

June 3, 2011

Khutbah



Title: The Meaning of Qalb and Qalaba

DVD title: Qalb and Qalaba: Turn from Forgetfulness and Direct One's Heart to Allah

Allah (swt) revealed in Surah al-Fath:

It is He Who sent down deep inner peace into the hearts of the believers, so that they may add faith to their faith. To Allah belong the forces of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is All-Knowing and All-Wise—that He might bring the believing men and the believing women into gardens through which rivers flow, and that they may dwell therein forever, and to cover over for them their past evil deeds. And that in the sight of Allah is a mighty triumph. (48:4-5)

Also, in the same *surah*, in ‘*āyat* 11, He says:

The desert wanderers who were left behind will tell you, “Our wealth and our families possessed us, so ask forgiveness for us.” Their tongues do not speak what is in their hearts. Can anyone do anything for you against Allah if He intends harm for you or if He intends to benefit you? Rather, Allah is well aware of what you do.

Asalaamu aleikum. Those us of who receive reassurance in our hearts, and who are believers, add to the faith our own faith, and add from the fullness of the Dīn of Islam to our own faith. There is this reciprocal contribution being made in the cycle of giving and

receiving. The word “*qalb*” is used in both of these ‘*āyāt*. *Qalb* is used more than 100 times in the Qur’an, and there are 200 references to the derivation of the word in Qur’an. It means it is a fairly significant word. This reference today is about turning of the heart toward Allah, in keeping with what I have been speaking about in terms of meditation and remembrance. Allah says that only by remembrance of Allah is the heart made to be peaceful or tranquil. This *dhikru-Llāh* is remembering that or who is always present (as I spoke last night in a detailed answer to a question posed by Arifa). But Allah is not always recognized so easily or spontaneously by us, and this is what we need to focus on again today.

Sometimes it’s good to go back to the obvious. I suspect you could do some kind of a search, if we only had the right search tool, and find how many times I’ve made this reference. The seeing and knowing that has been eclipsed by our forgetfulness is unfortunately vast and daily. Our personal responsibilities, our personal responses to one another, our actions and reactions to circumstances and each other put us in a position of forgetfulness. We forget what is important, and then we construct our own reality around that forgetfulness, and then we enforce or expand on that reality. What we are sure is real is often a construction of our own.

We take elements of the Divine Attributes – and we’ve seen this unfortunately many times in our lives, people who wrap things up in spirituality – like love or justice or concern, and implant them into our own constructed reality, which is not the reality Allah has presented to us; our own constructed desires, which are not necessarily the responsibilities Allah (swt) has given to us. And because it’s an implant, guess what we have to do? We have to take every day something, so we don’t reject it, so that implant is not rejected. And what do we take? Self-deception, desires, proofs all around us, as if we have our antennae out trying to prove what we want to prove, instead of really caring about remembering that Allah (swt) is present, and *that’s* the proof of everything.

That's the standard we should be living by, and that's how we should be making decisions, and how we should be giving service, as well as receiving love and service from others. What does this have to do with *qalaba*? Everything. Because this remembrance is not really meaningful unless there is with it the recognition of our forgetfulness. Against the backdrop of for-getting, we see the importance of remembering. I use the word for-getting as two words: for getting – selfishness. Sometimes it is just pure selfishness in the case of greedy people, and sometimes it is just for comfort. Sometimes it is for psychological reasons, but whatever reasons they may be, for-getting is a serious, if not THE most serious, problem. Against the backdrop of forgetting, we can see the importance of remembering.

This sort of dyad of forgetfulness and remembering creates a very dynamic reality for us day to day. For the most part, we forget. The deeper we find ourselves in forgetfulness – until we no longer find ourselves in forgetfulness, and we think where we are is normal, right or even righteous – the deeper we find ourselves in forgetfulness, the greater the chance we have to return to remembrance until that paradigm shifts. It is said if you have *khawf* and *taqwa*, you find yourself in forgetfulness. It causes you to respond emotionally, mentally and intellectually to say, “Oh, this is a really bad place I'm at! I don't want to be here anymore.” You are in a state where you can really embrace remembrance, but you are also one step away from that becoming your norm. So it's a very, very tenuous place to be.

