

April 8, 2009

Wednesday

Title: Listen. Be Silent. Ponder. Then Understand.

DVD title: A Common Language of Universal Values:  
Ponder the Signs to Understand

Dinner blessing: O Allah, You blessed us so much this week and given us many challenges, and filled our hearts with hopes for the future and made our lives fuller. We ask You, Allah, to make us worthy of all of this. We are grateful for our brother coming to video us and the mercy You have shown to him. We are grateful for the beauty of nature that reminds us of Your greatness and Your beauty. We are humbled by the challenges before us. There are those among us who are not well, and we ask You to heal them, and bring their bodies to fullness. There are those among us who have concerns and worries. We ask You to lift that burden from them. There are those among us who have great work ahead for the future, and we ask You, Allah, to empower them. Protect us; protect our community and our livelihood. Protect those who are traveling tomorrow. May their journeys be filled with *khair*. *Amin*.

Sohbet: Over these last couple of day when we've been, instead of behind the 8 ball, in front of the lens, often the term "universal values" came up. We all know what they are and can all list them, but it is always good to try to understand what they do. We call them universal values to make them acceptable and palatable to everyone, and we forget that they are also the Attributes of Allah Swt. Because they are attributes, they must have some effect; they must do something. Just like a match that is unlit has the potential to do something, when it is lit it has the potential to cook food, burn your fingers, or set a forest on fire, or start your barbeque for kebabs.

It's important to realize that these universal values awaken us. They stimulate and create qualities in us, because they are qualities and attributes. They create qualities of empathy, qualities of love, qualities of patience, qualities of compassion, of mercy, of justice, and even make us attentive so that we are protected by our consciousness. What is beautiful about them is they are essential to human beings. We know that, because human beings fall in love, and feel empathy and compassion, and sense the power of nature. Obviously, they are essential to us. Indeed, that is what happened when Allah reveals the Names to Hazrat Adam (as). He awakens in Hazrat Adam (as) a resonance and harmony with the Qualities and Attributes of Allah. What does that mean? It means there can now be communication between Allah Swt and His Creation.

We now have a language we can speak in common with Allah. We know what that means. If any of us goes to a foreign country and cannot speak the language, though we have to read the signs, but we may be reading them incorrectly. So we have to learn how to listen - *istamā*. That in itself is a whole subject to talk about. After we have that, we have to ponder something, *insath*. We have to be quiet. We listen; we have to be in silence, and we have to ponder things. That's where things can become very confusing. There's a story.

It was recorded that a certain *muhadith*, a scholar of *Hadith*, knew someone who owned a strip of land close to his well. He would not grant that farmer permission to use the water to irrigate his land. They were always quarreling over this matter. The *muhadith* had the quality of *istamā* - listening. He heard the argument, but he had not developed the quality of *insāth*, pondering. Someone said, "Why are you always arguing with your neighbor about using the water from your well? Everybody has the right to

draw water from the well. This is the *Sharī'ah*.” He said, “No, no there’s a *hadith*.” “Oh? What *hadith*?” “There is a *hadith* that says, no person should use his water to irrigate the land of another.”

It does appear in a *hadith*. The man heard the *hadith*, but he never understood it because he didn’t ponder it. He didn’t understand the context. He didn’t pay any attention even to the *tafsir* of it.

The man said, “My dear brother, this is not what that *hadith* means. The correct explanation of this *hadith* is, if a person purchases a pregnant slave, he should not share a bed with her until she gives birth.” The reason being that the land is someone else’s; the seeds have been sown in the land already. Until that crop is cut and harvested, the land belongs to the one who sowed the seed in it.

You have to listen and ponder. It’s not just that the universal values were articulated, but you have to ponder them, and understand this is the common language. Otherwise, you are speaking a language in a land where someone else is speaking another language. You are looking at the signs and misinterpreting what you are seeing. Just like you might say *kalb*/dog instead of *qalb*/heart. The *muhadith* said, “May Allah reward you! Up until now, I had understood that *hadith* incorrectly.” All of a sudden he was informed of something he would never forget. He became *hifdh* (protector/memorized) of that *hadith*. There was another story regarding another *muhadith*.

