



PREPARING THE CHAMBERS OF THE HEART FOR THE BELOVED

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Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Surah al-Fatiha

AL-HAMDU-LI-LLAHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULUBI WA-L-ABSAR.
ALLAHUMMA ThABIT QULUBANA ^CALA SIRATIKA-L-QAWIM,
WA-J^CALNA LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHIN,
WA SALLI ^CALA-Sh-ShAFI^CI-L-HABIB,
RAHMATIL-^CALAMIN,
WA MANARI-L-NAJIYIN, WA MARSA-L-^CARIFIN

Praise be to Allah, the Turner of the hearts and sight.
O Allah, fix our hearts on the best of Your ways,
and make us face You in our way,
and bestow blessings on the beloved intercessor,
the mercy of all the worlds,
the lighthouse of the survivors, the harbor of the knowers.

YA MAWJUDAN ^CINDA-Sh-ShADA^A'IDI
YA KhAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YA LATIFA-S-SUN^CI
YA HALIMAN, LA YA'JILUQDI HAJATI
BI-RAHMATIKA, YA ARHAMA-R-RAHIMIN.
SUBHANAKA ^CALA HILMIKA BA^CDA ^CILMIK.
SUBHANAKA ^CALA ^CAFWIKA BA^CDA QUDRATIK

O Existent One, O Thou Who are Present in all difficulties.
O Thou of Hidden Kindness, of Subtle making.
O Gentle One, Who does not hasten, fulfill my need,

with Thy Mercy, O most Merciful of the merciful.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy Grace, after Thy Knowledge.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy Forgiveness, after Thy Power.

BISMI-LLĀH, AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀH
ALLĀHUMMA SALLI WA SALLIM ʿALĀ SAYYIDINĀ MUḤAMMADIN, WA ʿALĀ ĀĀLIHI WA
SAḤBIH
ASALĀMU ʿALAYKUM WA RAḤMATU-LLĀHI WA BARAKATUH

The Subject Tonight is Love
The subject tonight is Love
And for tomorrow night as well,
As a matter of fact I know of no better topic
For us to discuss
Until we all Die!

(Jelaludin Rumi)

INTRODUCTION

First, in my youth, I fell in love with love.
Then, as a young man I fell in love with the objects of love.

Then, as I felt the pains of love and joys of love and experienced the ever-changing truths and lies of love,
I turned toward the Source of Love and began to learn how to extract the essence of Love from creation.

Now, after a life of travelling toward Love,
I am journeying with Love, in Love, by Love,
striving to only be an expression of love.

You ask: how do I know you love me?
My heart replies, for my mind has no answer.

My wounded heart tells me you are willing to be loved
and you are permitting me to attempt that love, once again.

Oh, how patient we have been.
It must be Love that sustained us, pursued us, found us.

THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

The Journey of the soul is a journey toward love, of love, and by love. From the moment we are born, we are on a return journey, a journey to our Source, our Lord, Allah. This journey of the soul is also a journey of the heart for every human being, and indeed all living things. It is a journey toward the Eternal, Divine love, *Qadim*, and away from the conditional love of this created world, *mubdath*.

We all experience both the conditional love of this world and the unconditional love of the Divine. Today I will speak about both these types of love, and how we can use the love we feel in and for this world to build a bridge,

through the doorway of our heart, to the experience of loving the Divine, to experience returning to our Divine Beloved, as our souls have been yearning to do since our first breath.

Sometimes we worry that our experiences of love in and for this world corrupt the pure love for the Divine, *Qadim*. But it is, in fact, necessary for the return journey. It is a template that both shows us the way toward Allah, and reminds us of the limitations of our own love.

The individual who loves only the conditional and temporary (*mubdath*), that which has been created, has endless objects to love in this world. And, if we attempt to elevate our love of this world, by attributing to it the unconditional constancy of the Divine Love, it corrupts our love for the Divine and can even make us question the Divine Love: “Why did Allah take this person (or thing) from me? What did I do or not do? If you love me, Allah, why do you give me this pain, this loss, this struggle?”

But, invariably, the answer is that it is Allah’s (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) reminder to us of who the Real Beloved is, and of the distinction between Eternal Love and the conditional love we experience and feel for this world. This is the dance of life: the interplay between our attraction to this world and our remembrance of the Next, nearness and separation, remembrance and forgetting, loss and gain. It is in this way we are kept, reluctantly at times, on the *siraata-l-mustaqeem* (the straight path), the return Journey toward Allah, who is nearer to us than our jugular vein:

WA LAQAD KHALAQNĀ-L-ʾIŪSĀNA WA NAʿLAMU MĀ TUWASWISU BIHĪ NAFSUHU WA NAḤNU AQRABU ILAYHI MIN ḤABLI-L-WARĪD.

We created man and We know what his own self whispers to him. We are nearer to Him than his jugular vein. (50:16)

This journey, like the stories of the lover who travels the world looking for his beloved, only to return home and find her waiting for him, is a journey to the perfection or freedom of and from our own self (*insaan-i-kamal*). It is a journey to a station (*maqam*) where the lover can love the Beloved here, and know that that love itself is a path (*tareeqah*) toward the love that is, *qadim*, unconditional Eternal/ Divine.

Slowly and gently, as we follow this path, the Divine Love will transform our love of this world into the love of the Creator of this world, until every aspect of this life is a reminder, a metaphor, an opportunity for praising and appreciating Allah: *al-Khalaq, al-Ḥayy, al-Qayyum, al-Waduud, as-Sabuur...*

All living things make a similar journey: Listen this poetic simile:

Our Master once looked at a yellowing autumn leaf still hanging on a tree and said: ‘We both have sickly faces, yours because of life’s hardship and mine because of Love!’

