



Title: [Gratitude and Thankfulness with Humility Part I](#)
Intention for Ramadan

DVD title: (same)

Dinner blessing: Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. O Allah (swt), here we are on the night of Laylatul Qadr, *inshā'a-Llāh*. We have fasted a month, less a few days; but there are so many in the world who are fasting not by choice but out of necessity. We sit here with Your Fadl, with Your Nai'ma, with all the bounties You could possibly bestow on undeserving human beings, while some of the deserving ones go hungry. O Allah (swt), Your mysteries are very deep, and we seek the answers in our own hearts. We seek, Allah (swt), to be worthy of all that You bless us with, and to be generous and kind in our lives. And we ask You, Allah, to send Your Blessings upon those in need. Make us worthy of what You have bestowed upon us. Make us humble Allah, and make us grateful. O Allah (swt), it is those subjects which we will discuss this weekend. But more than discuss, let us drink them in. Let us make them be our sustenance for the next year, until Your blessing, our guest Ramadan, returns again for a visit. *Amin.*

Suhbat: Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. First let me thank Allah (swt) for bringing us all together, and thank you for making the effort to come. We are very grateful that you give us the opportunity to get so much *thawab* for serving you and being with you. Last year at this retreat I was speaking about *muraqabah*. We are Naqshbandiyya, Qadriyya, Shadhuliyya, and Chishtiyya. Though we focus mostly on the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi practices, we do all the rest also. One of the really strong foundational practices of our order is *suhbat*. It's not just people getting together, and not even just people of good will and piety getting together. There is a force that we all need to be exposed to that is transforming.

That's the force that is in every stroke and every letter of Al Qur'an. That is the force that motivated our Prophet (sal) to seek silence and to seek the company of Allah swt. That is the force that made our *shuyukh* awaken to another alternative way of understanding Islam. That's the force that has brought us together, and by the will of Allah (swt), has kept some of us together for over 40 years. That's the force, indeed, that has brought us together today to this place, to this time. Whether we recognize it or not, whether we understand it or not, fully; that's not what is important. What is important is that we accept it is a possibility. I ask Allah (swt) to help me in remembering Him and offering gratitude to Allah, and to worship Him in a way that is beautiful and befitting Him.

Allahumma inni asaluka hubaka, wa hubbaman ya hibuka, wal amal al-ladhi bel leghuni hubbaka. Allahumma ja'al hubbaka a-habba alay-yai, min nafsi, wa-ahli, wa minal barrid.

We need the love of Allah, so we ask Allah for the love of those who love Him, and the actions that will cause us to attain to His Love. O Allah, make Your Love more beloved to me than myself, my family, and even from the cold water.

...which is very important in the hot desert. We all know we have come to the end of the month of Ramadan. What was our intention? Did we have an intention for Ramadan? Here at the community, I ask people to make an intention for Ramadan. Was our intention just to fast from food? Was it to read the whole Qur'an, a *juz* every night? Was it to stand for hours or minutes in Tarawih? Was it to abstain from certain things that are allowable at other times in our life? Was it to monitor our tongue, to monitor our thoughts, to act with generosity?

Inshā'a-llāh, it was all of those things. But I hope and pray that we all entered with sincerity, and with the intention to recognize that when we are told this fast is for Allah,

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that it means we learn more about Allah (swt). Some people, we know, think that Allah has a long beard, a thobe of a certain length, and sits on a throne. I don't happen to believe that. I happen to believe that Allah (swt) is reflected in absolutely everything we see, everything we hear, that we think, and what we don't even know. The best we can do is to understand Allah is the attributes that we may affirm and recite, even daily.

