



Title: [Gratitude and Thankfulness with Humility Part II:](#)
Valuing Breath in Our Relationship with Allah

DVD title: (the same)

Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. We live in times where things that were once not permitted are permitted. I don't mean permitted by *de jour* / by law, but by social and moral and ethical values, which should be the foundation of law. Even that has been tainted in some way, and unfortunately, more and more. I think it gives all of us who try some kind of a compass to follow. There is a magnetic north and a true north, so sometimes we are off by 11 degrees; but we try, in the metaphor, to head north. We find ourselves, when we are affirming our spiritual, moral and ethical values, challenged a great deal. Often we find ourselves like wolves crying in the wilderness. Who is there to support it? How large a community do we really belong to?

Many people enter into the spiritual path, probably all of us at some level, for selfish reasons. I think it would be disingenuous of me to say we were not originally motivated by selfish reasons. We found something or we looked for something. We were not looking for something for our neighbor, but for ourselves. I remember going to India many, many years ago in the early 70's on a spiritual journey. It was about me. There are many ways things can be about the "me" or the "I". One can be motivated because of principles, or one can be motivated because of social reasons. Spirituality can be as much a socialization reality as anything else. Or they can be motivated by political reasons, or moral and ethical principles. Whatever they may be, the "I" takes up a lot of space.

Later on, we find out, *inshā'a-llāh*, that this is not about “me,” even though it is about me. My intention is no longer about me and what I want. It’s about my relationship with Allah (swt), meaning it’s about how compassionate can I be? How merciful can I be? Very few times is mercy required of a human being, actually, unless they happen to be a judge or a ruler. I doubt that many of us have the experience of daily needs to be merciful. But compassion... yes, of course, moment to moment. The spiritual journey is not usually about someone other than yourself, other than how your self serves others. Allah (swt) tells us in the Holy Qur’an that no one can carry the burden for you. You carry your own burden, and no one can be tested and tried for you; yet there is a caveat in that. In that caveat, Allah (swt) does provide for us, not only the Prophet (sal) and our *shuyukh*, but also provides out of love and respect for one another, the desire to assist. That is, for me to give assistance to you for you to do what you need to do, as Dr. Montessori said, “Help me to do it by myself.”

We find ourselves now in a world where things that were once permitted are not permitted, and things that were not permitted are permitted. Permitted by whom? By the society at large? I said to someone yesterday, genocide became acceptable because it was happening to black people on the other side of the world. That’s just a fact. When it started happening in Bosnia to white people, especially Europeans, it started to become unacceptable again; but that didn’t last very long. It was because the white world intervened; otherwise, it would still be going on. There are many forces to keep it going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where we were working right after that travesty there. We were working with people from Srebrenica and Tuzla and many places. What we found out was that when it is happening to white people, it is not tolerated. Now, we expect it to be part of war. Now, when there is self-imposed Muslim against Muslim

genocide in Iraq or Afghanistan, nobody bats an eye. Not only that, we don't listen to the wise people. Don't worry; I'm going to get back to gratitude.

There was once a man who was on a journey through a very forested country. And in a clearing, he came upon a snake, a big snake, like a boa constrictor. Someone had tied the snake up to a stake, and he thought, "How unfair that is! That's a terrible thing for someone to do, to tie this poor snake up to a stake, so I'm going to untie him." So with the best of intentions, he untied the snake. No sooner did he do that, feeling a sense of justice and merit, the snake, which he thought was approaching him to thank him, wound itself around him and began to crush him. He cried out, "Why are you doing this to me? I'm your savior!" (Are you counting the errors?) And the snake replied, "It's my nature. And not only that, what I'm doing is good for you." The man felt he had done the right thing; he was sure he had done the just thing; he was sure he knew what was good for him, and he was sure that he would be rewarded for such good acts, maybe not in that moment but certainly in the Hereafter. He just didn't know how soon the Hereafter might be. Because we don't know that, do we?

At that moment, a fox appeared. The man, seeing the consequences of his actions, is calling out for help. The fox asked, "What is happening?" The snake pauses in his crushing of the man and tells his story, and the man tells his story. The fox says, "Let me adjudicate this issue." And the two agree. Now, this has gone to mediation. The fox said, after thinking a while, "I can't pass a judgment from this perspective. We have to return to the original state for me to find a place in which we can create an objective response to this. We need to come to that original state to understand how best to proceed." The snake agreed, the man agreed, and the

man tied the snake back to the stake. The fox said to the man, “Leave the snake where it is, because for however good it may seem to change things without understanding the consequences, you, O man, lack the wisdom, as distinct from the emotions that motivated you. This bars you from having the right to interfere with the existing condition. You are using imagination and assumption instead of common sense, and that led you into mortal danger.” So the man is still on his journey, and still alive. The snake is safely tied to the stake, and we are all waiting for the fox to appear.