Here, Abu Sa’id finds himself hanging from the tree of life. Both have been manifested: he and the leaf; both have given up their life here. The leaf had no conscious role in its fate, but Abu Sa’id consciously worked hard to die from anything other than love of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*).

*I am in love with love, and love is in love with me.
The body has fallen in love with the soul, and the soul with the body.
Sometimes I put my arms around His neck
Sometimes, like lovers, He pulls my neck close to Him. (Rumi)*

IMPORTANCE OF LOVE TO THE SUFI

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of love in the life of a believer and a seeker on this path. Jami, the Persian Shaykh and poet from the 15th century, tells a story of a seeker who went to ask a *shaykh* for guidance on the Sufi way. The *shaykh* counseled him:

If you have never trodden the path of love, go away and fall in love, then come back and see us. (Jami)

While perhaps a simplification of the qualifications of a seeker on the path, this story illustrates the importance of the experience of love in the life of a seeker. Love is the most essential teaching of the Sufi. Love is the most universal human experience except for death, and love has certainly been associated with dying for the love of the beloved. Love is the message of our Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), and it is the most defining attribute of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta‘ālaa*). Can there be compassion without love or mercy or forgiveness? Love is why we are here and Love is what guides us.

Love is understood and/or misunderstood by virtually every human being. Conflated with attraction, loss and gain, possession and dispossession, grasping, letting go, yearning, despair, happiness and sadness, to name a few of its associations. Love is the first breath and the last breath breathed into and by every living thing, culminating in the articulated and complex ‘love’ of the human being.

We, as did our Father Adam (*alayhi-s-salaam*), associate it with companionship as well as completion. It is for the human being an emanation from the heart; and for the Sufi, that heart is the heart of a believer, in submission and affirmation of the attributes of Allah.

ON THE WORD “LOVE” (*HUBB*)

Let us take a minute to look briefly at this word love, *ḥubb*. Some say that the *ḥubb* is the name for purity of affection. They say that because the Bedouins spoke of pure whiteness of a person’s teeth. If they were pure white and very regular, they would use the expression *ḥabab al asnan*. Others say that *ḥubab* is the word for the excess water that runs from heavy rain. So *maḥabbat* came to mean the heart boiling and stirring with the excitement of meeting the Beloved, sort of overflowing like rain. Others said the words derived from *ḥabab al ma’a*, the greater body of water, because love is the object of most heart’s concern.

Another derivation means a camel that kneels and refuses to stand, just the way a lover’s heart refuses to leave the remembrance of the beloved. All these meanings are associated with love. There is also the derivation: *ḥabba-l-qalb*, the heart’s blood, meaning the thing that sustains us like bread sustains life. *Ḥubb*, of course, is also said to be taken from *ḥiba*, the seeds of desert plants, the kernel of life. And, the name of love also comes from the *ḥubb*, which is a vessel that contains water. It holds what is in it, but has no room for anything else if it is filled. Like the heart, full of love, has no space for anything but the Beloved.

Note, that when I’m speaking today and I say, “the Beloved,” it has a capital “B.” I am speaking of the Love of Allah. We know that in human love, it feels like the same thing, like there is no space for anything else. But, unfortunately, there is space for greed and humiliation, anger and revenge, jealousy, and gossip. This is why this “B” is a very important letter. How can we develop our love for the Divine Beloved: pure, overflowing, unrelenting? How can we germinate that seed of love that is in every human being, knowing that the human being always tries to direct his or her desire and love toward another human being, saving only a little for Allah, rather than directing our love toward Allah and become able to draw from the wellspring of Allah’s love for another human being? If we direct the stream of our love only toward a human being, or toward *dunya*, our well will run dry or it will get poisoned from the impurities of the source (our *nafs ammaarah*). The water will get bitter. But when it is directed toward Allah first, the stream is unending and pure. Inclining toward the lowest levels from the heights of surrender and gratitude in Allah, that love is provided to give to other human beings.

GUIDANCE ON LOVE

We can all relate to this in some way, because, as our *shuyukh* have said, love is a perpetual inclination of the heart. Over the centuries they have given us much guidance on the condition of love. But included in this is the answer to ‘how.’ I would like to share some of this with you today:

Abu Yazid al Bistami (*radiya-LLāhu ‘anhu*) said,

Love is to count it as little when a great deal comes from yourself, and to count it as much when a little bit comes from the Beloved, Allah.

Tustari said,

Love is to embrace obedience and leave disobedience.

If you want to overcome ego, you love Allah. You enter into the relationship with Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa*). The doorway to that relationship is found in the purity of our heart, our motive or trust, our *adab*, our selflessness; in the way we speak, act and serve; and in the way we affirm our practice, taking spiritual initiative, acting in full awareness of our responsibilities and our sincere yearning (*shawq*) for a peace that is deep, abiding and eternal.

Abu Ali Ruhmani said, “*Love is harmony.*”

Abu Abd Qureyshi said, “*The essence of love is to give all of yourself to the One you love, so that nothing of yourself remains to you.*”

And Shibli said, “*Love is called love because it erases from the heart everything except the Beloved.*”

Ibn At’ala Askandari said, “*Love is to always be blameworthy.*”

Abdul Rahman as Sulami reported that Shibli said,

Love means you are jealous that anyone else like you should love the Beloved.

