the prayers, the reading must be done with a quiet mind and full concentration in the heart, asking for understanding of the deeper meaning of the words. Hazrat Pir suggests that we read the Quran as if we were the only person alive, and it was a book of instruction for and about us.
3. Fast during the holy month of Ramadan and fast three days every month. The fasting should not be limited to food and drink. We should fast from everything that interferes with closeness to God.
4. Attend Tamarkoz® (Concentration, especially of energies) class (when available) and follow instructions. If no class is available where you are, attend one or more of the retreats.
5. Practice Movazeneh® (balancing and harmonizing exercises) every day. If you attend class, practice those exercises. If not, follow the website instructions and attend a retreat and practice the exercises given there.
6. Breathe deeply and fully. The text *Expansion & Contraction within Being [Dahm]* (Angha, 2000) describes the essential importance of deep breathing.
7. Concentrate each night, until body, heart, mind and soul are balanced and serene and a state of meditation is attained.
8. Sing the zikr during sessions, retreats and/or the broadcasts, moving in harmony and unity with the group, concentrating on your heart.

9. Say any additional prayers provided. For example, specific prayers are provided at Ramadan.
10. Become aware of your attachments, and let go of them.
11. Let go of habits, particularly your habitual thought patterns.
12. Do everything in moderation. No underdoing and no overdoing.
13. Give up all your expectations. Stop expecting anything from anyone.
14. Walk, preferably on a daily basis.
15. Quiet the mind.

These are not impossible tasks. However, most people do not even do the prayers, much less follow the other instructions. It is as if they expect enlightenment to descend upon them without any personal effort. Building spiritual strength requires work, just as does building physical strength. One has to practice, over and over again. At first, there is no obvious change, just as there is no obvious change from day to day in building muscles. It takes time. Then slowly, one becomes aware of subtle, and then more obvious positive changes. After praying, my emotional and mental experience is now palpably different. I feel it, and it feels good.

If we do these things in full concentration, then additional individual instructions will be given to us through our heart. Key to being able to do them successfully is how we think. Our thoughts are learned from prior experiences, so how we think is based on our past. Most of us believe we cannot control our thoughts, but we can, and it is not even very difficult. The mental realm is crucially important, and MTO Shahmaghsoudi® School of Islamic Sufism focuses on eliminating old brain patterns, enabling the heart to control the brain, rather than vice versa. When the brain is in control, what has been learned from one's family and society is in control.

#### **Western Paradigm**

Brain  
 ↓  
 Body  
 ↓  
 Heart

#### **Sufi Paradigm**

Heart  
 ↓  
 Brain  
 ↓  
 Body

The important thing to recognize is that the brain is like a very sophisticated biochemical/electrical computer. What it does is determined by what goes into it; Garbage in, garbage out. Now stop a moment and consider what has been fed into your mind and how you feed your mind today. How much junk food, how much fast food do you stuff into your brain every day? How much TV do you watch? Videos? Movies? How many junk magazines or books do you read? How many mental pollutants do you consume in an average day? Are you willing to replace them with something more positive?

Now stop and take a few minutes to write down the answer to a question that addresses a common fear: If you were certain you could not fail, what would you do? What would you undertake, if you could not fail? Write down your answers.

Did you notice a difference in your feelings as you wrote? What changed?

Fear of failure is very real for many people, even though it may not be clearly voiced. Do not allow fear to control your life. Focus on building inner love, so that love will replace fear. How? Start with following the instructions. For me, saying prayers is like an infusion of love.

You can choose what you will think about. You can learn to control your thought process, if you wish to do so. Until you do so, the world is in control of you. No one can become an extraordinary human without gaining control of thoughts and learning to concentrate. Molana al Moazam Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha (1986b) said: "Concentrate your thoughts in order not to perish in your earthy desires (p. 4)."

No one ever said the journey toward becoming an Extraordinary Human is easy. It requires work. It takes courage, determination, devotion, trust, discipline and effort. In my own journey, there have been losses, unpleasant experiences, pain and suffering brought upon myself. My lesson in attachment to earthly things was learned when all my family's belongings were destroyed in a moving van wreck. Everything, accumulated over many years, was gone in one instant. The lessons we need to learn come to us. If we do not learn from the first lesson, they come again until the lesson is learned. Some lessons have been personally difficult for me to learn, including trust in my teacher and trust in God.

## Trust

Unprotected

Naked, bare,

Each flaw revealed

No secrets held

Utterly vulnerable

My beating heart rests in Your hand.

Today, in the Western World, all kinds of people are writing all sorts of nonsense about the mystical way, the spiritual path, the way to enlightenment. Some become bestsellers, some are silly and some are amusing. Unfortunately, many are incorrect. Lots of books are sold, but the reader learns little. The writers who should be read are those who have themselves become Extraordinary Humans. They have attained the transcendent state and can then help others find their way along the path.

A prominent example is *Al-Rasa'el* (1986) by Molana Hazrat Shah Maghsoud Sadegh Angha. His chapter, "Al-Salat", clearly illuminates the essential importance and grandeur of prayer. He tells us:

The true prayer is witnessing the glorious light of God and truthful devotion in the Exalted God in the mirror of the pure, attentive, and illumined heart; the enlightened mind; and the pure and assured self, so that the words and the body shall be guided without hindrance; and the soul may journey in the eternal realm of clarity and reach the reality of the meaning of servitude in devotion to the Divinity of the Exalted Lord (p.62).

I would like to close with a quotation from the book *Sufism and Knowledge* (1995), by Molana Hazrat Salaheddin Ali Nader Angha:

To have stability and peace, we must return to our Source, our Origin. The teachings of the Prophets have provided human beings with a blueprint for this return, so the unknowns which are the source of our uncertainties and instability may be resolved.

May God grant you the resolve to endeavor on the path of self-knowledge; may He teach you the alphabet of the book of the soul so you may read the book of your being; may He grant you patience and perseverance to cultivate your being to its fullest so you will be the peacemakers of your societies; may He open the gate of the City of Knowledge unto your soul, so your actions may be guided by the light of knowledge and wisdom (pp. 32-33).

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