What we have to worry about, of course, is when we stop seeing that we have forgotten, and of course that is the greatest danger. The realities of life are often difficult with trials and tribulations. Living in this world is difficult. Allah (swt) has spoken many times about the heart, and He tells us: **“To them you will turn. We turn them about, to the right and to the left.”** He says, **“Allah (swt) turns over the night and the day, a day their faces will have turned.”** And another: **“He came to them with a repentant heart, most surely there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart.”** I talked about repentance last night. Over and over again we hear this word *qalaba*, to turn and

return to the heart. Return to the heart means to return to the qualities of recognition of the Will of Allah, recognition of the Attributes of Allah (swt), recognition of the Presence of Allah (swt) in the form of love, patience, trust, surrender, kindness, service, truthfulness, judiciousness, etc.

So in this travel guide, this book of journeying (Shaykh holds the Qur'an), we have ways of understanding the very subtle laws that embrace and cover this creation. It is written in a language that has deep, deep roots in Aramaic and Persian and Hebraic languages, the deepest linguistic roots. We receive meanings from those languages, and we see there are many aspects of the words that are important. We find the word *qalb* has many different meanings, though it has similar meanings to people with similar geographic locations. We find it very difficult to render the correct Qur'anic concepts into English, even though we say the 'heart,' or 'turning' or 'returning.' Even linguistic scholars have made mistakes giving prejudice translations because of their own attributes or cultural predispositions.

If we really want to try to see the core of the meaning of the word, we have to go back to the Qur'an and see how it uses those meanings, and not just in our dictionary and our concordances. We see how it is developed also through our meditation. The more time we spend on it, the more we get impressed with that light. What we develop through our meditation, our growth, through the light of the *shuyukh*, through the *ambiyā* is really important. Literally, as we have said a thousand times at least, *qalb* means heart, and it is the lump of flesh that Allah tells us in the Qur'an exists in the chest of all of us. Yet Prophet Muhammed (sal) describes it as an organ in the chest of a human being which, if it is well, the entire human being is well. And if not, the entire human being is ill, or not well. He also indicates that *qalb* is not just a physical organ, but is something more than that. It is something like a field of energy.

At the center of the heart, the *huwal al batin*, there is a subtle force that is imposed on the physical heart. If we look at that verb, it means to turn around, turn about, to overturn, to face up or face down, to turn inside out, to tip, to tilt, to fix, to lift, to topple over, to inverse, to upset, to reverse, to capsize, to subvert, to overthrow, to change, to alter, to transform, to transmute, to transpose, to exchange. That's just some of the meanings. That's why you find these 200 references in the Qur'an, to show the subtleties of these different meanings. What are those things? They are all experiences. Most of those experiences we have had in our lives. We have had them on a physical level and an emotional level, in our hearts.

What's most important is that it forms a foundation for our relationship with Allah (swt) and for our understanding about how we can use life as a form of remembrance of the divine blessings, and not construct a straw man or our own personal reality that we try to create, control, direct, without any real mandate, other than lip service, or direction from Allah (swt) to have that reality. Someone may say, "O Shaykh, what are you talking about? Don't we all create our own realities?" Certainly, to some extent, we do. But how do we check our reality against what is really real? How do we really know? Can we know only by emotions? Emotions can be manipulated by our minds, let alone by external circumstances, let alone by other people. How do we check that reality? Against what? Would you check an Islamic law against a Christian principle? Not necessarily, unless it was a shared principle. Would you check even a legal statute in America against a statute in Germany? No, you wouldn't.