Those attributes are the constituent elements of human existence and interaction. For us, it means as we learn more about compassion and mercy, submission, trust and justice, a fount of gratitude springs up in our hearts, and safety and humility comes to us. It means we realize that whatever comes to us, the *nai'ma* of Allah (swt) is there because we are striving to cleanse our hearts as well as our bodies in this month of Ramadan and fasting,

It means we recognize that Allah (swt) is the only reality. Allah is the light, the force behind all things. Allah is the beauty, the love, and the patience, the effort that we make during this month, the power that is within us to do so. Indeed, Allah is even the power that is behind my voice right now that enables it to speak, and to be grateful for that recognition, and be humble for that gift. We should not just take the concepts of gratitude and humility as throw-away points that we all know; therefore, we don't discuss it. What comes as a gift to us is something we never fully earn. There is nothing we can do to fully earn the gifts that Allah (swt) has given us, even the gift of gratitude. No matter how many years we have been given in this life, every breath is sacred and can carry a message of thanks. The truth is, with every breath we take, we should be offering our *shukr*, our gratitude to Allah. All 86,400 of our breaths a day would not provide enough thanks to Allah for what we have been given.

The most basic level of gratitude is to see that all the blessings we get, and all the trials that come to us, come from Allah irrespective of what the apparent cause seems to be. We have to become satisfied with what is given to us. To do that, we have to understand, my dear brothers and sisters, some of these words we don't like. We have to understand what it means to be obedient, what it means to submit, what it means to surrender. We

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have to understand what it means to trust; and if we obey, we set in motion other things. Other causal factors may lead us down roads that are unpleasant, where we cannot deal with the unpleasantness. They are painful, but we have no way of having gratitude for the pain. Where we are arrogant, we have no concept anymore of humility. We become forgetful, and lose the understanding of what it means to be obedient and to trust. What does it mean to be a grateful servant of Allah? It means there is an incredible generosity in this creation. And if we don't believe it, look at it. Nobody here can make a chicken. Some people here didn't even eat the chicken. None of us here can make a vegetable. All we can do is be an implement through which this power manifests itself, and we take it for granted.

I used to tell a story that I always wanted to live at the beach. I went and lived at the beach before we moved here. In '72 – 75 we lived at Virginia Beach, and it didn't take more than 3 weeks to a month to become so used to looking out the window at the ocean that I hardly saw it anymore. What are we looking at every day? What are we seeing every day? Anything and everything... we have to come to the point where anything and everything not just reminds us of Allah (swt), but reminds us that this power of remembrance itself is a force for transformation, for good both personally and in our Muslim community, and in our greater communities whether national or global. If we don't believe it, we've missed the point.

The truth is Allah (swt) is generous in everything, as everything, and by everything. . It is human beings who are not generous, who are greedy, who punish one another, who are arrogant. It has been said there is no worship better than gratitude in every circumstance. Total thankfulness would be to sincerely repentant of our inability to convey the proper gratitude. The greatest *tawbah* we can make is not for some thing I did wrong, some bad word I said, some action I took, some thought I might have had. Yes, we should make *tawbah* for that, but the greatest *tawbah* we can have is if we did not convey the proper

gratitude in our hearts, and really understand what it takes to truly say, “*Subhāna-Llāh*,” [and to know] the power in *alhamdulillah*, the power and the love in *mā’sha-Llāh*.

Thanks itself, just the ability to be grateful and give thanks to Allah (swt), is a great blessing. Don’t mistake it; it is a blessing. It is an ability like everything else that comes from Allah (swt), which makes all these systems we walk around with inside of, this factory of systems that we use daily. We just ate, so digestion says, “It’s my turn.” Then, pretty soon, we are going to have to go over to that little room over there, because it’s that turn. Then we are going to sleep, and it’s another turn. Then there are things that are allowable, which is another system. All of this is placed in this body which [purpose], for the most part, people are totally absent from. Most of us have only a little idea of what this creation, this life, is all about, the blessings that Allah (swt) has bestowed upon us as servants of Allah.

Absolutely every time we give thanks, we are obliged to remember that such remembrance itself is something to have gratitude for – to remember, and to remember to remember, and to remember that we are remembering to remember, ad infinitum. Why not? Allah is ad infinitum. We have to stop thinking there is an end to everything. There may be a beginning; we know about that: *kun faya kun*. Where the middle is, I have no idea; because that would presuppose there is an end. But for this there is no end. Allah (swt) is endless until the decision is made that another apparent ending will come, and we know that is even not an ending. We know it is the beginning of something else, in another time frame, in another space/time frame.

