



Title: [Gratitude and Thankfulness with Humility Part III](#)

Change through Dhikr, Reflection and Suhbat

DVD title (the same)

*Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm* . When Allah says, “**Remember Me and I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and don’t be ungrateful to Me**” (as we ended yesterday), [we understand] these are signs. If we are remembering Allah (swt) and we are thankful in that moment, we should understand that we are making progress and moving along the path. My Shaykh used to say, “You have to make progress, make progress.” I never knew what making progress was. He would say, “You have to change, and do your very best.” “Well,” I would say, “How do I change?” Let things change you. It means that everything other than remembering Allah (swt) has a questionable reality to it. If one remembers in a deep or consistent way, then in turning toward Allah (*tawajjuh*, paying attention), the essential reality reflects that remembrance back upon us and inspires us. Our remembrance inspires us.

We realize how protected we are, because Allah (swt) has given us this context in life, and given us a simple command, a simple injunction: “**Remember Me and I will remember you.**” It’s more than just a cause-effect relationship. It’s a communication between the force of creation and what has been created, just like there is a communication between the different systems in our bodies to keep them in balance. So if a sincere seeker remembers Allah (swt), then the reflection back is Allah remembering the sincere seeker. It’s not like a human being remembering another human being. It’s the way the system stays balanced, the way Reality expresses its beingness.

*Shukr*/ gratitude is the fruit of that personal experience of *dhikr*. If you don't make the *dhikr* – silently, loudly, affirmatively – without gratitude, there is no humility. Without humility, the ego begins to rage; and there is literally pain. Just think about pain, any kind of pain: my leg pain, whatever pain you might have. It takes you immediately to “I,” away from everything else. So there is a message in pain, a remembrance. You say, “I want to get rid of this pain.” For what? To come to a state of normality. Is your state of normality one of remembrance? Because [if it is,] there's an interesting thing that happens. If we establish a state of *dhikr*/remembrance, recognition and humility toward Allah, then even when the pain comes, the pain reminds us of Allah, and not of the “I.” It's a kind of transformational event that takes place.

When one has that gratitude, then the person feels joy and comfort and sweetness, which come from an inner peace and an inner consciousness. But like anything else, the environment has to be prepared for it. The gratitude, and that peace and joy act as a barrier to negative elements and distractions, moral and ethical confusion. More than that, it neutralizes our selfish desires and our unwarranted expectations. *Shukr* / gratitude is then the outer experience of an inner state of contentment. When it is genuine and profound and deep, and when it rises from us for good reasons, that's where you get statements like: “But for the grace of God, there go I.” You observe yourself, and you really see how it could have been you, but thank Allah, it's not you that is having that experience.

You are [experiencing it, in a sense,] because you are seeing it. You are seeing some negative or trying experience in someone else, but it's at arm's length. Because it is, you have the perceptive ability to learn from it. Because, by the Grace of Allah (swt) you remembered Allah at the right time in some way, you are in that dynamic of Allah remembering you or reflecting you. It's not mechanical or because you are supposed to do something, but because you did it. And you practiced. We practice and we practice, and we don't understand what really our “progress” is until the moment comes, and the

action is right, the words are clear, the response is good, the sight is clear, and we see that we are seeing, and we know that we are knowing.

The state of *shukr* or gratitude confirms inwardly what Allah (swt) has promised to us. In that confirmation, we accept the '*ālam al-amr*, the world of command. We realize that the commands of Allah are very clear, very purposeful, and they have a target.

In the '*ālam al-khalq*, the world of creation we are living in, we also accept it (the world of creation) by the command of Allah (swt). I won't repeat the story of Adam (as), but you know it. The target of this are these *latā'if* (*qalb, rūh, sirr, khafī, akhfā* , the five subtle organs of perception). All those *latā'if* are designed to reflect that remembrance; therefore, we can say in shortspak, they are praising Allah. Just like the flowers, trees, and all the things in nature are praising Allah (swt); we can grasp that. We have to understand that within us, there are these *latā'if* that are praising Allah (swt). We are living in that *nafs – mā, nār, bād*, and *khak* (water, fire, air, earth) and *nafs*. Inwardly, our acceptance and our gratitude allow us to experience the physical world and those elements of our inner being in gratitude.