By the Grace of Allah, I am among very intelligent people, and I don't need to pick apart the metaphor. But I challenge you to think about the times we are living in, in these terms, and not just the superficial aspects of these terms, but the personal ones. How do you make decisions? What are the foundations of the assumptions? How sure are we, or are we not, of what we encounter in life on a day to day basis? I also want to tell you that it is not an intellectual pursuit, nor a solemn one. It is the pursuit of the knowledge of the interface between your values and of your heart. We have been fasting for about 14 hours straight during this month. That took a lot of patience and perseverance. It's taken a lot of faith, a lot of tolerance, trust in ourselves, and effort. All of this can be sustained if we choose, and all of it is a bulwark against the evils I described yesterday, and against the problem of the snake and the sincere, but uninformed, caring and compassionate but assumptive human being.

I'm giving you some clues on how to look at the story. If you really understand the meaning and the nature of understanding, patience and perseverance, you understand that patience eliminates time. Patience belongs to the world. If we want to pick a fruit from the tree, we have to wait until it is ripe. When we see the signs of impatience, we are also

seeing the signs of ingratitude. Whenever we are impatient, we have forgotten to be grateful. These are all good teachings for us today in our lives, in the world we are living in. Patience is not just submitting ignorantly to some apparently deep and profound reality. Patience is something that is inherent in our nature, and we have to learn to access it. These are qualities that are sorely needed in the world today and are sorely absent in the world today. It is a world of instant gratification, unwarranted expectations, loss of dignity, and even the lost of juristic ethic and morality.

At the core of a human being, the heart of a human being can be awakened. It was constructed to be awakened. Our heart is awake, and when it is not awake, we are dead. We can go to sleep, and parts of our bodies rest, but our hearts never rest. We can be virtually brain dead, and still ‘medically’ alive, but when the heart is gone, that’s it. So it’s not wrong to assume and understand the metaphor that as long as the heart is beating, it can be awakened and its essential qualities can be manifest. It is there in the heart that one finds Allah (swt), finds the essential attributes that comprise the essence of human beingness. How can something so great be in something so small, the size of your fist? Allah tells us, ***“You will find Me in the heart of the believer,”*** because the greatness is in the power of those atoms and molecules I was talking about yesterday.

How broad is your compassion when someone comes to you and asks you for your compassion or love? It can overwhelm you, where there is nothing left in your mind or a pain left in your body because someone is in need. *Wa’lahi*, I remember many years ago being with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, just for a few days. It was 1975. If you were sick from the food, if you were in pain for some reason, if you were tired, if you were worried about some issue, it was gone—gone. Whereas before, your compassion was momentary—“Oh, my brother has a problem. I have this problem. Can you pray for this,” in that

situation, it took over everything, [and you were aware of] the vastness of compassion, the vastness of mercy, the vastness of patience, the vastness of tolerance and of justice, of love, peace...and 94 other vastnesses of the *Asmā' al-Husna*.

I pray that every one of us takes the time to be grateful for such opportunities. Look at the things that make us impatient and take away our gratitude, whether it is our children, our work, our fears, our financial situation, or whatever. As we seek that *mizan*, we remember that patience and gratitude are from the realm of timelessness and spacelessness. In that timelessness, we should work very hard. We shouldn't worry what will happen tomorrow, or five or ten years from now, but we do. Yet at the same time, we have to have a track that we are on. We should work very hard today. We should spend our time on *shukr*, so in our hearts and minds, we can truly say, "*Shukrana-Llāh*" for all the bounties, blessings and gifts He has given us. It has many meanings. It is to be thankful for the bounties we receive from Allah. Is it to be grateful for *just* those benefits?

Part of being grateful is to be grateful that you can recognize that you need to be grateful, and as I told you yesterday, that is *dhikr*. In circumstances that are difficult and trying, we don't often think of gratitude first or second, or third. Like when we are sick, maybe first you go to the Tylenol, and then to the Alleve. Then you go to the doctor and he gives you antibiotics. I am a Homeopath, and I really don't like any of these things. Or you come to me and I give you Rhus Tox, and that doesn't work so a half a day later I'm going to give you something compatible like Bryonia or something else. Then, it's going to dawn on you – or me – I should make *du'ā*! We don't usually start with *du'ā*. "I have a headache. I'm going to take aspirin." "How are you Parvaiz?" "I've had a headache for

3 days.” “I’m going to make *du’ā* for you! What are have you been doing?” “I took Alleve” or this or that.