Ibn At’ala Askandari, when asked about love, said, “*Love’s branches when planted in the heart bear fruit according to one’s line.*”

And Nashrabadi said,

There is a love that demands the sparing of blood, and there is a love that demands the spilling of blood.

I also heard him say, “*The lovers of God Most High have carried off the honors in this world and the next. For the Prophet said, ‘A man is together with the one he loves. So they are together with Allah (Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa).’*”

And finally, Abu Abdur Rahman Sulami said,

Love is your attraction to a thing with your entire being; and then your preference for it over your own self, your soul, your possessions; then your harmony with it privately and publically; and then knowledge that you have fallen short in your love of it.

Each quotation is a vein of gold to be mined; but it will remain in the matrix, unless we bring ourselves to contemplate and extract the guidance inherent in it, and develop the *akhblaaq* that comes from fashioning our self out of its beauty.

OUTER AND INNER REFLECTIONS OF THE DIVINE

These quotes ‘about’ love are beautiful and give us insight into love as experienced and taught by the saints, poets, and masters of our Orders. But how we cross that line from speaking ABOUT love of the Divine to feeling love FOR the Divine, how we move from defining the word *hubb* to feeling that gushing forth in a spring of love is our life challenge. It is easy for me to sit here and tell you stories about the lovers of Allah, but how do we become the lovers of Allah; and not just at ‘spiritual’ times, like these, but in every moment?

To understand the foundations of love we must understand the reflections of the Divine that are in our own life. The attributes and qualities of love are the attributes and qualities of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*).

As with our series—which begins with Peace, then Mercy, then Justice, then Love, then Freedom—the goal of all lovers is freedom—Eternal, Ever-lasting, Ever-living Freedom in the awareness of Love of the Beloved. In *dunya*, we have the freedom to experience, to express, to feel, to taste, to use all the senses. We say, “I love that picture, that food, that sunset, that person. I love to laugh, to cry, to make love, to talk, to listen to his/her voice.

In the inner, it is the Love of Allah that we can experience—love in, with, and by, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*). It is the love that is coming ever closer to that eternal pleasure of *sulbat* (company), *fu’aad*, *samad*, *baseerah*. We make that connection between love in the outer and love in the inner through the subtle senses that point to and receive from the Divine Love: by *ishaarat*—making everything pointers to the Divine.

Yahya Bin Mu’za said,

Any time you see a person who makes ishaarat by his actions, know that his Tariqat is piety. And if you see someone who makes ishaarat by knowledge, know that his Tariqat is ‘ibaadah, and if you see someone who makes ishaarat in being secure with provisions, know that his Tariqat is zūbd (asceticism); and if you see someone who makes ishaarat by wonders of the nature, know that his is faqr (forsaking this world); and if you see one who makes it by blessings, know that his Way is that of ‘arif.

What is being said here is typical of Love. Love is not defined by mere words or bodily gestures. It must be shown in inclination, attitude, intention and actions that reflect the core of Love. It is seeing the beloved (Allah) everywhere and knowing that if you are not making *ishaarat* toward Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) in this sense, He is making *Ishaarat* toward you.

The problem, as in love, is the limitation of words. Love cannot be understood by explanations or phrases alone. We do not trust someone who only says, “I love you,” but does not act with love. We expect love to be shown: in the glance of an eye, in a face that lights up, in generosity, in tenderness, in loyalty.

That ephemeral nature is why love, which is the most intimate experience, can also be the most separating experience. Grasping and losing hold are the subjects of all poets.

Near and Far

*How Beloved can you be
so near to me
so far from me?*

*Your nearness fills my heart,
Yet my heart feels your distance.*

*Your distance fills my thoughts
Yet my thoughts feel your nearness.*

*Memories are moments past and
passing.
When we are together moments
pass.
Future memories are born.*

*Remembering is moments past
returning --coming nearer.*

*When we are apart my heart
brings you near.
Now Beloved, past and passing,
near and returning are one.*

*I look for you and you for
me.
We meet in the passing moment
and it begins its return*

*Since our first memory
we have never been apart.*

(Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid)

THE QUALITIES OF LOVE

The goal of the Sufi is to create, within and without, the environment for Love, to increase our capacity to love, and to be the conduit for the Love that is Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). One can find and analyze the qualities of love that are present in any situation by approaching them through the attributes (*ṣifaat*) that reflect Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*).

Take, for example, the love of a mother for her child. In that relationship there is trust, patience, perseverance, compassion, mercy, protection, sacrifice, submission... All these same qualities can also be found in a marriage, as well as loyalty, forgiveness, safety, security. These and more are the components and the syllabus of love. Whether it is love of a parent for a child, or a husband for a wife, we find these values in a deep friendship, in brotherhood/sisterhood, and in the relationship between the student and the *shaykh*, or the Muslim and the Prophet (*ḥalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*).

Pride in heritage, love of place, humble gratitude, *taqwah* (fear of losing name, face, honor in the ‘eyes of Allah’) – these are the qualities of the love I am striving to speak about today. These are attributes that can be found in every relationship of love. And, in fact, we could say that the relationship is not a healthy one if it is not founded on these values and does not evoke these qualities in us.

Junayd (*rahmatu-Llaahi ʿanhu*), when asked about love, said,

Love is to enter into the attributes of the Beloved/ Allah, al-Waduud. Then everything that pertains to the traits of the ego, and even the very sense of it, is forgotten.