He used to perform his *witr salat* as soon as he would relieve himself, even if it was during the day or night. When asked why he did this, he said, “There is a *hadith*. It says that whosoever relieves himself should perform

*witr.*” The questioner told him, “This is not the actual meaning of this *hadith*. The word *witr* also means ‘uneven.’ It means after you do that, you should use uneven amounts of clots of soil. It doesn’t mean to perform the *witr* prayer.”

This is how important it is to understand the language you are hearing and speaking. If *istamā* has to be followed by *insād*, then *insād* has to be followed by *hifdh* (memorization)—to remember it, you have to memorize it. You have to remember what you heard and understood. If something is not in your mind, how are you going to practice it. If you don’t know the names of things, how are you going to know how to use them? In the Garden, Jannah, everything is taken care of. But when you find yourself in *dunya*, you have to know how to deal with things: What does this mean? How does that operate? People come to this country from some place where they had no education, and no training. It happened recently when Somalis came to the U.S. They were put in apartments in cities, but they don’t know how to do anything. They don’t know how to turn a stove on or off. It could cause a fire. They don’t know how to use a telephone, an elevator, or a refrigerator—nothing. They have to learn how to use it, not just name it. “That’s a stove.” The assumption is you know how to use it because it has a name.

These Attributes and Names of Allah have to be pondered. It is the common language we speak to Allah. Who is Allah? Where is Allah? Allah is present. Allah is that Dynamic Presence, and we don’t see. Something is extremely beautiful, extremely fragrant, extremely powerful: the earthquake that happened, the beauty of the flowers in the spring time. It attracts us for a minute or two, then we are distracted again. If we remember, then the next day we must practice what we know. Some things, by the grace of Allah, come naturally. Someone falls down, you rush to them. Compassion comes naturally. Why? Because Allah is present. You are swimming in the ocean with the fish. You are in

the water. It's automatic. Some things we have to think about. Sometimes you get these terrible stories, like someone in a big city like New York is being attacked, but people walk on by it and don't do anything. Everything inside of them is telling them to do it, but their own self-protective mechanism and their fear tell them not to. Sometimes things happen like that. But if we value the Names of Allah Swt, and the relationship, [if we] understand the language we were programmed to think with, to speak with, to act through, then we will practice what we hear and know. There will be *amal*.

When we practice whatever we have heard or remembered, there will be blessings to that. And if we don't practice what we know, then there will be no benefit. Allah Swt reminds us in many ways that we then have to do more than just practice it. We have to share this knowledge. We have to have *nashr*. People say "preach it," but you have to "publish" it. (Like a Ph.d. dissertation. It's not official until it's printed in a book.) By sharing it, it is protected. It is copywritten. Otherwise, it will be off somewhere on a shelf, or in some file somewhere. You have to use it, share it, so it has its effect. These universal values are a language.

They are essential to us as human beings, not just between us and Allah Swt. They are the bonding element between you and me, you and him. Your brothers, your sisters, your friends, your neighbors, even your enemies you can come to be as your dearest friends, as Allah says in the Qur'an. On what basis does this take place? It takes place on the basis of the Attributes and Qualities of Allah. If they are attributes, they must manifest. You have to be aware of what they really are. Because if a *muhadith* can be wrong, we can be wrong; therefore, we have to ponder. We have to be silent and think over things. Of course, we realize these relationships are often affected by cultural overlays, linguistic overlays and assumptions; consequently, people become myopic or blind in some ways, or very near sighted.

If we don't see the common human goals, or share the common human purposes, how can there be peace? How can there be understanding and unity? If the foundation of Islam is *tawhid*, how can that be achieved without sensitivity, understanding, respect for the Names and Attributes? Understand, that before them, we had no common language. Ah, but there was a language. It was a higher language. It was not the language we had to speak in *dunya*. The common language is *du'ā*/supplication. We know that is the language, because that is the language of the angels. They are always making *du'ā*, praising Allah Swt. That's all that is necessary. Let's say it's Fourth of July. We're in Washington at a park. Big fireworks! The common language is, "Aah! Ooh! Ahh!" Everybody knows that it means. You see this magnificent, beautiful, loud glorious thing, and you say, "Aah!" If someone were to ask you to describe what you meant, you'd say, "Are you crazy?" All the angels know what it means. You are standing in Aceh, and the tsunami comes in. Nobody is describing it; they are all screaming, "Aaaah!" There are common languages like that. I use that example because there is *taqwa* also among the angels, because the angels are aware of *al-Hayyu al-Qayyum*. They are aware of the power, the Endlessness, and the Everlastingness of Allah. We have to remember that.