We are obliged to remember that such remembrance in gratitude is not only necessary, but to remember to thank Allah is a blessing we don’t normally think about. “Shukran Allah,” we say at the end of the meal, or “Shukran” to someone. There is basic guidance [about this] that is contained in the words of Allah (swt) in the Holy Qur’an: **“If you are thankful, I will give you more.”** How much more? Just more. How thankful? As

thankful as you can be. There is no end to thanks; there is no end to more. How many of us are really prepared to live in such an open-ended universe? Without all the training, we have had to plan our lives in this way or that way. How much time did we spend on this and that, on what grade we are going to get, on what we are going to do, and then what? Retire somewhere? In the old days, there used to be tires that got re-treaded. I like retired in that way, then you can keep using it. Allah (swt) says: **“But if you are ungrateful, My punishment is terrible indeed.”** What could be the worst punishment, just the fire of hell? That’s good to scare the average person. The worst punishment is ignorance, the pain and suffering of not knowing Allah (swt), not hearing the message of *Rasūlullāh* (sal), not being in *suhbat*, not being able to be the able-bodied person you can be.

The support of Islam is *iman*; the support of *iman* is *ihsan*. The support and foundation of *ihsan* is *shukr*. This is also reinforced in the Traditions. You remember the story reported by Hazrati Aisha (ra) where it was reported,

I entered the presence of Aisha and said, “Tell us about the most amazing experience you ever had in the company of Rasulallah (sal).” And she wept at first.” Why did she weep? Did she weep because he was gone, only? Or did she weep for the same reason you [breathe in, and exhale,] “AHHH” when you smell a beautiful flower? For the same reason you weep when you see your child born? Did she weep because the love still lasts beyond the grave? Was there anything at all about him that was not marvelous? *But she told me, ‘He came one night to bed and came close to me. His skin was touching mine. And then he said, “O Daughter of Abu Bakr. Let me go that I might devote myself in worship to my Lord.”’* Let me go. He didn’t say, “I’m going to go.” He said, “Let me go,” and asked for permission.

“I said, ‘I love that you are near me, but of course I respect your wish,’ and I allowed him to take his leave of me.” Can you imagine saying, “I allowed the

Prophet (sal) to do something?” What *adab!* “*He got up, took a skin of water and performed wudu and used a lot of water. And then he stood up and performed his prayer and wept as he prayed until tears were streaming from his face onto his chest. Then he went into ruku, and shed more tears. Then he laid himself in sajdah, and again wept even more tears. Then he raised his head and wept even more. He went on like this until Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him) arrived to tell him it was time for salat. I then said, ‘O Messenger of Allah! What causes you to weep? Allah has forgiven you all your sins.’ He (sal) replied, ‘Should I not be a thankful servant? Why should I not be, since Allah has sent down to me worlds of revelation?’*”

The point of all of that, the foundation of all of that, was *shukr*. Do we remember that? Maybe you do; I still try to. Surely, if the Prophet Mohammed (sal), in his state of such purity and love for Allah, can spend the night in such gratitude, we should not forget for one second who we are, and what we owe Allah. Owe to Whom...to someone sitting on a throne, somewhere in the sky? No, it is to that light, that force, that truth, that compassion, that mercy, that beauty out of which we have been created, and out of which we are sustained. The Prophet (sal) approached the ‘Arsh. (He has, but we haven’t.) What Allah (swt) has provided for us, and what the Prophet (sal) saw moment to moment and felt in his heart, is that Allah’s Signs are before us, around us, within us. The reflection of the Divine is all that we have.

Hādirī, nādhirī, shāhidī, ma’ī. The Divine Presence is what we can seek, and for that we have to have a model, a means, and we have to have courage, effort, and commitment. It’s exactly the same thing we need to survive in this world today. It’s exactly what we need to save the planet from the environmental disasters. It’s exactly what we need to save our civil society from its tortuous route downward. It’s exactly what we need to end starvation in this world and food insecurity. It’s exactly what we need to support the rights of women and children around the world. It’s exactly what we need to overcome

diseases that easily can be overcome. It is exactly the same thing. We need the models, which we have; we need the courage, and the effort, and the commitment.