Confusion comes when we take the burgeoning knowledge and experience we have with the inner, developing love, and project it on to someone or something else. The purity of our love becomes tangled in justifying, excuses, rationalizing, logical reasoning ...all serving the desire nature of the ego, rather than serving the core of love (*fuʿaad*), the center of the Everlasting, Eternal Love.

Of course, today, most people love the idea of immortality, rather than loving The Immortal. We see around us unending love of self, and the search for immortality of fame, with no successor. This is personified in the character of power hungry secularists like Murdoch, Mubarak, Qadaffi, tyrants, thieves, liars and xenophobes, and characterized by their incessant search for physical immortality and total obeisance from subordinates.

As a society, our search today has, at times, become just a yearning to live forever, in-love with our self, without true spiritual belief: Yoga without the guide, Sufism without either the *pir* or Allah, *islam* without *ihsaan*, *imaan* as a tool of the image and ego, power without surrender, truth without reality, life without death. As Allah reminds us in Surah al-Qiyamah:

KALLĀ BAL TUḤIBBŪNA-L-ĀJILA—
WA TADḤARŪNA-L-ĀKHIRA.

**Nay, but you love the fleeting moment—
And neglect the Final World. (75:20-21)**

LOVE ALLAH THROUGH LOVING OTHERS

The pain, or frustration, or loss that is inevitably experienced with love in this world is a sign from Allah that we are directing our love too much toward the fleeting moment. Whether it is with another human being or some material thing or ideal, it tells you that your inclination was real, but your expectations were unrealistic. As we all go through the vicissitudes of love in this life, each one of the trials and tribulations is pointing us toward Allah. Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani wrote:

Do not try to run away from trials and tribulations, but endure them with patience. They cannot be avoided, and there is nothing for it but to endure them with patience.

How can you expect the whole of this world, and all that has been created therein, to undergo change and transformation just to suit your convenience?

The Prophets are the best of all creatures, yet they have always had to suffer afflictions and so it is for their followers, those who tread in their footsteps as they walk along their highway, emulating their example.

We are on this journey together. If we mutually love Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) and take these practices seriously, and mutually obey, and mutually share something that is eternal, then we are going to have success in both our human relationship, and our relationship with Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*).

Junayd said, “*When a love is sound, the rules of behavior fall away.*” And, Abu Ali recited, “*When people’s love is pure, their ties are constant. Speeches of praise sound ugly.*”

This tells us that if we have in our hearts love for Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*), and if we know ourselves and know our Lord, then we can have the capacity to love others with the same love that Allah loves us with, and that we love Allah with.

Ibn At’ala Askandari recited the following things:

I planted a branch of desire for the people of love. No one before me knew what desire was. As a branch, it came to leaf and ripened with the infatuation of youth. Then bitterness was born to me from the sweet fruit. It desired all the lovers, every one. If they looked for its history, that is its origin. It is said that the beginning of life is deception and the end is slaughter.

That's how overwhelming this journey can be to lover. We get tastes of moments. When we get the taste of those moments, whether bitter or sweet, whether it's the one we wanted or the one that was given to us, we arrive at a place of understanding that it is a Mercy from Allah. It came to us from Allah, and it is to remind us of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*).

If we are swimming in the ocean and a shark comes near to us, we forget about the ocean. There are so many sharks surrounding us in day-to-day life, but we forget that they are part of the ocean.

How can we be reminded of the love of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*) every moment? Don't be just pious people, travelling alone on this path, be friends with one another; cultivate love, and love for Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*), and love for the sake of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*). Cultivate love in your family, in your relationships, in your approach to the world. Speak on spiritual topics to one another. Look at the stars; look at the Spring flowers. Learn to appreciate at the brightness of just one star in the heavens, or the fragrance of one hyacinth blossom.

No two stars are alike, no two trees are alike; no two children are alike. Look, and open your heart to people. How are we going to understand this unless we reach out to one another? How are we going to become a friend of Allah or of the Prophet's (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), if we are not good friends to one another? Humanity is the template for the Eternal relationship.

The Love that we have for Allah is very private and very personal. The only way we can see the love we have for Allah, the only way it becomes visible, is to see it as it is expressed towards fellow human beings; because the love FOR Allah, just like the love OF Allah, is hidden in the hearts of men and women. So the proof of our really loving Allah is to love the people of this world, and the creatures of this world, without any distinction.

If you are seeking closeness to the Beloved, love everyone.

Whether in their presence or absence, see only their good.

If you want to be as clear and refreshing as the breath of the morning breeze, like the sun, have nothing but warmth and light for everyone.

(Shaikh Abu-Saeed Abil-Kheir – “Nobody, Son of Nobody”)

SEEKING THE BELOVED

As important as it is to love everyone, and to show our love for Allah through our love for His creation, this is not a replacement for the personal and individual relationship with Allah. Every prophet, every *imam*, every *shaykh*, every successful seeker has discovered that we must, eventually turn away from that which is limited to that which is eternal and meaningful.

For the Sufi, this turning away, is really a turning toward Allah, turning toward Love. It is a way of awakening the heart, shaking the heart. It is a way of focusing on the goal and seeing through the pain and uncertainty of this world to that which is Real.

The one who tries to reach Me, knows Me

The one who knows Me, wants Me

The one who wants Me, seeks Me

The one who seeks Me, finds Me

The one who finds Me, serves Me

The one who serves Me, remembers Me

The one who remembers Me, I remember him with My mercy.

(Hadith Qudsi)

Let me share with you a story that illustrates the conviction to follow this path, from trying, to knowing, to wanting, to seeking, to finding, to serving, to remembrance. What obstacles do we allow to bar our way and turn us aside from this journey?