As soon as we come out of the Garden, now we have to make choices. We have to communicate with one another. We need another language. Allah says, "Now I'm going to tell you something the angels don't know." "What is that?" "I have other Names. I am not just Aah, Ooh. I am *ar-Rahmān ar-Rahīm*. I am these other things. This is how you will come to understand Me, by seeing Me here and here and here. Wheresoever you look, there you will see My Countenance. There you will see My Face, east or west. I have other Names by which you will communicate to Me and with each other. If you communicate with each other by these Attributes, by listening and pondering and putting into action, and then informing others of it, to help them and assist them, then you will

again attain to that state near to Me, because you will love Me.” That’s *dawa*. That’s not going out hitting people over the head with the Qur’an saying, “Here! Put this in your head!” No, it’s the living Qur’an. **“Iqra - bismi rabbika.”** It’s the living Qur’an. That’s how we are bonded together.

What evokes an understanding to whatever little degree we can understand *tawhid*, the sense of unity in the Names of Allah Swt, in the Attributes of Allah [is important]. People who say, “Oh, these are names,” are as ignorant as the *muhadith*. Yes, they are names. Yes, that is a *hadith*, but you don’t understand it. “*You have ears but you are not hearing. You have eyes but you are not seeing. O man, you do not understand.*” Let’s understand that this word *tawhid* comes from the root *wahad*: oneness, singleness. It has an expended meaning also: to be alone, unique, unmatched, without equal. In its active form, it means to unite. It means to connect, standardize, join, create a criteria, to consolidate and aggregate. This is the time in the world we need to do that, *wahad*, to aggregate. It’s not just to declare that Allah is One, or to profess a belief in the unity of Allah Swt. The implication is very interesting for the times we live in today. To have belief and faith in the unity of Allah even to the extent that we are unique, alone, solitary, even lonely in that knowledge implies something else: it points to a very personal commitment. The implication of that is, we all share these attributes and speak this common language, potentially, but it is still a very personal commitment and belief. We will never quite understand it unless it is enhanced by the *ummah*, the community.

We have been talking a lot about community in the last couple of days. It is not just a bunch of people living together, or the *ummah* of the Prophet Mohammed (sal). It is, in itself, a concept. It’s an attitude. It’s an environment that is created, like the Montessori school: a prepared environment for learning. A community is a prepared environment for faith and believing, and service, and learning. Because in that we can invoke and utilize

that language we have in common. That active force to unite takes place. But it can only take place if it is developed in the hearts, souls and minds of individuals. That's why the Qur'an tells us that you can't take on the burden of someone else. You can, by your knowledge, love, and assistance help someone with their burden, if only by reminding them of **“inna ma'al 'usri yusrā.”**

All this is in this one word, *wahad*. The implication is also a sense of privacy, but at the same time, being part of something greater: “Solitude amidst the crowd,” as we say in Naqshbandi tradition. Without a group of individuals, you could not have a proper understanding of solitude. Without inner solitude, the community itself would be lacking something. You would just be a bunch of people living together in a gated community somewhere by the ocean where they have a community center and go play Mah Jongg. To a Sufi, the *Sharī'ah*, the *Sunnah*—in addition to being doctrinal foundations of Islam, and guidelines for life in the here and Hereafter, and the basis for mystical insight and revelation—is what comes out of a human being in contact with Allah Swt. What is the *Sunnah* of Prophet Mohammed (sal) but what comes out of him from his contact with Allah? It starts before his revelation. It starts in his *ruh* as a young boy, al-Amin—the ever-living *ruh*, the undivided connection between ourselves and Allah.