The spiritual journey, at least from our perspective, is not just a personal journey. It's an interpersonal journey, because we are all, at the core, one beingness. There is only Allah. We know that, because we say it. We say it, maybe, hundreds of times a day, if you make *wazifa*, all of it accompanied by gratitude and humility. Both eventually become part of our being, and I want to stress that. What you practice becomes part of your being. If you play the piano or another musical instrument, before you could read music, you couldn't read music. Once you can, you have another language. You can sit down and read the music. Did everyone here speak Arabic from birth? But you can learn it, and then you have it. Like everything else, the models are there. Allah (swt) has given us these templates for everything.

If we want to know how gratitude and humility become part of the core of our being, you practice it. What a simple message. I'm getting away with a very simple message tonight. I'm not talking about quantum mechanics like I sometimes do. I'm not talking about space/time changes. I'm not giving deep *tafsir* of some 'āyat of Qur'an, which I'll be happy to do some time (if I can find a good person to steal it from). But we have to accompany every moment of our life with gratitude and humility. That's this path. Both gratitude and humility eventually become part of our being, but we have to remind ourselves to practice each moment until our character, our being, exudes gratitude. And our demeanor is humble. In this room, there are examples. I'll let you find them.

We know from many, many 'āyāt in Qur'an the importance of gratitude. For those who really know the true nature of thankfulness, it is really the acknowledgment of the beneficence of Allah (swt), and it is accompanied always by humility. If it has no humility, there is no gratitude. In the world we live in, many of us realize how much we really owe to Allah. Our complacency is gone; our sense of security in the world has been

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sorely disturbed. We feel a calling, pulling to try to make things better. But we often forget that while we try to make those things better – the list I gave you about poverty, women’s issues, wars, starvation, and all that – we forget about making ourselves better. And yes, to some degree, if we work very hard in service, especially in service to Allah (swt), changes come about in ourselves—of course. But we have to know how to turn inward. We have to know how much time to spend in the *dhāhir*, and how and when to turn to the *bātin*. If we don’t know that, only half of our life is taken care of. That means half of our purpose is potentially met.

Allah (swt) did not create us and did not send the Prophet (sal) just for social justice and social change. But He sent him for the rectification and affirmation of character. Our identity is therefore going to be challenged. We are all intelligent enough to say we know who we are, and also intelligent enough to say we don’t know who we are. We are most of us very well educated, either personally or academically, so we know how to present the argument of humility. But even when one is naturally idealistic and positive, and looks to the future, we realize more than ever that our future has to be in Allah’s hands, because it does not seem to be very much in our hands, does it? The hands our future seems to be in right now are pretty dirty hands. I’m here to tell you and remind myself that Allah swt has put all this in our hands. He tells us in a *hadith quds*:

My servants continue to draw near to Me with superogatory works so that I shall love them. And when I love them, I am the ears with which they hear, the eyes with which they see, the hands with which they strike, and the feet with which they walk.

This of course comes in relationship to the ‘*āyat* of Qur’an where Allah says:

I am as near to you as your jugular vein.

Essentially, the message I take from it is to act and be responsible for our circumstances, our inner and our outer state, and to realize that all that is possible is only possible by the *Rahmat* and *Fadl* of Allah (swt), and that it is necessary to acknowledge this. It is not just that it is the truth, but we have to acknowledge it in order to sustain it. We have to acknowledge it in order to find *mizan*, harmony and balance. We have to sustain it for that balance. If we don't acknowledge it, it is not sustained. It is like a container, like this cup. This cup we know is made out of molecules and atoms, but the relationship between them and the liquid is the liquid can stay in the cup and not leak through it. Just think about gratitude as being a cup. Think about it as being the glass that holds what we really strive for in life, that harmony and balance.

Ultimately, the journey in life for the Sufi at least is that Allah (swt) is present, reflected outwardly in the *'ālam al khalq* (the world of creation) as the attributes we know and the qualities we see – the Sifat of Allah (swt). Inwardly, Allah is reflected as the subtleties of perception. These organs of perception that enable us to distinguish everything: what is beautiful from what is not, from right to wrong, justice and injustice, peace and conflict, ad infinitum. How do we discern these things? By developing the *basīra*, the eye of discernment/*fīrāsa*. It is the subtle awareness we hopefully have been refining in this month, believe it or not, knowingly or not. All Muslims who fasted don't know that their little *latā'if* are getting stimulated, that there are subtle organs of perception being awakened to some degree by the commitment, the *iman*, the effort and the courage to fast.