One day Nasrudin Hoja was digging in his garden. A man came and asked:

“How can I know my Rabb (Lord)?”

Nasrudin took a stone from his garden path, and threw it at the man, hitting him in the head.

The man, of course, was hurt and upset, and so he took Nasrudin him to court. The judge said to him:

“Hoja, this man asked you a simple question. Why did you hit him in the head with a stone? Why didn't you just answer his question?” And he replied:

“If the man can show me the pain, I will show him his Lord.”

This story reminds us that there are some things you can't make real with words. There are some things you can't answer in the way the answer is expected or wanted. And, even more than that, there are some things for which pain (perhaps the pain of longing; the pain of separation) is a reminder of what is true and real, what is fleeting and worldly.

One of the defining qualities of a true lover of Allah is that they feel the presence of Allah in every moment. They experience Peace, affirm Justice, seek the Mercy of Allah and love others by seeing the Divine's Presence, to the point where they are freed from slavery to this world.

When Mansur al Hallaj famously said “*ana-l-Haqq*,” his state of love was misunderstood and condemned by those who remained attached to separation. They could not see that his love for the Divine dissolved all separation. As Jelaludin Rumi wrote:

*Dissolver of sugar, dissolve me,
if this is the time.
Do it gently with a touch of a hand, or a look.
Every morning I wait at dawn. That's when it's happened before.
Or do it suddenly like an execution.
How else can I get ready for death?*

*You breathe without a body like a spark.
You grieve, and I begin to feel lighter.
You keep me away with your arm,
but the keeping away is pulling me in.*

“I and my beloved are one,” the lover says. “My heart beats in your chest and your heart in mine. I will die if you remove your heart from my heart.” We must learn how to fly on the wings of such love. Our physical heart is in the cage of our chest, but, like the bird in the cage, it seeks freedom.

Once a young man saw a caged dove and felt pity for it. He opened the door, but the dove, which had been born and raised in a cage, would not venture out. It would only perch on the door of the cage and look out at the world. Then a wise and learned man came, and seeing the yearning of the man and the potential of the bird, he walked up behind the cage and clapped his hands loudly, startling the bird, which then took flight and became free.

*Waiting, straining to hear your voice that I may rise:
I am heaven's dove that from the earthly cage will rise.*

*If I am bid but to be your slave,
I gladly foreswear Dominion over worldly things as now I rise.*

(Hafez - "Dance of Life," two couplets)

THE TURNER OF HEARTS

Our heart yearns to be free of the cage of this world, the bars of forgetfulness, of doubt, of selfishness, of disobedience, and arrogance; the bars of injustice, inequality, and mortality. In our heart lie the keys to freedom: remembrance, *sakeenah* (tranquility), well-being and love. The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) describes the heart in this way,

[It is] an organ in the breast of man, which, if it is well, the entire being is well; and if it is not, the entire being is not well.

As we know, the verbal root of this word, *qalaba*, means: to turn around, turn upward, turn over, turn face up or down, to invert, reverse, to overthrow transform transmute. For this dars I will leave it to you to connect the dots and not go deeper into these terms right now.

We have been given the template to understand our reality and the qualities of love and attraction in this reality, to energize our attention and to turn our attention toward the Divine Essence. This template can be activated if we pay attention to our heart and to the subtle organs of perception (*lataa'if*) deep within our hearts. In our Order we say:

Main mutawejjeh boon qalb ki taraf, qalb mutawejjeh hay zāt pak ki taraf

I pay attention to my heart (and my heart) turns and pays attention to the Divine Essence.

Thought the heart we have an open door, a direct line to Allah. Of course, Allah **swt** knows everything that is happening to us in every moment. How? Allah is Present. By bringing our sincerity and worship to the moment, we are knocking on the door of the heart and Allah **swt** is inviting the Beloved who is seeking His company, in. Yes! We are invited into the core of our own heart. Hu's Heart? Yes.

The Persian Poet Shabistari wrote:

*Go sweep out the chamber of your heart.
Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved.
When you depart out, He will enter it.
In you, void of yourself, will He display His Beauties.*

(Mahmud Shabistari – "Rose Garden of Mystery")

The heart is everything. Without the active affirmation of the heart there is no meaning and no understanding. Just as without the life of the heart there is no life of the spirit. It is no accident that the heart has chambers with doorways, and the lover seeks to close himself or herself into the chamber of love with the Beloved. To miss the importance of the heart to the believer is to miss the significance of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) to the Muslim.

To understand and to operate from the heart, with all-encompassing fairness and equity, loving people from your heart, doing your work from your heart, this is the realm of the Sufi.

As our heart turns and allows us to see the Divine everywhere, we become more safe and secure, more free, more patient, more loving. As we join with others who are also turning their hearts in this way—that is studying, practicing, and striving to experience the Divine dance of love—we are, more and more, living the life of a believer. In the daily exchanges of good words and inspiring thoughts, in the exchanges of loving kindness and service, and in the awareness of the Divine Love, we find that we are more and more turned toward the Beloved, and more and more free.

Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) uses this concept of ‘turning toward’ in the Qur’an:

YAWMA TUQALLABU WUJŪHUHUM

A Day their faces will have turned (meaning without distraction). (33:66)

The word is also used as a noun:

INNA FĪ DhĀLIKA LA-DhIKRĀ LI-MAÑ KĀNA LAHU QALBUN.