To know we have to strive to be grateful in the circumstance, in the moment is the *bab*, the doorway to timelessness. That’s where all time stops. That’s when Mother Teresa comes in, holding a dying child in her arms, knowing it is going to die (she could just leave it there), comforting the parent if there is one. How many times do you need to see death until it makes you still appreciate life and death? Most people see it a few times, and it loses its value. Not once did that woman become dehumanized. I’ll tell you another story about her. I was on my first flight on Alitalia Airlines, and I was getting off in New York. There was Mother Teresa in first class, because they wouldn’t let her fly coach. I’m standing right behind her, and it’s been 8 or 10 years since I saw her. She turns around and looks at me, and says, “I know you.” I said, “Yes, but not well.” “You were in Calcutta.” I said, “Yes.” She said, “How are you?” I said, “Very well, thank you, Mother Teresa.” “Thank you for your assistance,” she said.

There was no time; there was no space. It is just like when we see someone we haven’t seen in a long time, but it’s like we met yesterday. It is as if we were just on the phone, talking about familiar things. What do we feel? I was so grateful. I’m sure my ego was stimulated to some degree. More than that, I was so grateful that there was a person like that in the world. How else could you have watched so much death and misery? If it doesn’t lift you up, it totally destroys you. If it doesn’t make you more moral, it makes you totally immoral. If it doesn’t make you more just, it makes you of the unjust. And isn’t that the message Allah (swt) is trying to tell us in every *surah* of the Qur’an? That’s where gratitude starts. Obviously, we are grateful for the things that are obvious – obviously wonderful, obviously bountiful. It reaches us from off the horizons. But we

can become very lazy when things are very good, and we can become very distracted when things are very bad. From each point, we have to have gratitude. Imam al Ghazali (ra) said:

Life is nothing but an accumulation of many breaths. Every breath is a precious diamond that cannot be purchased with anything in this world. It is a priceless jewel that has no substitute in value. So in movements and talks, in sorrow and happiness, such a priceless breath should not be spent in vain. To destroy it is to court destruction. An intelligent man cannot lose it.

Can we not say how much a woman like Mother Teresa valued breath? 86,400 breaths a day, and we shouldn't waste one of them. If I said to you that I was going to put \$86,400 in your bank account every single day, and you can spend it and do whatever you want with it. At the end of that day, it's going to be wiped clean. It's not going to be there, but the next day you will have \$86,400. How long will it go on? Until you no longer are alive. What are you going to do with that \$86,400 every day? Will you put some away for your children's college education? Will you buy yourself a new BMW instead of a used one? Are you going to travel to meet the *shuyukh* around the world? Are you going to build the biggest clock in the world?

There's a lot in what Imam al Ghāzali said. How can you destroy your breath? How is it like courting destruction? First of all, the clue comes from Arabic (and Farsi): *nafas* and *nafs*. It's more than just linguistic. Just the average, good person wastes their breath. The person who is seeking the truth should know the value of breath. Even these little children, and all of us living in this kind of a community that we live in, where we seek to make our life meaningful, where we practice conscious breathing, where we practice attentiveness, where we reach out intentionally to the world, where we try to eat well,

where we welcome other brothers and sisters like you, we should all know better than anyone in this world the value of words and breath. It is not just what you say, but to whom you speak, where you speak, and the subjects that you speak about. I would go even a little further, and say that words, attitudes, thoughts – because thoughts cannot exist without breath – and intentions have a very profound effect, and they are either valued or devalued.

Many times a day, we may find that most of our breath is being used in an environment of or with people who cannot value what we say, or understand the work we are trying to do. Worse than that, we don't focus our intention, spending hours in distraction and useless words, useless thoughts, useless endeavors; therefore, it's wasted breath. We're throwing the money out. It is wasted breath, never to be recaptured, thinking that we can sway the people who don't understand, thinking that we can change the events by ourselves. Where is the humility that comes along with that gratitude? It's coming tomorrow.

Imam al Ghazali says, "*An intelligent man (or woman) cannot lose it.*" Because when you are out of breath, it is finished, *khalas*, gone. Life is over. When you are talking to someone who is not listening, what do we say in English? "Don't waste your breath with that person." Is it just a matter of time? "I'll just keep saying the same thing over and over again, and eventually the person will hear it." Are you sure? Eventually your words will have value? Are you positive? Think about that kind of a situation. You become frustrated; you can't get your point across; you cannot warn even someone of a danger that is coming. There are people on the Outer Banks right now, because their homes are more valuable than their lives. A woman I knew once called up her husband

and said, “My car is broken; it has to go to the shop. I’m going to die without my car! I can’t live without my car!” Really? Wow. “What am I going to do?”

If you cannot induce them to do something that is good for them, how are you going to induce them to do something they don’t even know is good for them? They won’t hear the answer to their questions, even one that you may know the answer to. You’re wasting your breath, but is that a cause to be selfish, to say, “Okay, I’m just going to live my life”? That’s not why we are given life. That’s not why we are given gratitude. On one hand, we have to keep trying; and on another hand, we have to know who we are with. We have to be in *suhbat*. We have to be in the company of good people. When we are not, as soon as we are serving those who lack that goodness, who lack that understanding, or lack the opportunity even, we have to come back to some place within ourselves and sit in *muraqabah*, and be in the company of good people to revive our focus.