For those who can't fast, Allah says they are not left out. There are things you can do. They seem to be only outward things— feed the poor, for example. But more than that, it is to remember to do that, to act on it. We all have to be activists in the month of Ramadan, all of us, exhibiting in the outer life in our words and thoughts, with the anxiety that we might lose this awareness in just a few days looms in front of us. Don't you worry a little about what happens after Ramadan? Oh, we can fast six days in

Shawwal, but it's not about food. It's about remembrance. Everything is about remembering.

Remember last year, Suleyman, when you were here? Remember some of you the house that used to be by the pond? Remember when the gardens were new? Do you remember when we first met Pervaiz? Do you remember? Its' all about remembering. We link one think with another and another in remembering. *Wa' alahi*, why should we be surprised that Allah (swt) says, **“Remember Me and I'll remember you.”** It's reciprocal. We call it reciprocal maintenance. So let's be very, very thankful that Ramadan can be a continuous event. I might add that even though the guest Ramadan is leaving, we now have the ability to take pictures of Ramadan – digital images. How do I take a picture of Ramadan? I got my new Blackberry today, the new torch. I take this and put the camera on and look at Kevin and Wahi and go like this and that. I've just taken a picture of Ramadan. I've taken a picture of Ramadan when I take a picture of the flowers, of the lights, when I carry that picture in my heart.

Three months from now we sit around and say, “Remember that dinner we had? Here is the picture.” It is to be present. So be thankful this is a continuous event. I might add, not just cause and effect, like you get a gift on the Eid. That's good for the children. Merry Eid-mas. This is *shukr*, a multi-level state of mind. Eventually, it becomes one character, our security. We can be heard and it can be seen and felt by ourselves and (by the way) by others, because it exudes from us. There are many levels of *shukr*, thankfulness that we need to recognize. There is the thankfulness we are very aware of, the thankfulness being told by our tongues and speech, like at the beginning of the meal and at the end. It is characteristic of the acknowledgment of the generosity of Allah with some humility and acceptance verbally.

Then there is the thankfulness we can have in our bodies, our arms and legs, which is characteristic of being loyal and ready to serve Allah (swt). Then there is the

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thankfulness we have expressed by our hearts, the *shukr al-qalbi*. That requires we carefully balance what we show visibly in appreciation, while being able to conserve and preserve inwardly a kind of modesty, a reverence and personal gratitude that we never show outwardly. It's just personal to us. It has also been said that there is the thankfulness of the eyes, *shukr al-ain*, where we try to overlook the faults of others (especially those who are near to us and our companions in life). And there is the thankfulness of our ears. That means we should not listen to what people are accused of or process the things we hear that are negative. In the simplest form, perhaps, *shukr* means that we do not disobey Allah (swt), especially by misusing the favors that have come to us. I do not believe that most of us spend our days in reflection on the blessings that have come to us. Certainly, we wouldn't be here unless we spend part of our days doing that. We just wouldn't be together. It would be impossible for us to be in the same room. I know that for certain.

We have in the room our children, the most important physical aspect of this world. What are we leaving our children? Do you want project this world forward? We want to go live on the moon. We have a responsibility we can hardly even articulate to these beautiful children. And how well are we doing? We can teach them to recite Qur'an, and we do. We can teach them to know Hadith, and we do. We can teach them Sīrah of Prophet Mohammed (sal), and we do. We can teach them how to open doors and close doors, but we have to teach them why, why, why. We have to teach them so it is part of their character, so they don't have to do what some of us have had to do. We have had to learn it in our adulthood, where have to strive to unlearn before we learn.