Most surely, there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart. (50:37)

Over one hundred times, this word *qalb* appears in the Qur’an. This heart is the source of guidance from Allah:

MAÑY-YU’MIM BI-LLĀHI, YAHDI QALBAHU.

Whoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart. (64:11)

And the door to understanding:

LAHUM QULŪBUÑY-YA^oQILŪNA BIHĀ

They have hearts with which to understand. (22:46)

And when it functions properly it is the door to the qualities and blessings of Allah:

HUWA-LLADhĪ AÑZALA-S-SAKĪNATA FĪ QULŪBI-L-MU’MINĪNA

He sends down peace into the hearts of the believers. (48:4)

THE LOVING SERVANT OF ALLAH

So again the question: How can we remind our heart of the unconditional love of the Divine? How can we walk the bridge between the love we feel for the things and people of this world and the love we feel, or yearn to feel, for Allah?

The answer can be found where I began today, and also where I will end, with the *sifaat* of Allah, the attributes: compassion, mercy, patience, gratitude, submission. Every one of the Divine Attributes can be tied to Love, and by bringing these attributes into our life and living them, loving with them, we are living in Allah's Love, by Allah's Love. As Jelaludin Rumi wrote:

*Our desire for Allah is fanned by His love:
It is His attraction that draws all wayfarers along the path.
Does dust rise up without a wind?
Does a ship float without the sea?*

This quatrain of Rumi reminds us that our Love, our desire, our yearning, all belong to Allah. Anything and everything we feel is simply a reflection of His love for His creation. As Allah reminds us in Qur'an:

... ..

YUHIBBUHUM WA YUHIBBŪNAHU ... DhĀLIKA FADLU-LLĀHI YU'TĪHI MAŃY-YASHĀA'U...

He loves them and they love Him...for this is Allah's Face. He gives of it to whom He pleases....
(5:54)

Thus, the Truth (*al-Haqq*) may be described as loving the servant, and the servant may be described as loving the Truth. Similarly, we could say that the Peace loves the servant, and the servant loves Peace. We could say Compassion loves the servant, and the servant loves Compassion. We could say this for every attribute: *as-Sabuur*, *ar-Rashid*, *al-Malik*, *al-Ghaffur*, *al-Wadud*...

Allah's love and His Attributes are always available to us; available to those who repent, who do good, who are just, who persevere in patience, who fight for His cause, who love cleanliness, who put their trust in Him. But it's not available to those who are conceited, boastful, mischievous disturbers of the peace, unjust, extravagant, supercilious. Allah tells us this many times in Qur'an:

ALLADhĪNA YUŃFIQŪNA FĪ-S-SARRĀ'I WA-D-DARRĀ'I WA-L-KĀDhIMĪNA-L-GhAYDhA
WA-L-ĀFĪNA ĀNI-N-NĀSI -- WA-LLĀHU YUHIBBU-L-MUHSINĪN.

Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity or in adversity, those who restrain anger and pardon (all) men; for Allah loves (hub) those who do good (al-muhsineen). (3:134)

BALĀ MAN AWFĀ BIĀHDIHI WA-TTAQĀ, FA'INNA-LLĀHA YUHIBBU-L-MUTTAQĪN.

Whoever fulfills his pledge and is conscious of Allah [is the beloved of Allah, for] Allah loves those who are conscious [of Him]. (3:76)

... FA'IDhĀ ʿAZAMTA FA-TAWAKKAL ʿALĀ-LLĀH. INNA-LLĀHA YUHIBBU-L-MUTAWAKKILĪN.

...And when you are resolved, then put your [whole] trust in Allah. Surely, Allah loves [hubb] those who put their trust [in Him] (al-mutawakileen). (3:159)

...WA-LLĀHU YUHIBBU-Ṣ-ṢĀBIRĪN

...And Allah loves [hubb] those who are firm and steadfast (as-sabreen). (3:146)

There should be no question of Allah's love for us, and the way to that love, but what of our love for Allah *swt*? Abu Bakr al-Kattaanee (d.322H) told this story about Love:

A discussion about mahabbah took place in Makkah during the Pilgrimage month. The shuyukh who were present spoke about this matter, and al-Junayd was the youngest of them. They said to him:

'O 'Iraqi, what do you have to say?' So he bowed his head and tears were flowing from his eyes, then he said:

*'A servant should overcome his soul,
And be continuous in the remembrance of his Lord,
Establishing the rights of his Lord,
Focusing upon Him with his heart,
The light of fear letting ablaze his heart,
Whilst drinking from the vessel of true love;
And certain realities become unveiled for him.
So when he talks, it is due to Allah.
When he speaks, it is from Allah.
When he moves, it is by the Command of Allah.
And when he is serene, then it is from Allah.
He belongs to Allah, is for Allah, and is with Allah.'*

So the shaykh's started to weep and said:

'How can that be increased upon? May Allah reward you with good, O crown of the knowledgeable ones!'

(Taken from: Madaarij-us-Saalikeen, of Imaam ibn Qayyim)

In all of us is the potential for the perfection of love. It is a condition that can move us to be attached to the world or people, or it can move us to glorify Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*) and see that Divine Presence everywhere, as it did Junayd. It can make us too patient with our faults, or it can make us impatient to see Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*). We can have a passionate excitement for this world, or we can have passionate desire for Allah. We can rest comfortably in this world, thinking that rest will never be ended, or we can rest in Allah and draw near to Allah in the desire to be close to Allah.