Just like after a long day at work, the first thing you do is come home and take a shower. Not just because you are dirty, but because you know there is a relationship between the water and the way you feel. Your electromagnetic field changes, and you feel better with the positive ions that come in the water. How do you create the environment where that wasting of breath doesn’t happen? You don’t want it to happen. I don’t want it to happen. You can tell yourself you are not wasting your breath. You can tell yourself anything you want to tell yourself, because that is the blessing Allah (swt) gave us. You have a destiny, but you are free to make choices. You know what choices are? They are in the realm of no-choice. All freedom lies in the realm of no-choice. Read Ibn At’ala Askandari’s book on Tadbir. Shaykh Nooruddeen and I gave a series of talks on it, which are available to you.

What do I mean? Look at these beautiful mothers here. They give birth to our children. They have a choice. They have no choice but to feed the child, unless something is emotionally and mentally disturbed about them. They have no choice to feed the child, but they can feed the child goat's milk, cow's milk, water buffalo milk, donkey milk, formula, breast milk. They have all these choices within the realm of no-choice. How much no-choice do we realize we have? That no-choice is what Allah (swt) tells us is on the *mahfūdh*; that's the no choice of our *qadr*. That's the destiny, but how are we going to realize it in this space of time we are given in the world? How are we going to be in the world of timelessness and spacelessness, in the world of time and space? Enter into the world of meditation, my brothers and sisters, and you will know the answer to that.

You can tell yourself whatever you want. Let me tell you what Imam al Ghazali said. *“Life is nothing but an accumulation of many breaths. Every breath is a precious diamond.”* I just told you that a few minutes ago. Are you remembering that? I know that to some people it sounds like life should be boring, and somehow it should be restrictive. “I have to spend my life thinking about my life? Is that what you are saying, Shaykh Rashid? What a boring life! You mean I can't dance the Texas Two-Step, ever? I can't go on vacation; take a little cruise; enjoy the Caribbean?” I'm not saying that, but if you take the cruise, you will be surprised who you meet if your breath is at the focus of your life. You will be amazed at what happens where you are.

I could spend the rest of this retreat telling you how many doorways have opened to me because Allah (swt) put me in the right place at the right time, and the right people showed up to teach me something—and not just people. For so many years I sat in the basement of my Shaykh's office, in Jamia Milia Islamia in New Delhi. My Shaykh had a desk with one pad of paper and one pencil on it, and one Qur'an. (I generate more paper

than there are trees, and I'm digitally oriented.) We would go and sit in *muraqabah*. I'd have my chador, my shawl. It would be 110, 115 degrees, maybe 95 degrees if I went in the right season. Then we would go to the *dargah* and other places. He'd give me instructions, and we would sit. Very early on, I'm hearing these beautiful crickets. Whooo, whooo – wonderful crickets. Ahh, here's a pathway to deepen my meditation. I listen to the crickets instead of my mind, and I go deep into meditation. It went on for years—not in row, but I would couple or several months a year, whenever I could get there. He'd come here once a year and live across the road there.

One day, about an hour into meditation, I hear, “WHOOOW, WHOOOW” – really loud. I open up my chador, and this beautiful cricket... no, I'm sorry, it's a rat, really large, standing on his hind legs, closer to me than I am to him, looking up at me. Choice and no choice! My legs wanted to run. I took my chador and put it back over my head, and tucked it under my feet, and I went deeper into meditation than I had ever gone. My first lesson actually came years before that when I was living along the Ganges in the Himalayas, 24 km north of Rishikesh, in a place called Washista Guha. In those days, I was a yogi, I was Guru Vasudevadas. I was in a cave where one of the Supta Rishis live, Sage Washist. There was another cave where there was a Shiva Linga about this size, and another cave for Sage Washist's wife. They had separate caves to live in. One day, we were sitting in a cave, and a 10 foot cobra comes and wraps himself around the *linga*, which is very symbolic if you are a Shavite. Again, we had a decision to make. Are we going to go outside, or stay inside? He stayed there for three days, and we stayed there for three days. And he left, and we left. We used to sit on the rocks there, huge boulders. In the spring time, the cobras would come out to get warm. They would crawl over you and around you, and everything like that. You didn't bother them, and they

didn't bother you. So my first lesson was from a snake, and my second lesson was from a rat.

