

# ONE SOUL, MANY FACES

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON FAITH, STOICISM, AND COMPASSION

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## WHY WE GIVE

Our philanthropic work is guided by a simple belief: that beneath our differences of nation, culture, and faith, we share a common humanity. The reflection below expresses the spirit in which we serve: quietly, respectfully, and without expectation of return.

Over the past two months, I have travelled through India, Vietnam, Dubai, and Cambodia, across different religions, languages, levels of wealth, and histories. I walked through temples thick with incense, mosques echoing with prayer, crowded streets where poverty is visible and dignity is hard-won, and modern cities moving at astonishing speed.

What struck me most was not how different people are, but how remarkably the same they are.

Everywhere, I saw the same hopes for children, the same quiet endurance of suffering, the same generosity offered by those who had very little. Slowly, almost without effort, an idea I had long believed intellectually became something I knew: we are not many souls; we are one soul, expressed in countless forms. The Qur'an states this with clarity: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul." (Qur'an 4:1). Travel turned that verse from theology into lived truth.

## NATIONS AND TRIBES: DIFFERENCE WITHOUT DIVISION

As I moved from country to country, I kept returning to another Qur'anic verse:

*"O mankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another." (Qur'an 49:13)*

The phrase so that you may know one another' feels deeply important. Difference, I realized, is not meant to divide us but to invite encounter. When you sit with people in poor villages, when you help quietly without cameras or announcements, the labels fall away. Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian; these remain meaningful, but secondary. What comes first is humanity.

In India and Cambodia especially, where suffering is visible and often normalized, I felt something dissolve inside me: the unconscious separation between "helper" and "helped." There was simply presence, shared vulnerability, and shared dignity.

## STOCISM: DISCOVERING THE WORLD AS ONE CITY

During these travels, I found myself returning often to Stoic thought, particularly Marcus Aurelius. He wrote: *“My city and country, so far as I am a man, is the world.”* (*Meditations*, 6.44). Stoicism gave language to what I was feeling. The Stoics believed all human beings share the same rational nature (logos) and therefore belong to a single moral community. In modern terms, this is radical: it means no one is truly foreign.

Marcus Aurelius also wrote, *“We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids.”* (*Meditations*, 2.1). When I helped people in need, not as charity, but as duty, I felt aligned with this idea of cooperation as nature itself. Helping others did not feel virtuous in a proud sense; it felt ordinary, almost inevitable. As if this is simply what one does when one understands the world correctly.

## BUDDHISM: COMPASSION WITHOUT EXPECTATION

In Vietnam and Cambodia, surrounded by Buddhist teachings and imagery, I reflected deeply on compassion without attachment. The Buddha taught:

*“Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, so should one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.”* (*Metta Sutta*).

What struck me was how closely this mirrors both Islamic sincerity and Stoic duty. True compassion is not transactional. It does not seek gratitude, recognition, or even success.

The Qur’an expresses this same spirit powerfully:

*“We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We desire neither reward nor thanks.”* (*Qur’an* 76:9).

And Marcus Aurelius echoes it almost word for word:

*“When you have done a good act and another has benefited, why do you still look for a third thing - a reputation or a return?”* (*Meditations*, 7.73).

Across traditions, the message is the same: let the act be complete in itself.

## SERVICE AS ENLIGHTENMENT

I have often heard enlightenment described as something rare, distant, or mystical. But during these travels, I felt something quieter and more grounded. Not excitement. Not transcendence. Rather, a settled clarity.

When I helped people in God’s name, with no expectations in return, something inside me softened. The constant inner negotiation, ‘Am I doing enough? Am I seen? Does this matter?’ fell silent.

The Buddha taught, *“If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”*

The Stoics taught that peace comes from aligning one’s will with nature and reason.

Islam teaches sakīnah, a tranquility that descends when one acts sincerely for God.

Different words. The same experience.

I do not claim spiritual superiority or final attainment. But I do recognize a form of enlightenment, not as an endpoint, but as a way of being. A state where the self loosens its grip, where helping feels natural, and where humanity is no longer divided into “us” and “them.”

## PROVIDENCE AND TRUST

Marcus Aurelius once wrote, *“Whatever happens to you has been waiting to happen since the beginning of time.”* This idea, that what is divine is full of providence, resonates deeply with Islamic faith in qadar. During my travels, I felt less resistance to circumstances and more trust in unfolding events. Poverty did not feel random. Nor did opportunity. Everything felt connected within a larger moral order, one that calls not for control, but for response.

## CONCLUSION: ONE SOUL, ONE RESPONSIBILITY

After these journeys, I no longer experience faith as something confined to belief or ritual. I experience it as recognition. Recognition that beneath different names, faces, and traditions, there is one shared soul.

The Qur’an names it divine creation.

Stoicism calls it universal reason.

Buddhism experiences it as compassion beyond ego.

When I act from this recognition, serving others quietly, sincerely, and without expectation, I feel aligned with something ancient and enduring. Not above others. Not separate. Simply in place.

Perhaps enlightenment is not something one achieves. Perhaps it is something one remembers.

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