I have to tell you, my experience is practicing gratitude does not interfere with day to day life; it builds on it, enhances it, and creates humble understanding. There is a saying that thankfulness may mean the thankfulness of the scholars (the *alim*), meaning it will be among the subjects they discuss. Thankfulness may mean the thankfulness of the dedicated worshiper, meaning it will be a feature of their actions when they pray. Then

there is the thankfulness of those who know with direct insight (*basīra*), the *arif*s. In which case, it is expressed through people's honest devotion to Allah in every state they are in, and in every circumstance they are in through their convictions, their experiences, and their work. Abu Bakr al Wariq said, "*Thankfulness for gracious favor means feasting one's eyes on the gift received while preserving a sense of reverence.*"

Certainly, for those of us on the way of *tariqah*, we know it is very, very important that we preserve whatever state we have in our personal relationship with Allah. We try to show in our actions and through our words a state of gratitude and a state of thankfulness, and thankfulness for thankfulness itself. This is more than being thankful. We fail perhaps every day, but we have to know that even if our body cannot get up, our heart can rise. Our soul can rise. We realize our ability to be grateful and thankful is the result of Allah's enabling us to think in that way, teaching the heart and informing the mind. Most of us do not think in that way, so we are surprised. Something good happens, and we are grateful for it. Something bad happens, and we look at the cause and blame. We do not think all things come from Allah in what is apparently good and what is apparently bad. Allah (swt) gives us so many things.

We should not see ourselves as totally unworthy. It's not productive, and it's not true. We are worthy because we are given life. But merely to be thankful, *inshā'a-llāh*, we have the opportunity to do that. *Inshā'a-llāh*, we have the opportunity in this country, as a day is set aside for Thanksgiving. I have been to many interfaith programs. Every year we do an interfaith program in Lynchburg and I'm invited to come in and speak there. What do we do there? We bring the Qur'an to them. Roy'a or her mother recites *tajwid* Qur'an, and people come to tears. "That's so beautiful!" they say. "Thank you very much." And we say, "We are very thankful to be able to give this to you." That's Thanksgiving. Every day is thanksgiving. In a strange way, it allows everyone who is religious to join together, because it is a secular holiday. Isn't that ironic? In whatever way they are able to be thankful.

There is another saying, *“If your hand is too short to extend remuneration (to pay back for something you have been given), let your tongue dwell at length on the expression of thanks.”* I would certainly hope we would do that. Pearls from off the tongue have a lasting value. We remember in Surah al-Baqarah, in ‘*āyat* 152:

Even as We sent a Messenger from among you who follows and recites to you Our Signs, and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom, he teaches you what you did not know. So remember Me and I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and do not be ungrateful to Me. O you who believe! Seek assistance by patience and prayer. Surely Allah is with those who are patient. And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah’s way as dead. Rather, they are alive but you do not perceive. And We will most certainly try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of property and lives and fruit. Give good news to those who are patient. Those who say, when a misfortune befalls them, “We belong to Allah, and to Him surely we will return.” These are the ones on whom blessings from their Lord will surely come, and who are rightly guided.

We are not surprised. Surah al-Baqarah is almost the whole Qur’an, we are told. Who other than us is that person/*insan*, the person who seeks completion? The verbal root in Arabic from which the word “*insan*” comes, means to be companionable or intimate. The human nature is to seek familiarity. It is an essential part of human-hood to liberate gratitude from the clutch of fear, doubts, from ignorance and distraction. Outwardly, there is a means that we can be guided through life safely, and inwardly. There is a sacred domain within us. It’s called the “city of knowledge” or the place of knowledge. That’s where we want to live. We want a beautiful, beautiful hut there. If you want a

condo, you can have one. We want to go through life safely, and our family and loved ones, and for all humanity also.

Inwardly, we also want to enter that city of knowledge. That domain is entered through gratitude, through being an *abd*, having good *adab*, courtesy and humility. The journey in this life is the journey from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light. The heart that is pure will receive that knowledge if it hears it, will perceive it when it sees it, will know it when it feels it, and will act upon it when it is necessary to act upon it. It is to be an activist, a peace, love and compassionate maker. If we truly remember Allah, then we know that we are moving on the *siratal mustaqim*. Remembrance of Allah in gratitude and thankfulness, remembering that all things come from Him, this is the proof that we are on the *siratal mustaqim*. Remembering, acknowledging, affirming, seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing that Presence, one is moving along that path.