There are so many people living in this world, impoverished people, who are grateful for every day of their lives. Some of us have had the opportunity to visit some of these people. What do you think it is like to start your day with the idea that maybe you have not even that day to live? Not because philosophically you know that is true, or because spiritually you know that is true, but because your body is telling you it's true, and people are dying all around you. At least in this moment, you can say, "Allah has delayed my death." What's going to happen with that? I'm going to make *muhasabat*. I want to account for myself before I'm accounted for. I want to weigh my actions before my actions become a weight upon me. But will we do that first or will we take the Tylenol? How do you run your business? Is there any equity in your business, or are you totally in debt, partially in debt? Is there any equity in your life, other than material equity? What have you done? How long will what you did last week or last month last? The goodness that we put out, what is the life expectancy of it? What is the half-life expectancy of it? Like these words that are uttered today, what is the life expectancy of them?

Of course I hope you understand, I speak them as much for myself as I do for you. I have been blessed. You have been perhaps cursed to listen to me talk. But I've been blessed. What did you do last year? The last seven years? How long can you rest on the laurels of that? You have to keep creating more. As Dr. Nyang would say, you are creating your history. Was all your money put into one bad business deal, and it's gone? Did you make one bad decision, and everything you have stored up is gone? Is all the goodness you have done gone? All the hope you have from the work you are doing, are you sure it

will accomplish what you want it to accomplish? Are you wedded to that work, or are you chained to it? Is the chain steel or is it golden? Because in the company of bad people, bad things happen. Even in the company of good people dealing with bad people, bad things happen. It's like someone cutting your vein, or maybe it's like the death of a thousand cuts.

Imam al Ghazali is telling us that every day you have to get up and realize that the treasure is that Allah (swt) has delayed your death for at least that minute, that hour, that day. And at the end of the day, you have to say, "O Allah, You gave me another day. What did I do with it? Did I spend it or did I accrue something? What did I put in my account for today?" The beauty is that when you serve others *fi sabīli-llāh* —and I don't just mean shoveling someone's walkway in the winter, saying to yourself, "Oh, I'm doing this for Allah"—but when you serve the right people, the needy people, for the right reasons, really *fi sabīli-llāh*, more comes into you than goes out. All that energy is rewarded, and all other energy is death. On the other side of the ledger are the expenditures. Where do you think accounting systems come from, some other planet? Is the idea of a double ledger imported from Mars? You think Allah didn't invent accounting? As above so below: you will find in Islam, accounting – a double ledger (balancing the expenses and income).

Every breath is a precious jewel. How do we get that message across? Do you know when that message started to be given out? I'm sure you do: at the time of Hazrat Adam (as). What harm in eating a little fruit? Fruit is good for you! God wouldn't give us this beautiful Paradise and give us anything to harm us! Imam al Ghazali:

Man is guard day and night of 24 treasure houses in 24 hours. Fill these up, then find them filled with Divine sights in the world Hereafter. If they are not filled up with good works, they will be filled up with intense darkness wherefrom a bad stench will come out and envelope them all around. Another treasure house will neither give him happiness nor sorrow. That is an hour in which he slept, or was careless, or not engaged in any lawful work of this world. He will feel grief for its remaining vacancy.

The only way to fill the treasure houses with treasures is to do good works. Yes, you can do things that will not bring you happiness, and may not bring you sorrow, like sleep, or being careless, saying something you didn't mean, or just doing lawful work in the world but perhaps has no real effect in the inner. But there will be a time when you will look at that and say, how much of that vacancy could have been filled with priceless treasures.

When you try to reduce everything to black and white, on and off, like and dislike, you get to be like some of our brothers and sisters who think that to praise Allah means saying, “*Alhamdulillah*” all the time, telling everyone all the time what's wrong, *bida*, while not seeing all that is good and possible in the beauty and bounty of life. If you use your breath correctly, if you act in good ways and are humble and grateful to Allah, you and I don't try to manipulate the world around us. Everything we do then will be praise of Allah, and caring in praise of Allah (swt), because love itself is praise. Patience is praise. Forgiveness is praise. Tolerance is praise. Submitting is praise. Repenting is praise. What does it do? It makes the hardened heart soft. It expands the heart and soul in *tariqah* and in *haqiqah* and in *marifah*.

There is another meaning for *shukr*, also. *Shukr* means to eulogize. A eulogy is something you say about a dead person. Why do you think that's a sign of *shukr*/thankfulness? Because when you create a eulogy, you are thinking about all the good things that person that person did. You don't say, "I'm very sad to be at the funeral of my good friend so-and-so today, who was a miserable human being, who I never liked, who made people miserable and said bad things..." Is that what happens? No. We stand up and bite our tongues, and forget a lot of the things the person might have done. Because we realize that in their heart and soul, they were a living breathing human being who did the best they could do. And if they didn't, we wish that they had; and we wish them the best in the Hereafter. As Dr. Nyang will also tell you, your history doesn't stop with your life. I hope he speaks about the history you leave behind.