Often we turn outward instead of inward to validate our state, our beliefs, and our understandings. If I'm having a problem, and I go to our neighbors, you will say I'm crazy. What do they know about my life? What will I get? I am going to get some association they have with my problem, and they will tell me what they might do if they were me. So where do we turn for validation? We have to turn to something that is immutable. We have to turn to something that really makes perfect sense, even when we

don't like what it says, but we know is true. We turn to the example of the Prophet Muhammed (sal). We turn to what is in this text (the Qur'an). If we are not sure what it means, we turn to people who have great knowledge of what it means, who also follow a very moderate and open-minded world view from this Book, which is not a text but the words of Allah. We turn to Allah. That's one way of looking at turning, *qalaba*.

How do we validate what we are told here? Our heart. Not just the passionate heart of human love, but the heart that recognizes when something is right even though we may not like it to be, and even though we don't like that answer or that situation. It tells us it is right. We have seen the magic of how the heart can transform our attitude about a person, or a situation, how our intuition works. We have seen from our own experiences how there are reversals in the heart and in the mind. We have seen all of these implications that happen in our heart when we are happy, when we are upset, when we pay attention, when we look at different ideas, when we grow and overturn the predispositions we have had before, when we reverse our beliefs, when things are subverted and changed.

If we think of ourselves in a more holistic way as human beings, as a model of something multi-dimensional, then we can begin to understand the term *qalaba*. Then we really want good change. We really want transformation. We really want to turn away from the things that are harmful and hurtful, confusing and selfish; but at the same time, we want to have meaning in our lives. So we try to understand our capabilities, and we realize our capabilities are endless. We should always be growing and learning, and adding to our wisdom. When we look at our faculties, we can only look at them through the faculties we have. You can't look through my eyes. I can't look through your eyes. But we try to look through the eyes of, or the teachings of Nebi Muhammed (sal) and the Qur'an.

Allah (swt) says: ***"I will see through your eyes, speak through your lips, I will walk through your feet."*** It means it is possible to adopt a point of view that you can trust is

true. The agenda is truth; the intention is character development. If we are to think of ourselves in this holistic way, as models of something multi-dimensional, then we not only can understand the term *qalaba*, but we can try to understand those faculties within us that give us the ability to increase their sensitivity. We can try to understand better the reality we are apparently perceiving, and try to understand that everything in this creation is somehow a model of the Creator. Everything we are presented with is an opportunity to find *mīzān*, harmony, balance, peace, everything.

The thing that is frustrating to you is also a challenge for harmony and peace. This is nothing new. The prayer of the Prophet Isa (as) was, “*Change me, O Lord, change not my circumstance.*” The circumstance is what brings you to the situation of “I want to change.” So you pay attention to your heart, and where your heart directs you. Not toward your preferences only, but toward the two hundred meanings in this book. I would venture to say that none of us, if we were really operating on a proper level, would make any changes to our lives unless we checked the 200 meanings of that. Wouldn’t that be great? That would be terrific. That means for our work, for our personal lives, for our community, our families, our advice to our children, our brothers and sisters, whatever it may be.

Why is this Book meaningful? It says Allah not only resides in the heart of the believers, but what did we say in the very beginning? Only in the heart does a person find tranquility and peace. It’s not referring to the world. This central organ is a very important piece of flesh that has a transcendental value to us. The best model, of course, that Allah chose for replicating His Qualities in His Heart is human beings, and human beings have a few limitations as some of us might recognize. We are limited by our senses, by our emotions, by our physical experiences, and sometimes by our bodies. These are very profound functioning organisms that have taken control over this world. If this world were in the control of that which there was the most of, we would be slaves

to insects. There are 200,000 insects for every cubic foot, which means in the air too. If you don't believe that, turn your lights on in the summer time when you are driving.