What are the commands that give us clarity and contentment? We are content with our *qadr*, our destiny. When we are content with our destiny, then, and only then, do we see how perfect Allah's decree is. We are not trying to escape it; we are trying to be content with it. The opposite of this sweet and clear path is confusion, and falling down, falling over the obstacles of denial and covering up, *kufr*. Then instead of being free, we are burdened. Each one of our anxieties we know has a weight to it. How much can we carry? If we carry a weight around all day long, it hurts. Our muscles begin to ache; our back begins to break. We become irritable; we feel enslaved by this weight we are carrying around. Unfortunately, at times we assign a weight to things that don't have weight. Sometimes we misinterpret love as being commanding or limiting, but love has no weight.

We have to be very careful to construct the situation, or take advantage of the situation Allah has constructed, where we develop *basīr*, where our sight becomes clearer and clearer. All those anxieties are self-created, self-imposed defenses that provide our lower state, our *nafs ammāra*, with the ammunition it is looking for to blow up our goals or terrorize us, or provide us with the veils to hide the oasis/*wadi* where we can rest and be peaceful. Everything becomes a desert in life. Even the beautiful forest here feels the weight of the drought, and the beautiful stream dries up. Sometimes I drive across the bridge and when I see the stream dries up in late summer, I am worried about all the little fish who live there. “Where do the fish go?” Somehow they find their way over the rocks, before it’s just too late, and they find a pool of water and stay there. They make their *du’ā*, however they make their *du’ā*.

In a way, that’s how we are. If we can set ourselves apart for a moment, and get free of the miseries and worries, and set ourselves above them, then we can see how easy it is to fall back into the pit, when don’t remember and we don’t have gratitude. You can even understand why people have opinions and become judgmental, why bigots hang out together, or prejudice rises like it is in our country today. We find how easy it is for people to start listening to the arguments of prejudice, bigotry and bias. There’s a false temporary sense of safety. If we gather together against the “other” – those other people – if we hold fast to even irrational thought, somehow we are going to be like those poor fearful people huddled together afraid of the dark, but at least we have each other, huddled together. This is perhaps the worst situation one could imagine: a group of fearful people, susceptible to prejudice and bias, and selfishly concerned, and at the first opportunity, they abandon one another for their own selfish needs. Unfortunately, that’s sort of an executive summary I guess of the world we are living in today.

The *‘āyāt* of Surah al-Baqarah about remembering and focusing on Allah (swt), and covering up, and affirming is a guideline for life. Allah says:

**Do not attribute purity to your souls. He knows best who guards against evil. Therefore, enter the gates of hell to abide therein. Certainly, evil is the dwelling place of the proud.**

And the Prophet (saws) said, *“Three matters are annihilating. They are obeyed niggardliness, the pursuit of fancy and self esteem, and arrogance that consumes the good deeds like fire when it consumes wood.”* When we look again at the roots of the subject of this weekend, *shukr* and *sabr* and *khūshū*, we see especially here in the month of Ramadan that we have an incredible opportunity to reflect on our self—not just in general terms, but very specifically: how we are, what is pleasing to us, what is not pleasing, what is pleasing to Allah, what affirms Allah’s faith in us, what creates within us gratitude, what affirms within us our gratitude for being, and what sustains it in our life, what sustains us while our physical body is being tested, and our desires and schedule is being shifted, and our comforts are becoming discomforts, and our discomforts become doorways to peace and understanding.

It’s an incredible month of juxtapositions. Though we may have persevered with our bodies, and though we might have found ourselves to make some progress and have some good pride in being able to accomplish what we accomplished in Ramadan, it’s by no means the end of our journey. It’s really the beginning of another journey for another year. There is nothing worth of worship than Allah, and so there is nothing more worthy of worship than that remembrance of what we learned during this month. For those who take to the *wird* or the *wazifa* of some *tariqah*, who love Allah and His Prophet, and seek to open their hearts to the teachings of the Prophet (sal), who seek the teachings of the Prophet (sal) and realize the promises of Allah, we realize that we have a place of contentment within us. There is a place we can turn to.