We are enumerating and vocalizing and praising the good qualities. Isn't that what we should be doing with Allah (swt)? When you acknowledge the beneficence of Allah (swt), and you speak in the best terms, the most expansive and encompassing terms, in the most compassionate terms about that beneficence, you are filling your mind and heart, and the ears of those who are near to you, who receive your light and words – even if you write them and it comes 20 days later, or in an email a few hours later – with praises of Allah. When we acknowledge the beneficence of Allah, and we act in a manner incumbent upon us to act, by our breath that He gave us, that's the command of the breath. By being obedient to Him, and striving to abstain from disobedience, then that is *shukr*/gratitude, and patience, and eulogy. Aren't these languages, Farsi and Arabic, wonderful? There are so many meanings hidden in them.

The qualities of a person of gratitude are headed by humility. Submissive in heart and mind; praising, eulogizing, acknowledging the beneficence of Allah with the tongue;

obeying and submitting oneself through our actions and performing actions toward others with that same humility – that’s the foundation of *shukr*. It is that humility toward Allah (Who created us); the love for Allah (to Whom we are thankful); the active, continual (as much as we possibly can) remembrance and acknowledgment of the beneficence of Allah, speaking in the best of terms to others about Allah [that is praising Allah]. That doesn’t mean saying, “By the way my friend, do you know Allah is great?” “Do you know Allah is your Lord, and your friend?” No. How about, “My brother, why not be a little more compassionate in this situation? My sister, please be at peace and be patient. My friend, be merciful to that human being. My brothers and sisters, we are here to help people make peace in Egypt or Libya (or wherever).” That’s praising Allah. And at the end of that, you can look each other in the eyes and say, “Today we did good work, *Alhamdulillah-Llāh!*” Now that *alhamdulillah-Llāh* is filled with lots of stuff. It’s filled to overflowing. It’s not just, *alhamdulillah-Llāh*.

How do you know Allah’s likes and dislikes? You have the Qur’an, the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (sal). We have the words and the writings of the *taba’ain*. We have the words and writings of the *shuyukh*. We have the words and writings and love around in the *tariqah*. Then we have the guidance of those whom Allah sent to guide us. It’s like a child that doesn’t see something, but all of a sudden realizes... You realize that we are all children of someone, yes? Even though my parents have passed, I’m still their child. My beautiful mother-in-law who is still with us, we are all children before her knowledge and wisdom. One day, what happens? The child in you realizes, “My father and mother weren’t wrong about such and such. I didn’t see it or hear it, but they were right. It’s not exactly the way I understand it, but they were right. They gave me good advice, but I didn’t listen to it. They warned me, but I didn’t obey it, and this and that happened.”

What's the difference? No big difference. If someone who sees tells you what they see, you want to have humility and gratitude. You want to at least accept that it is a possibility. It's a point of view. By the way, there is no age limit on this. My Shaykh was still telling me things I didn't see when I was in my 60's and he was in his 80's. One day I asked him about something, and he said, "You are a *shaykh*; you make the decision." Oh, did I feel very alone! I felt like the kid who was pushed out the door in the American way of doing things, "Okay, you're 18 now! Go do what you have to do. Go make your career, that's it. You're out of here. Go find your own way." I felt very alone. But I found a way around it. I didn't ask that question anymore. I asked everything around that question so that I had a *du'ā* for this, a transmission for that, until he made me into someone who could make that decision. I couldn't have done that on my own. Now, there was a time when I thought I could (when I was Guru Vasudevadas), but I realized I couldn't do it on my own.

Keep the company of good people. Don't try to make them good in your mind. Don't try to make someone perfect in your mind because you like the way they cut their hair, or the muscles on their body, or you like their blue eyes, or you like the fact that they are intelligent, or the fact that they like you. Don't say they are good because they are not bad, or not as bad as someone else's bad. That would make Idi Amin not quite as bad as Adolph Hitler; therefore, he is a good person? That's not what it means to be in the company of good people. It means people who are living and breathing and seeking and striving to serve Allah. I don't care what they call themselves: Jews, Christians, Buddhists, or whatever. Do you care? You may want them to understand Islam, but do you really care if a good person calls themselves by some other name? It's still all Allah (swt). We have been blessed to know that. We have been blessed to know that there is only Allah (swt), that there is only unity/*tawhid*. That's the only reality. We are all

running around, thinking we are independent human beings, but we are really only a little blood cell in the vein of a body that is a lot bigger. We think we are independent.

Allah places us where He places us, and we have to remember that one of the Attributes of Allah is *ash-Shakuur*. Another is *ash-Shaakir*. One is Allah is liberal and bountiful in rewarding or giving benefits to humankind. When we express this gratitude between human beings, it means we should be thankful and be grateful to one another, our brothers and sisters, and be bountiful in our giving of benefits and rewards to others, especially to our parents and teachers. We should develop the strength of character where we don't do anything just to secure approbation or affirmation from others.