Allah (swt) offered this creation to things that were most plentiful: the mountains (meaning dirt and soil and rock) and the rivers (meaning every drop of water). What did they say? They refused. But in this lowly thing that walks on the earth, which is the most central creation of Allah, human beings, the most perfected of the beings – limited in number but supposedly intelligent – He put a heart that can be turned toward the good or not, the choice to remember or not. We seem to have characteristics and capabilities that are unlimited. We attempt to imitate the capabilities of the Creator who is unlimited. We tend to think we are omnipotent, and even on occasion, omnipresent, when we feel guilty and think we are being watched. You may feel the *shaykh* is omnipresent. (Believe me, I'm not.) What is omnipresent is in your head.

The Creator is the root of our holistic life. And if our heart is focused on any one situation, we are likely to reflect that situation. If it is set on something we want, we are likely to gain it, because that focus is a *niyyat*. If our heart turns, it usually turns toward something we can perceive, touch and sense; but the function of our heart in the generic sense is always turning, always growing, never fixed on anything for any length of time. In a way, it is like we are scanning the world around us, scanning the information around us, storing what we want, and translating what is useful to us, and describing what we don't want and don't need, usually without consulting Allah (swt). When we are told to enjoin people to do good and forbid them from doing wrong (*maruf* and *munkar*), how do we know what is good? Certainly we know it from our own self, our own maturity, and our experiences in life; but it is verified for the Muslim in the Qur'an. It is verified in the Torah for the Jew, verified in the Injil, verified for people in the holy utterances of Allah swt.

“O Changer of hearts.” What does it mean? It means: I pay attention to you, Allah. I am remembering You and all those attributes, all the injunctions and all the admonitions; then You are going to change my heart and turn my heart to where it should be. If I’m just thinking through my ego and fears, my desires and my wants, then my heart will change according to that. So we say, “O You Who is the Changer of the heart,” not “O me who is the changer of the heart.” In translating this, we see that the heart is something which turns to the left or right, in repentance or in love; we see there are so many aspects. In the Naqshbandiyya we begin and end in *qalb* in our meditation. We realize that all of our inner organs are perceptions within the *qalb*. Under the noun *qalb*, the dictionary says, “a reversal, inversion, overturning, etc.” The core, the center, the marrow, the pith, the best, the choicest part; the mind, the soul, the spirit – these are all attributes of the heart. Then it takes so many years, 1420 some years for science to discover that brains cells are in the heart.

For those of us who follow Tasawwuf, when we put our heads down and are sitting in meditation, when we strike our heart in the *dhikr* in search for balance / *mizan*, harmony, happiness and tranquility, we are actually creating that as our form of remembrance. We are creating that in our *muraqabah*. We are aligning and attuning ourselves just like you tune an instrument. How many of you would like to be on Broadway or booked at the Kennedy Center, forced to go there, and before you walk in, they hand you an instrument you have never played. How many of you would like to perform there on an instrument you do play? Abul Hasan on the violin. Fatima on the flute. Roya on the piano... she would be the only one who could play there. How many of you would like to do that? No. You’d be embarrassed, humiliated. Then, let’s take it back a step. If you come out of a concert at the Kennedy Center, and someone from the Washington Post comes up to you and says, “We need you to write the review of what you heard tonight and it will be published tomorrow,” how many of you would say, “Thank you very much, I’ve been waiting for an opportunity for this my whole life”? Nobody.

I understand learning by doing; and unfortunately, most of us are great embracers of the concept. And we walk over the edge of the cliff so many times in our lives. We make decisions we have no real knowledge how to make. We have a kind of ignorant arrogance. Then we say, "I'll trust in Allah. I'm jumping off this bridge, but I'll trust in Allah that I will be all right." We have the guidance, and we have the means to train ourselves. What do you think the sitting in *muraqabah* is for? It is for tuning and training.

What do you think the study of Qur'an is for? What do you think all these terrible things I've asked you to do for 35-40 years are for? Just to get your toes wet? How many of you would like to go to the beach right now? Wouldn't that be nice? It could be a nice private beach, where the ladies have part of the beach and the boys have part of the beach. Nobody would have anything to complain about. How many of you would swim if you were at the beach or go in the water, at least? As we used to say in Arabic, "Dunk." All of us, right? What's my point? (That we should sit). Right. These things are given to us as opportunities.