When we feel compassion and mercy for one another, we are in the presence not only of Allah (swt) [as] Rahmat; [but also the Prophet (sal), as] we are told that Allah sent to the Prophet (sal) as a mercy. When we find that compassion and mercy stimulated in us

during this month of Ramadan, our companion is *Rasūlullāh* (sal). That means in our words and in our actions, and in our heart even at times of great trial and tests, not only is there the bedrock of our *iman*, but we have the *mayyat* of *Rasūlullāh* (sal). In any case, we begin to realize that the means/*wasila* to Allah, the awakening to Allah's presence, lies in our patience, our perseverance, in our gratitude and our willingness to be humbled before the Magnanimity and Majesty of Allah (swt), but also by the day to day reflections of our own personality and character. Some of us go through periods and stages in our lives where that is a very, very difficult process. It is painful. We would rather do the outer beneficial practices of piety, and avoid seeing ourselves, because the seeing of ourselves is just too difficult in those moments. So hopefully, *inshā'a-llāh*, we resort to the more outer practices of Islam.

Know that is how you keep the foot in the door, so it doesn't slam. Don't be too self-critical. The tendency lies in each one of us to think that somehow, all of our sins of omission or commission either can be overlooked, or are so burdensome they can never be overlooked. We have to understand that we shouldn't gamble with Allah, [or] with our lives. Our lives are very, very precious, and any moment of gratitude, any moment of patience and perseverance, any moment of doing good for others, whether it is under the rubric of interfaith work like Dr. Nyang has been doing for so many years, or if it's just removing the stone from the path. They are equal in their blessings, equal in their *thawab*. The Prophet (sal) doesn't say that if you give 10 *dirhams*, you get less *thawab* than if you give a hundred *dirhams*. And it becomes natural, which means the *thawab* becomes continuous.

I didn't tell him not to sit next to the vent because I was trying to harvest some *thawab*. "Oh, good! He's doing something that could hurt him. I'm going to tell him to stop doing that and get *thawab*! And he's not going to get hurt. It's a win-win situation!" That's not it; it's that your sight develops. You learn to trust it and speak it, no matter what. What comes, comes – you don't know. Maybe what comes is the ability to see that more, to love more, to care more. How can you not be grateful for that? The gratitude and the

*thawab* are sandwiched together. Guess who is in the middle? You are and I am. We want to wrap ourselves in that – the *salām* wrap, whatever you want to call it. Clear, transparent, it holds you together, but poisons you if you put it in the microwave.

There are the times when we have to stay in *suhbat*. Times like this. We have to stay in the company of one another, and we have to enjoy the company of others who seek us out because of our unique community of people. To whatever degree we are pious, to whatever degree we represent the Haqq of Allah (swt), Allah has permitted us to have this *suhbat* and this *jamah*, and be a part of this *ummah*. In these times that we live in, nobody can keep away from the actions and the words that taint and discolor. Those sins, if you want to call them that, affect all of us. Because the *fitna*, whether in the form of man's inhumanity to man, or woman's inhumanity to man, or woman's inhumanity to women, or man's inhumanity to women (did I cover it all?), the corporate exploitation, poisoning of people for short term gain, the genocide, murder, poverty – all these things rain down on us like torrential rains, and we get wet.

Every day, there's barely one of us in the room who doesn't have to shower, I hope. We all shower every day, because we get dirty every day. I know it's a simplistic analogy, but it's like that. If you think for one second that even we are not affected by the rains of *fitna* that are flowing all over this world, not only are you naive and self-deceptive, but you are in big trouble. We are in big trouble. We have to repent every day, at least to say the *Surah al-Fātihah* with an understanding of what's in it. At the same time, we cannot be arrogant, and we have to realize that we can't change the world overnight. Those of us who have been working to change the world over night realize we have been losing a lot of sleep.

We have to be patient, even with the corruption in the world today, because we have to understand that we live in a time where the foundation of Divine guidance has been undermined, virtually destroyed. It is not only by the *kafirs* (those who would cover the truth) from the outside, whose name, religion or ethnicity have no relevancy, but also by

the *kafirs* (those who would cover the truth) on the inside, who are ungrateful, who are arrogant.