Then there are the private relationships we have with Allah, the Prophet, and our *shuyukh*. What is the means for us to investigate and explore and develop that relationship, to develop that love? Tawajjuh, attention, paying attention, turning inward, turning toward the process of inspiration that comes from one's attention. We say in Urdu, “*Main mutawajjuh hum qalb kiteraf*. I pay attention to my heart.” Is it possible that your heart and my heart can be connected? Of course. That's the bond of language, and the meaning of that Divine presence. Allah Swt has no reality to a human being but through these Attributes. There has no way to conceive [of Allah, except] of what little we are

permitted to conceive of Allah. We can only predict certain things, like in geometry. If you have two points, you can predict the line. You have the inner universe and outer universe, and can predict a relationship between them atomically. When you have developed another lens, your physical *latīfa*, and can see farther into the universe, and learn more about the universe, then you can make certain assumptions about it, about black holes and singularities.

If you look inside, you find the same quantum phenomena. People say, “Oh, this great *shaykh* was in Baghdad, but was seen in Damascus at the same time.” Is this just hagiography, a mythical story? No, it’s a physical possibility. This process of turning attention to one’s heart is also turning one’s attention to the heart of the beloved. “I know what you’re thinking. You and I have been together a long time; I know what’s on your mind.” Does your wife tell you that? My mother would say to me, “You can’t fool me. You may fool all of them, but not me. You’re my son.” Of course, hearts come into resonance with one another. Sometimes they’re wrong, or not exactly right. You can know something is happening, but you can’t know exactly what it is. Why? Because Allah Swt also grants us privacy, singularity—*ahad*. There is a oneness of Allah, and the oneness in us, because everything is reflected.

All this naming and all these attributes and qualities are designed to strengthen us, to give us spiritual muscle. They are indeed cardio exercises, spiritual aerobics. They keep your heart strong, because there has to be strength within the heart if you want strength in the community—this community or the global community. What holds the fabric of that together is very important, now that the fabric of society is rent with so many economic problems, social problems, ethical problems, extremism and all kinds of selfishness, instead of privacy. We have to realize that the inner fabric can be rent, torn. There are certain things that Allah tells us are behind the veil/*hijab*. Why are they kept behind the

veil? Outwardly, we say it is for the protection of women that they wear *hijab*. The real story behind that is symbolic of protection. It's in resonance with the protection the Prophet Mohammed (sal) requested. He requested that after his death his wives be kept behind *hijab*, behind a screen, for protection. Why? Think about the times, the wars, the enemies, the people who would do harm to Islam. Think about the tribal affiliations. This was good policy.

It also reflects something else. There is always a veil. You can approach only so close to Allah, then it becomes too bright, too great. Just like when we go into town for a grand opening and they have a big million watt lamp. It attracts you, but if you stood in front of the lamp and looked at it, you'd go blind. It draws you to it, but don't look at it. Don't get too close to it. Only Prophet Mohammed (sal) could come that close. Even *Buraq* could not go that close. You can take it as real, or as symbolic. It doesn't matter. What matters is to understand that unity, that truth is so bright we can only see what it illuminates, or the shadow it casts. We have to develop the spiritual strength and put our attention in the right way. The spiritual seeker, the person on *suluk*... and everyone who is on a spiritual path is on *suluk*. It may not be a methodology, but there is *suluk* in every individual. There may not be a methodology, and there is no methodology in the *Naqshbandī-Mujaddadī* line either, but it is a reality.

We are all on this journey through, as Hazrat used to say, the seven stages. The sincere seeker begins by acquiring the spiritual attributes as they are manifest to him in the *shaykh*, the *shuyukh*, in the *ambiyā* and the *awliyā*, and in the Prophet Mohammed (sal). That's *silsila*. None of us can climb a ladder without one of our four limbs touching every rung. It's very hard. That's one beginning way of understanding the relationship we have with Allah, and also the connection with Allah Swt through the transmissions of the Attributes and Qualities of the relationship through the heart of the *shaykh* in our Order,

in our way of making these transmission. These are transmission of the Attributes and Qualities of Allah Swt in the *latā'if: qalb, ruh, sirr, khafee, akhfah, nafs*. This is what it is: to learn the language better. Just as people say, there is no end to learning Arabic or Farsi. The languages are so deep and complex, there is no end to it. You are not even sure what you are reading when you are reading it; you have to ponder it. It might be confusing to a non-Arabic speaker to hand something to an Arabic speaker to [translate or interpret], who might say, "What I believe it means is this," because there is so much detail and subtlety in these languages.