If we don't take them, you have to lie to yourself that you are making good decisions, that you understand what's going on in the world, that you can deal with your work, your children, that you can deal with environmental crises. You have to lie to yourself that you are prepared. So we become comfortable with lying to ourselves. Why? Go back to the beginning: we create our own reality. We set the standard for what that reality is. The reality is, if I say "I'm trusting Allah, everything will be all right" that's my reality. But I've not done anything to trust in Allah. Who am I to trust in Allah, when I haven't proven to myself that I can trust in Allah? What happens if everything changes? Then what? Will you say your trust wasn't any good, or will you say Allah failed you? Or will you say, "Wait a minute. I still have Jesus, Buddha, this and that to trust in. I'll just try another god." We laugh, but it's true.

We have to align ourselves and attune ourselves just like you tune an instrument. You tune an instrument by having a ground note. The heart is the instrument; it has a ground note. We have to tune the heart, and filter what comes into us and what goes out of us. We have to attempt to find a balance between the human heart and the human mind, between normal human issues and challenges, and the Divine Presence. Happiness is our natural state. Sometimes we make ourselves unhappy on purpose. Happiness is our natural state. But we impose conditions on ourselves, allowing ourselves to experience so much fear, alienation, intolerance, acquisitiveness and desires. We have so much insecurity in the search for security that we forget about the beauty of that unconditional love that is available to us. We don't seize it in the moment with one another.

A moment of love should not be immediately contrasted with "what you said to me yesterday" or "tomorrow you will do this." A moment of love should be savored. I'm watching the roses on my rose bush. They grow bigger and bigger every day, and then they get to that point of absolute beauty. Shall I cut it or let it keep going? Then it gets purple on the edge and dries and falls down. You have to know how to seize the moment and enjoy its beauty; that's our natural state. In our hearts, love is pure and unconditional. We impose from that distracted mind conditions on love, conditions on experiencing happiness. When we put them only in material terms, when we think of the gift instead of the giving; when we think of what we received instead of receptivity, when we think of getting instead of the benefit of forgiving and repenting, then we have conditioned our own happiness.

So this is the meaning of *qalb* and *qalaba*. They are keys to understanding what it means to turn away from forgetfulness, to turn away from conditioning, to turn away from the attachments of this world that are not beneficial and to turn to unconditional love. It is necessary for us to dwell upon it, and that is in our *muraqabah*, and that is in our prayer and in our study. Just set a little time apart, and allow yourself to benefit from it. Very few people don't repeat what they benefit from, if they really taste the benefit and

understand it. Don't gloss over this capability to direct one's heart in a good direction. We cannot easily totally surrender and let Allah direct our heart at the very beginning. The very beginning can be 25 years after you start on this path, because you may not have been really doing it for 25 years.

We have to direct our heart toward Allah (swt) and put our attention toward the Divine Essence. Eventually, we get lost in that practice, and eventually our hearts naturally turn. Our capability to reason is mostly in our mind, but what is in our heart embraces everything that is in our mind and our soul. So look for those quotations in the Qur'an.

Most surely there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart.

There is a reminder in this for him who has a heart.

He who is in his heart a sickness is greedy.

Whosoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart.

Thus Allah sets a seal over the hearts of the disbelievers.

These are some examples just to give you clues where you can find in the heart. This is the way to peace and understanding, *inshā'a-Llāh*. We can maybe make *wuqufi qalbi* in the heart a few more times today and arrive at some understanding of what this love really means. When we look at our children, we love our children. You should also pause for a second, and think, what is the quality of that love? *Alhamdulillah-Llāh*. We can also direct it in other ways. *Asalaam aleikum*.

SECOND KHUTBAH

Take a moment to pray for what you want, in all sincerity.