As we said earlier, *kufur* means to cover, to hide. *Shukr* means to uncover, and to expose. It doesn't mean that you go out and uncover and expose truths, that you "out" people. It means that in your gratitude, you find contentment and fulfillment, because what you feel had been covered, and has now been uncovered – where? – in the *huwal al batin*, in the core of your being, inside your own self. That's all that counts, really. The people of love accept us; of course that is good. But it is the empathy we have for one another, and our presence alone uncovers what has been covered. It is not to deceive, but to be grateful. And *shaakir* means toward Allah (swt) in everyone and in everything.

The last analogy I will make in this talk, in another definition of *shukr*, is the fullness of the udder of the she-camel. The bounty of Allah (swt) comes to us naturally if we fulfill our role as a baby camel. The camel doesn't say, "I want to be a horse! Or why wasn't I born a person? I'm so angry at my baby camel I'm not going to feed it today." The baby camel comes and what does it do? Does the mother push her udder into its mouth? No, the calf butts the udder with its head, like a calf does to the cow, or a little donkey to its

mother. Then the milk comes down. *Alhamdulillah*, bountiful! How much milk? As much as that baby camel needs. It only takes what it needs. What's left? That's food for us. Do you think the camel driver drinks before the baby camel? First he feeds the baby camel, then he drinks from what's left, and that he takes to the family.

The first choice goes to the baby camel. You can say that's an economic and financial decision. The more camels he has, the richer he is. The richer he is, the more things he can carry to market. But on the other hand, if he doesn't feed his family or have any camel drivers, or anyone to grow crops or load the camels... the family gets what is second or third. So let's practice the abundance Allah has placed before us, whether we are female camels or male camels. Allah has placed a lot before us. And make sure you don't milk the camel without a pan to catch the milk.

Since we are in the time of Ramadan, and we began hopefully with repentance and we ended hopefully with gratitude, maybe we should take a little time personally, walking in the woods, sitting quietly. Pick up the Qur'an today and in the next few days, and read it only to hear what it says about humility and gratitude. Remember, today and every day, that the benefits of the *shukr* and the *nai'mah* are to uncover what has been covered. To conceal the blessings of Allah, deny them and not share them, or not utilize them in a good way is to cover them and be a *kāfir*. *Kāfir* is not just someone who doesn't believe in Islam, doesn't put their head down five times a day to Allah (swt), doesn't go out and try to convert, and doesn't claim that everyone else is a *kafir*. No, no, no, no.

Verily your Lord is full of grace to mankind, but most of them do not render any thanks or gratitude/*shukr*. It is He who has given you a sense of sight

and understanding, but little thanks do you give.” “Allah loves those who are thankful. Allah assists those who are patient.

Here we are at a time still when you can thrive in Ramadan. Our piety is our strength. Our fasting gives us power. Our love for one another and gathering together allows us to build bulwarks against the hurricane, against the disobedience to support the better judgment of our heart and soul. We can thrive in our potential as human beings, as people of *taslim*, as people who feel the safety and security of being in the Divine presence, people of *tariqah*, perhaps. *Inshā'a-Llāh*, today we can be generous to one another, and kind to one another. Remember what Allah (swt) says:

Just as We have sent you a messenger from among yourselves to recite to you Our signs, and to purify you, and to teach you the Book and the wisdom, and to teach you what you do not know. So remember Me and I will remember you, and thank Me and do not cover up the truth.

That's the difference between a believer and a *kafir*. There is no other difference – not an ethnic difference, not an institutional or religious difference. It is just the difference between being someone who is thankful and someone who doesn't cover the truth. Allah uses the words “*rasūlah minkum*” meaning: a messenger from among you (humankind). ‘You’ meaning ‘humankind,’ not Muslim, but Muslim in the true sense of being obedient and self-surrendered. The root of the word *anasa*, from which the word *insan* comes, means to be a companion, or an intimate / *uns*. It is the nature of human beings for all of us to seek familiarity. Don't you want to know about each other? We are here in this beautiful place, in this community... “Oh, what do you do? Where did you get your degree? How long have you been here? Who planted the trees? Ah, the garden. How do

you educate your children? It's so nice to meet your auntie, your brother, your sister, your friend. It's so good you came." Our hearts are filled. We love to be familiar.

We look at the world we live in today and see how people seek familiarity by copying one another so they don't stand out. They think that friendship is poking someone on Facebook. What an image! I got poked yesterday. I felt very funny about that. The implication is you are getting poked in the face. Would it be as popular if it was called "Backside book?" Or "Arm book?" I actually liked "MySpace" better; it made more sense. But they didn't create any space for you; they let everyone else into your space. So Google has now created little MySpaces, so I can segregate you. That's another wonderful thing we can now do. Let's get back to segregation. We can now rate our friends on Google. You're my closest friend, you are in that folder. You go in that folder. I never look at that folder, but you are my friend.