But we should never mistake the conditional love of this world, with the Love of, or for, the Divine. The 'abd's love for Allah has only gratitude, not ownership; whereas, our love in this world we consider with ownership. We have rights and entitlements. "You're my wife. You're my husband. I'm entitled to this. I have rights." But not in the love of Allah; the person who loves Allah has no rights, feels no entitlement, and no possessiveness. Hafez wrote of this kind of selfless love:

*Even after all these years; the sun never says to the earth,
"You owe me."
Look what happens with a love like that.
It lights up the whole sky.*

ON ESHQ

And this brings me to *Eshq*. I began today defining one word for love: *hubb*. I will end with another word: *Eshq*. This is the beginning of a whole deeper level of discussion on love, one that we do not have time for today. But, as Sufis, we cannot sit and talk of love and not mention *Eshq*. Certainly, it is *Eshq* that was represented in the poems I have quoted so far.

While *hubb* is something we all experience in our life, *Eshq* is something reserved for the true Lovers of Allah. *Eshq* cannot be explained; *Eshq* has to develop. It too develops out of *shamq*: desire, longing, yearning; yet finds no fulfillment, except in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) and the love for the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). For the person of *Eshq*, there is not even temporary fulfillment in worldly love; the worldly love points to the Divine each and every time. Only that which overflows with Divine Love can calm the heart of the seeker of Love.

My Shaykh, Hazrat Azad Rasool, and my beloved mentors Shaykh Ahmed Kuftaro, Shaykh Osman Sirajuddin an-Naqshband, and Sulieman Dede Loras, all showed the signs of *Eshq*. In their eyes was an emptiness that drew in my soul. Their eyes were always filled with limpid tears that overflowed their love for Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) and the Prophet, with serenity and clarity that overflowed into my empty vessel. Not a harsh word, not a sharp tone, not a doubting look did I ever see in them, only love and submission – only LOVE, calm, peaceful and assured.

This longing, yearning type of love is so much the Sufi's special love, that no Sufi feels they deserve it. It is the love that is designed by Allah **swt** only for those who feel they are unworthy of Allah's love. They are only worthy in Allah's eyes, never in their own. It is for those who in the core of their heart from the earliest times thought only that they were unworthy. They searched because they had to. They were dissatisfied with what they had, because it wasn't complete.

Every time this person receives a blessing, they wonder why, thinking: "Perhaps it was meant for someone else, and accidentally came to my address." Accepting it gratefully, they think they will soon be "found out" and it will be taken away, and so never quite use it up.

Eshq has a sense of unworthiness in it, a longing in it, a nearness and farness in it; hence, there is humility and modesty that accompanies it. It has the pain of separation in it, and it has enormous gratitude. If we want to know *Eshq*, we have to reduce our self to living in the moment, on the Charity of Allah. When one arrives in the moment, desire ceases, but longing and yearning never cease.

One can't say they have *Eshq*; they can't pretend they have it. In the person who has it, you will always see the joy of union in their face. Their words will be comforting, their advice indisputable, and their patience comforting. Their hand is soft to the touch, and their love for you undeniable.

As Bayazid Bistami said:

The Thing we tell of can never be found by seeking, yet only seekers find it.

CONCLUSION

There is so much to speak about on the subject of Love. We have only touched on it today. It is a subject that everyone can relate to in some way; yet it is also a subject that has such depths that most will never fully understand it. Most people only experience momentary love, assigning it, falsely and eventually regretfully, permanency. But the few who really understand life, Islam, Sufism, learn to walk the bridge or corridor; learn to listen differently to the poetry; see differently with their eyes, and listen differently to the heart.

My Shaykh guided me on the path of love, and taught me to see with the eyes of the heart, as I have tried to do today. His was the type and character that he did not test his *mureeds*, except in one area. There is another type of shaykh who tests the aspirant in many ways. But my Shaykh, Hazrat Azad Rasoul (*alehi Rahmo*), tested me only in love, in *adab*, in a love that was deep, not passionate, but one that was built on trust and friendship, one that was open and congenial, one that included personal discourse and sharing of the challenges of life. And we also laughed together often and without reason!

He taught me the need to see and constantly adjust my *adab*, to continuously strive to train my *nafs*, to attempt again and again to temper my temperament. At once he elevated me, and at the same time humbled me. He brought me to love even my enemies (*inshaa'a-Llaah* that remains), and to present that love even to the enemies of Truth. He taught me a love with hope and *du'aa* and trust in Allah. He offered me a rope, cast from and anchored in the Divine Reality, and offered it to my hand, through his hand. This was the test of love: it is always offered, but the test is if we can grasp it and hold onto it.

WA-ṬAṢIMŪ BIḤABLI-LLĀHI JAMĪʿAÑW-WA LĀ TAFARRAQŪ WA-DḤKURŪ NIṬMATA-LLĀHI
 ʿALAYKUM IDḤ KUÑTUM AḌDĀʿAÑ FA-ALLAFA BAYNA QULŪBIKUM FA-AṢBAḤTUM
 BINIṬMATIHI IKHWĀNANAÑW-WA KUÑTUM ʿALĀ SHAFĀ ḤUFRAṬIM-MINA-N-NĀRI FA-
 AÑQADḤAKUM MINHĀ KADḤĀLIKA YUBAYYINU-LLĀHU LAKUM ĀYĀTIHI LAʿALLAKUM
 TAHTADŪN.