We have to realize that the servant of Allah (swt), that is, the person who realizes they are a servant of Allah, has no escape from where Allah has placed them. We think we can escape because we can change our geography. “That place is going to change me.” No, there is no escape. It is important for us to realize that in the world in which we live today, gray is better than black and white. We cannot hope for white against black in any way, symbolically nor actually. Allah (swt) said what? **“A white is not better than a black, and a black is not better than a white. An Arab is not better than a non-Arab nor a non-Arab better than an Arab.”** What’s the message? We haven’t gotten the message. Some of us have gotten it, *inshā’a-LLāh*, and we remember it, but then look at Washington. No wonder an earthquake hit Washington; Congress made it weak.

We have to make the effort to abstain from acting against the Will of Allah, as much as we can that is within our power or in our ability. Not to say, “This is all I can do,” but [do] the most one can do, even if it is much less than you would hope, much less than you know you should be doing. Even if it is much less than the prescriptions are, and much less than the proscriptions are, Allah (swt) judges us by our *niyyat*. What does it mean that Allah judges us? I hope by this time, after listening to me so much, you know what I mean by “Allah judges us.” You are either going to be balanced or unbalanced. The way is either going forward, or you will be stopped, or you will go backward. It’s the dynamics of our religion, our way, our *tasawwuf* that is important. We can make *dhikr* driving to work, and we can also say *astaghfiru-LLāh* driving to work –both of which have to be done with sincerity.

In these times, those who have any knowledge of Allah (swt), especially any *wali* who exists at this time, has a very, very significant role to play. The *awliya-LLāh* are the real inheritors of the Prophet Muhammed (sal), as you know from the stories of the Taba’ain, Zubayr, and others. Just the presence among people, of those who have come close to



Allah, who know Allah, who know this path, who have been brought up on the mother's milk of this path and weaned to some degree from the world have especially a role to play in these times. It's incumbent upon us to say what and who we are, not for the purpose of making Muslims, per se, in the sense of religion, but for the purpose of people finding *taslim* within themselves – to show what is good, not what is labeled. Let the label be seen from the good.

Go to Soul TV. See what this man is doing on Soul TV, showing the good of humanity, showing the process of the good, not just the eye of a videographer, but always looking with the eye of affirmation. See what he is doing. Then I'm going to say something very self-serving, or partially at least. I really don't know why we deserve to have such people here with us in our community. But I note that such people come. And I want to just say I'm grateful and I thank you: people like Babu Asrari, people like Tayie, people like Suleyman. Also, it's the people like you, members of this community who have been here for 40 years, 35 years, 20 years. Do we know ourselves, enough about ourselves? How are we going to be when death approaches us? Will we remember to remember?

Then I look at you young men and women. We are getting older and so I wonder, "What is this all to you? Is it all religion, something called Islam? Is it being in *tariqah*, getting the *baraka* of the *shaykh*? Is it taking out your *baraka* album and putting the *shaykh* stamp in there? "I got the *baraka* from this *shaykh* and that *shaykh* and that other *shaykh*." Or are you building a life of service? Do you see what has come before you? Do you see the opportunities that are before you? Are you grateful enough for what has come before, and humble enough to carry some of that responsibility in the future?

What is *adab*, a set of rules? Stand when the *shaykh* stands. Sit when the *shaykh* sits. Don't sit in the *shaykh*'s chair. Take the *baraka* from the food of the *shaykh*. Ask the question in this way. Yes, of course. But what is that about? It's about humility. And humility cannot come without gratitude, and gratitude cannot come without remembrance. Remembrance cannot come without reflection upon your own self. And

reflection upon your own self, that's the gift of Allah (swt) to you. Most people in the world do not reflect upon that, believe it or not. So it is incumbent upon me to say what I've been saying: what and who we are. Just think how it would be if everyone you met showed respect to you, for who you are at the very core of your being, even if you, yourself, don't know what the core of your being is. But you want to be what you are at the core of your being, and you are the expression of what Islam is – far beyond “another religion.”