This is just the beginning of understanding. This is what these transmissions do. They refine our ability to understand. What does understand mean? It means to stand under. Why? If you really understand something, you realize that you don't understand and you have humility. You are standing under a great weight of knowledge. It is through these transmissions that we have become attracted and attached to the process, and to the One Who created the process, and through whom He transmits this process. That takes us to the next subject, which will not be tonight, on *nisbat* and *jedhbah*. *Asalaamu aleikum*.

## QUESTIONS

Student: Some of the 99 Names of Allah are opposites. It seems in community you can see the whole range of the 99 Names manifest. ....different people bring different perspectives.

Shaykh: I think it's the same situation. Everything you see in creation, you see the relatedness. Again, we go to the example of the hologram. All the information is in each element of the hologram. A person gives you another perspective, using the same language from another angle. They are seeing it differently through their *latā'if*, but it is

the same thing they are looking at. The reason why you can then receive it and say, “Oh, I never thought of it in that way,” like the *muhadith*, is because internally you recognize something else, another Attribute of Allah—*al-Haqq*. You recognize the truth in it. What does it mean? When you are in a safe and secure environment, when you are among those who love you and you love, you are receptive. Why Allah Swt gave us this language is so that we would be receptive to Allah, and would not think of Allah as somewhere off there, up there somewhere; away from us, like Zeus on Olympus, or like the Wahabis think, that Allah is sitting on a throne somewhere micro-managing the universe, and having no faith in themselves. These extremists have no faith in their own teaching; otherwise, they would trust people with it. So they have to constantly micro-manage it and control it.

You see something from another point of view because you are receptive to it. Granted, Hazrat Adam (as) had no choice in the matter. This was the essential beginning of *qadr*. But in that no choice, the world of choice is opened up, and now the whole movement is toward making the right (consonant or resonant) choices, which begins with what? First you have to learn the language.

Student: You used the word ponder. Does that imply just thinking about it?

Shaykh: Indeed. It’s turning it over, looking at it, testing it out, seeing its effect on you. This is why the first cousin to this is *muhasabat*, because you have to account for your own self. That usually has to do with how you manifest your life and understanding. It doesn’t mean just thinking. It means really investigating, like in a laboratory. You may observe the results of an experiment, and write down exactly what happened, but you don’t understand it until you ponder it. Why did that happen? How did that happen? What was the step by step procedure? Is it a repeatable phenomena? Will this

circumstance create this every time? If it's a negative response, how do I change that? What do I have to do to change that experiment to make it come out in another way? Poner means a lot more than just thinking about it. It means facing it, looking at it, contemplating it, and turning it over.

Studeht: About taking on the burden of another.

Shaykh: Wisdom, knowledge. Many of the attributes of Allah Swt are means of assisting. In some way, they all are. If that is manifest to you, you have a new tool. But you have to use it. I have to use it.

Student: About taking on another's financial debt.

It's *sadaqa*, a blessing. Then they (the recipient) have the burden of owing that person. It's still the same thing. You may not have to pay it back that way, but in your heart you owe. Once you do that, there is no getting away from the sense of duty and responsibility for it. Yes, you can do that. I'm not going to get into *fiqh*, but it can be done and there are rules for doing it, except as *sadaqa*. But ethically, morally, you feel something internally for that. The way Allah Swt helps us in *fiqh* do that is through *zakat*. It is to purify yourself, *atazkiya*. You purify yourself by assisting someone else. These are the means by which we can do that: *sadaqa* and *zakat*. If you understand it as that, you accept it as that, because it is by Allah. If you don't understand it, then you have to deal with the feeling of obligation. But if the person who does it is really doing it *fi sabīl Allah*, then your obligation is to assist someone else. It's a one of the five [beliefs]. We shouldn't call it a pillar, because nowhere does the word pillar appear. (Recites *Suratu-l-Fatihah* with *du'ā*.)