Shukr comes from *shakara*, to be grateful. But gratitude is the fruit of our remembrance. What is that? It is nothing less than, nor can it be more than, *dhikru-Llāh*. When we come into that place of thankfulness, we are in a place that is very comfortable. It is filled with joy, where we can have contentment and happiness. Is there anyone here who doesn't want contentment and happiness? Is there anyone here who doesn't want to be a model of contentment and happiness? Our unworthy desires which we have, our excessiveness which we have, our expectations which we have, become neutralized in gratitude. Outwardly, it is the expression of that inward state of peace and contentment.

My dear brothers and sisters, that is the beginning, just the beginning. Many of the things I say tonight I will say again. But I hope that in the process while you are here, walking in nature, loving one another, caring about your own thoughts, [you begin to] realize that your self is very important, not from an ego-centered selfish way. Rather, it is to know who you really are and have the courage to be honest about yourself. It is to have the courage to know your strengths and weaknesses, to have the courage to enter into a way

where you can see yourself, because no one can see themselves without it being reflected in some way.

Now it may be in *tariqah* or some other way; but please believe me, we all need to see ourselves and have that courage. Either we are going to cover up the possibilities that are inside of us, being distracted by social, personal, political, national, ethic and tribal issues (which are distractions often in the name of religion, and hence cover up our gentility and sweetness and our gratitude that are at the core of our being), or we are going to take the time and know ourselves better, making us not only better human beings for our children and for our husbands and wives and brothers and sisters, but better *khalifas* of Allah (swt).

From the heinous crimes against humanity that happened, remember at the 10th anniversary of 9/11, or in Iraq, or in Afghanistan, or in so many other places; or from the state sponsored terrorism we are exposed to in the world today that we are compliant in – the torture, the oppression, the rejection, the mental oppression, and the starvation of the poor and disenfranchised people, the political enslavement of people (as seen being overthrown in Libya today and the Arab Spring in April) – to the starvation of those poor people and the victims of human greed in Somalia and Darfur, we have before us an example of covering up the most basic dignity and goodness of human potential. Allah says:

As a grace from Us, thus do We reward those who give thanks.

I am telling you there is power in thanks, power in *shukr* – a power to change the world. There is power in humility. Every cell of us has so much power it can light up a city. That's just the scientific part. It can generate so much power, so can we not change this world for the better? But if we cover this up in ourselves, then who are we? What is to cover? *Kufr*. Who are the *kafirs*? Are they the bad people, the Christians, the Hindus, the

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Jews? Are they the Baptists? Are they the silly people who say that? No, they are the ones who cover up the truth, who conceals what is essential in us. They are those who cover their essential blessings from Allah (swt), who have abandoned the *dīn* in the name of the *dīn*, be it Islam, Christianity, or even secular based principles of righteousness, justice and morality. They are unbelievers dressed in belief. That is the worst thing we can be, and that's what we are seeing in the world around us. To be unbelievers in the name of belief is to show ingratitude for the wonderful blessings that have come to us.

A person who is *kafir* is a person who is burdened by their anxieties, and they have self-created and self-imposed defenses. They provide that excuse of piety literally as ammunition against others. They give a false and very temporary feeling of power, and self-righteousness to those who are blinded by lies, greed and power. But really, ultimately, they are the cause of a person's doom. Really, this is characteristic of the type of person who finds themselves wandering in the caverns of their lower self. Just like today, the news media is wandering in the caverns below Ghadafy's house, the dark caverns. Where else would vermin go but in to a dark cavern. The *nafs ammāra* is a dark cavern, the dark abyss of ignorance and greed. Is it not appropriate that many of these people hide in caves, in darkness?

So let's remember Allah and be grateful. This is the way we pull away the veil of *kufr*, and we deny its reality. Either we will affirm the mercy of Allah, or we will deny it. In the state of contentment and gratitude, our desires become quieted if not neutralized. Then we can become efficient, serviceful, worshipful, trusting and patient. **“Allah loves those who are patient.”** *Asalaamu aleykum.*

May Allah forgive me for anything I have said that is not correct. May you forgive me for taking so much of your time, but then maybe it's Laylatul Qadr. No problem. Enjoy yourselves.