The Prophet (sal) said, “*I did not come to create a new religion.*” Even if you, yourself, don't know it, you are the expression of gratitude, because it can be expressed through you. You are the expression of patience and perseverance, if you allow it to be. Then we have a future. The future is not just one genocide after another, one war after another, one impoverished group after another, one fear after another, one doubt after another, one divorce after another, one marriage after another. Our responsibility is that we are a *bab*/doorway; we are a *fath*, an opening to hope, a track where Allah (swt) comes to the needy, both in spiritual terminology and physical means – literally coming to the needy through your hands, through your checkbook. We can't just spend our lives dealing with the problems of life, because they become too burdensome; they make you ill.

I always tell people in the health profession, you know you are spending your life with sick people. You need to spend part of your life with well people. That's an instruction I try to give to my students. You have to do that; otherwise, you will not only lose your edge, you will lose your insight. And guess what? It will be the way you define yourself. I'm a doctor. I'm a nurse. I'm a social activist. I'm a peacemaker. I'm a this or that. You may very well be, and it may work in Japan where it is part of the culture to announce what company you work for before you say who you are, but that will steal your gratitude. The pride will be like a crutch and you become dependent on playing that role: I'm a *shaykh*. I'm a whatever.

When you become dependent on playing that role, there will be no humility. If there is no humility, there will be no gratitude. If there is no gratitude, there is no remembrance. If there is no remembrance, the truth is covered in you and in me. When you become an opening, even for a moment, it's like turning on the light at night and opening the door. A moth flies in – even for a moment. We have to understand what's available to us and fulfill the will of Allah (swt) in the times we are living in today. One of the reasons why the *ulema* today don't have the real ability to pass on the real message – that's an Islamic political statement – of Islam to people is because they are wrapped up not only in historical inaccuracies, they are wrapped up in their role. They are wrapped up in arrogance, and they are wrapped up in selfish desires for power. Another name for that is ignorance and stupidity.

The real message of Islam is only of the people of the heart. I'm not ashamed nor overly proud to say this, because I don't think I'm that astute, but we, meaning those of us who are of the path of the heart, have access to the *fadl* and *nai'ma* of Allah through our spiritual relationship with our *shuyukh*. Is the *fadl* not for everyone? Of course it is. Is there not *nai'ma* flowing to everyone? Of course it is. But how would you like to have the spigot in your house to turn on within you? Our spiritual relationship with the Prophet Muhammed (sal) allows us to be capable of serving in a way, and passing on a message, those *ulema* have no way of doing.

All the *ulema*? Of course not. All the Sufis? Of course not. I don't want to insult your intelligence. So I know you are not going to walk out of here and say, "Shaykh Rashid said all the *ulema* are bad and all the Sufis are good." I guess if I knew that, I wouldn't have just said that, would I? Ah, you just can't get the lawyer out of me.

As you know, life as we know it is just a measure of our degree of attitude and humility, because we realize how little we have and how much less of a person we are than we could be. Then there have been times of corruption that we see. It was out of the corruption of the *jahaliya* that the Prophet (sal) was sent to change the character of

humanity. Great saints were sent over the history of Islam during times of corruption. There were very few times when there wasn't corruption, so there were very few times when there weren't *awliya-Llāh*. But there were times when there were great waves of *awliyā*. It wasn't because the times were great, but the world was different. These people had a different kind of Internet. They had the "inner net." You know like inter and intra mural sports? They had the "intra net." There were and are means of communications that cross long distances in which the world and people can be affected, and they were expert at those.

Though I don't recommend Gurdjieff, because that's a hive of a lot of dead bees with some leftover old honey in it, he did report some interesting things about the capabilities and *karamat* of some of the people of Tasawwuf. I met some of his teachers many, many years ago, who had not yet passed out of the world, and they affirmed what I had thought, too. There was a time when we could communicate over long distances, and we still can. Those are called. "Your aunt is in the hospital, say a prayer for her." "Okay I will." Or, "So and so's son is having a difficult time. Remember them in your prayers." "I will." We are buying the fact that time and space don't count, when someone says that, right? Be a companion with people in need. I have students in different parts of the world. Not a lot; a few. I give them a transmission on a regular basis. Now I'm using Skype. They say, "Shaykh, do I have to stay on Skype to receive the transmission?" I say, "Before Skype you didn't have to!" "Do I have to stay on the phone?" "No, the phone is used to say, 'At 4:00 I will be sitting in meditation.'" "Well, should I be sitting at 4?" "If you are sitting at 4, I'll be sitting at 9." But, I tell them that these are really good questions, because I'm discerning an attitude of submission in these questions – ignorance, but submission.