So I've been thinking I would start a whole new thing called "oogle," which is kind of like "ogle." You just look at people. You never talk to them, and you make judgments about them. You can't talk to them directly, but you can talk to everyone else about them. It's just judgmentalness, that's all it is. You are talking to other people about them behind their backs. That represents society much better than this idea that we are all friends and really supportive of each other. I guess then we all should wear pants that are low on our hips and display our underwear, so that we are "unique." I'm sorry, these are very bad examples. Let's get to a good example before I end today.

The best example is the Prophet Mohammed (saws), who brings a message in a language of the time that people understand. He brings it in a way that is not just understood intellectually, but is clear. He makes known both the Book and the wisdom of that Book.

He's a spiritual *hakim*, spreading *hikma*. He brings the message, and makes known to people the knowledge that comes with it. Why? So that in the outer, there is safe passage through life.

Abul Hasan Shadhuli tells the story in Hizbul Bahr that the winds died. They were sitting on the boat. They left from Humaythra and went across the Red Sea in upper Egypt. So he constructs the Hizbul Bahr, and the winds come and gave safe passage to the people. The winds that waft upon our soul give us safe passage. That is the breath of Rasūlullāh (sal) that has been breathed into our soul by Allah (swt). He doesn't breath directly into our soul, but through Rasūlullāh (sal). Before that, we are gathered before Allah (swt) in the *ghaib*. He gathers all the souls that are ever to be born... must be a big space, right? Probably about the size of the head of a pin, with the weight of billions and billions of tons, like matter at the beginning of *kun fayā kun*. But in the world, the breath comes through Rasūlullāh (sal).

Do you want safe passage through life? The answer is of course, we all want safe passage through life. Here's the navigation manual (holds the Qur'an). The truth is, if I hand you navigation maps – how many of you are sailors – are you going to be able to read it? No. We have to learn how to read it. Who's going to teach us how to read it? Well, the Internet, of course! I'm going to go on the Internet and take an online course on how to read navigation maps. That's possible. I'm going to become a pilot with Allegiant Airlines out of Roanoke. I was once sitting on a Piedmont Airlines flight, a small plane, and there was a pilot deadheading. Do you know what that is? It's when a pilot doesn't have a plane to fly, so he flies on a plane to pick up his airplane somewhere else. The Pakistani PIA used to do that all the time, because they had a lot of pilots but not many planes. They sat in first class enjoying themselves, eating (and drinking, I

might add), which wasn't counting as flying time. So they could then go and fly for 18 hours and that would count as flying time. It didn't give you a lot of confidence.

So I was having a conversation with that pilot, and I asked him how long he had been flying. He said, "About four months now." "Oh, were you in the military?" "No." "Did you have a private pilot's license?" "No." "What were you doing before that?" "I was a cross country truck driver." Well, I understand the metaphor about flying loads in the sky, but it's pretty weak. I said, "Why did you become a pilot?" "Oh, my best friend's father owns this airline, and I lost my job, so I thought I would become a pilot." "Do you like it?" "Oh, yeah, it's okay." I said, "Where are you flying today?" "I'm flying out of Cleveland to Pittsburgh to Albany to whatever..." I was thanking Allah that I was not flying that route! Someone taught him how to read a navigation map and maybe he was a good pilot. I don't know, but I didn't feel very confident.

The message of the Prophet (saws) gives us safe passage through life, but we have to learn how to read the manual. Inwardly, it creates an opening to the sacred, the real, eternal Haram Sharif, the eternal Mecca that's within us. It gives us an opening, a doorway, into the city of absolute truth and the kingdom of knowledge, and that is entered into on two conditions. There are ancillary qualities. The conditions are *adab* (courtesy) and *khusu* (humility). We already know about *shukr*. The journey in this life is a journey from ignorance to knowledge; and the inward journey is from the city of truth to the Dar es Salaam, the place or city of peace, a journey from darkness to light.

Virtually every heart – Allah tells us that it is not every heart – can be purified, and we know Who owns that heart. The Owner of that heart is Allah (swt), and we are the

lessee. We hold the lease. How many of you live in rented properties? Do you feel fairly secure where you are living? In the economic times we live in, it is better to pay rent than to own. But at any time, the owner can say, now you are going on a month to month lease. That's a warning. Dr. Nyang will tell you about the warnings, about the 12 minutes he spent in the *ghaib*. How many warnings are there? What does it mean that Rasūlullāh (sal) is a warner? Allah says, **“Remember Me and I will remember you. Be thankful to Me and don't be ungrateful to Me.”** So we have to remember Allah (swt) and find that place of humility, and find that place of truth. *Asalaam aleikum.*