And hold fast all together to the rope of God, and never be divided. Remember Allah's favor upon you: you were once enemies, and He reconciled your hearts so that through His favor, you became like brothers. You stood on the brink of a pit of fire, and He delivered you from it. Thus, Allah makes His signs of truth clear to you that you may be guided (to the Straight Path in all matters, and be steadfast on it). (3:103)

This quote from the Qur'an of course refers, as most explain it, to holding to the Sharee'ah and the Sunnah; but note the tone and the essence of this *ayat*: "...He reconciled your hearts so that through His favor, you became like brothers..." Read this carefully and learn about true love.

Listen, and learn, today, if you dare; or continue on the roller coaster ride of love and loss, love and loss. To love and fear Allah can mean fearing the love of this world as a replacement for the Divine, rather than seeing love in this world as a metaphor, a doorway to the love of Allah.

Today, I hope that I have given no excuses, not an inch, for justification or for forcing your wants into the framework of Love. Love resides in your heart be assured. You may, some of you, faced with fear or loss or desire, try to twist these words (as I have done in my life); but that comes to no avail. To surrender to love is to surrender to Allah (and His *sifat*). So, give up the goal and enjoy the momentary love, hoping it is eternal; or maintain the journey and enjoy the love, moment to moment, *insh'allah* for Eternity. Rabi'a al-Adawiyya wrote:

O Lord, if tomorrow on Judgment Day You send me to Hell, I will tell such a secret that Hell will race from me until it is a thousand years away.

O Lord, whatever share of this world You could give to me, give it to Your enemies. Whatever share of the next world You want to give to me, give it to Your friends. You are enough for me.

O Lord, if I worship You from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell.

O Lord, if I worship You from hope of Paradise, bar me from its gates.

But if I worship You for Yourself alone, Then grace me forever the splendor of Your Face.

(Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, translation by Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut - 'Perfume of the Desert')

CLOSING: DU^{AA}: LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

I would like to conclude today with some *du'aa* of the heart. *Du'aa* is one of the ultimate expressions of love for Allah. *Du'aa* that comes from the heart embodies all His qualities – the qualities of love, patience, humility, gratitude, trust, acceptance, submission, tenderness.

Often we wish that we could spontaneously recite these *du'aa* and speak what is in our hearts. But most of us are barely aware of what is in our hearts, let alone able to speak it, in the moment, directly to the 'ears' of Allah. The exception is the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).

There's hardly a moment, if you read the life of Rasulu-Llaah (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), when he was not making some *du'aa*, whether standing, sitting or lying down, whether in public view or in private. Because everything he did in every situation, and every challenge he faced, whether happy or sad, every challenge he faced, in hardship or ease, *du'aa* was the very breath of his life.

It's with these *du'aa* that you can unravel or decode the heart of Rasulu-Llaah (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), to the point where we see that his life was nothing but filled with love for and submission to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*).

In these *du'aa*, we see all the qualities, *sifaat*, that I began with today. We find a very humble person, a person whose heart is awake, a person who is immersed in the remembrance of Allah. Everything in their life reminds them of Allah, and reminds them to make a *du'aa*. The remembrance is loving and joyful, and there's not a moment of forgetting. You find a heart that knows that Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) is everything, and that he, himself, is nothing.

We walk around this earth with all of our frailties if not displayed 'on our sleeve,' then on our face, tongue, eyes, and attitude. The implication is that we are something because of our problems and flaws. But here, in these *du'aa* we find a man who thought he was nothing but a servant of Allah, because his heart is emptied of everything so that only Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) can occupy it. We find a heart totally submitted to the will of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), totally humble before Allah, and totally thankful to Him in every circumstance, a heart that is willing to be patient, persevering, kind, loving and humble.

So, with that, let me end by sharing some of this *du'aa* with you:

O Allah! I am your servant, the son of your servant, and the son of your maid servant, and entirely at your service. You hold me by my forelock. Your decree is what controls me. Your commands to me are just. I beseech you by every one of your names, those which you use to refer to yourself or have revealed in your Book or have taught to anyone of your creation, or have chosen to keep hidden with you in the Unseen, to make the Qur'an al Karim the springtime of my heart, the light of my eyes, and departure of my grief, and the vanishing of my affliction and my sorrow.

Our Lord, of your knowledge of the unseen and by your power over your creation grant me life so strong as you know life is good for me, and grant me death when you know death is good for me.

Our Lord, I ask you for the fear of you in public and in private, and I ask you for the ability to speak the word of truth and tranquility in anger. I ask you for frugality in wealth and poverty, and for happiness which is never exhausted. I ask you for pleasure which is never-ending, and for contentment with your decisions. I ask you for a finer life after death, and for the pleasure of looking upon your fact and meeting you without ever having undergone great suffering or subjected to misleading temptation.

Allah, unto You I complain of my weaknesses and helplessness, and my loneliness before men. O Merciful of the merciful, You are the Lord of the weak, and You are my Lord. Whose hands will you entrust me unto—a far off stranger who will ill-treat me? Or unto a foe whom You have empowered against me? I care not. Do not be angry with me but Your favoring help that were for me the broader way and wider scope. I take refuge in the light of Your Countenance whereby all darkness is eliminated and whereby all things in this world and the next are rightly ordered. Lest You make Your anger descend upon me or lest your wrath beset me, yet it is Yours to reproach until You are well pleased. There is no power and no might except in You.

*Allahumma allif bayna quluubinaa
wa aslih dhata bayninaa
wa abdinna subula-s-salaam
wa najjinaa mina-dh-dhulumaati ilaa-n-Nuur*

*O Allah! Create mutual love in our hearts
and make peace between us (or set us straight),
and guide us along the path of peace, safety and harmony,
and bring us from darkness to light,*