We believe that transmissions are instantaneous. You know the story I tell often of Mevlana Jelaludīn Rumi, whose wife had made some special sweets. He knew that one of his *muridīn* loved those sweets, but one happened to be on Hajj. So he walked up to the roof of the building with the plate in his hand, and reached out with the plate. At that

moment, a hand came into the man's tent outside of Mecca with the plate of sweets. He took it and ate the sweets, and brought the plate back. There's a quantum universe for you that also has "Beam me up." What did they call the thing on Star Trek that made the food? The replicator, the cosmic replicator and the arm of Mevlana.

The corruption in the world today we can't forget about, even when we are talking in all these positive terms at a wonderful retreat. *Inshā'a-llāh*, it's wonderful. It's a lot more subtle than we know. It's much more insidious than we think. It's based on this absorption of 'I': what I want, what I need, what's right for me, who I am. There is the luxury of 'I.' Sit down and contemplate your 'I,' assuming your I (eye) is still in your head to see with. There is the luxury of psycho-babble, the luxury of being able to think we can have an existence outside of where Allah (swt) placed us, let alone the blessing that Allah (swt) has given us.

Also, I advise you today, don't be subject to too much shortspeak. It's okay when we say, "Allah – He," but take a moment and reflect that Allah is not He, not a being, as I constantly say over and over again, ad infinitum, ad nauseum. Beware of shortspeak in spirituality. It tells you about short-think. Short-think tells you, "I don't have *sabr*. I don't have the time." Why? "Because I'm very busy being spiritual. I'm very busy being pious. I don't have the time to think these things through. I'm very busy making a new history for myself." But history is time. Reflect upon your history. I tell my students, write your spiritual history. I don't want your autobiography. I want the history of your spirituality. It's very important to know spiritually where you come from and who you are.

If you don't do it, at least ask yourself why you are afraid to do it. What excuses are you making not to do it? "The Shaykh told me to do it, I should do it." That's true, because that's the contract we have. That's called *bai'at*. You had something to sell, and I bought it. Really, it is a lease. I own the lease. That's not why you should do it, however. You should do it because it's good advice. You should do it because, yes you might see things

you don't understand, or you might find it difficult. On the other hand, when you know point A and point B, you can project the trajectory of point C. I think Dr. Nyang will agree with me: that's history, and that's why history is important in projecting the future.

We are all guilty of not using time correctly. It's very hard to understand how to divorce yourself from your I, while your I is being commanded to do things. Like, I was inspired to create this community. I had this vision. "I." What name was I then? Vasudevadas. I, Vasudevadas. I? I did this? Well, as we say in Jersey, "furgedaboutit." We are doing it. Sometimes we are losing it, and sometimes we are gaining. But thank Allah, we got many signs of how this vision couldn't be created, how it wouldn't work, how I couldn't do it, but I knew it had to be done. It was at a time in the world where we needed to gather and have *suhbat*, an ashram, a *khanqah* where people of a like mind could grow and be together; raising their children, educating them to this world and to the inner world, and to the world hereafter; going through many, many iterations, many tests and trials, sweat of the brow; living with people who don't think exactly like we think, living with people who would never be your friends under any other circumstances, people who don't speak exactly like I speak, or like exactly what I like, and yet realize there is a higher purpose.

People who were not vegetarians became vegetarians, and then went to Dr. Chang and became not vegetarians. He's in Charlottesville. If you want to overcome your vegetarianism, go to Dr. Chang. Don't underestimate the power of one person, and the fear of your body. With that, you may only follow that person for 6 months, but they change your life. A lot of former vegetarians are sitting in this room right now, who are eating fish and chicken now because Dr. Chang became part of our history, part of the history of this community. So we are looking for a Chinese Oriental doctor who performs miracles, who is a vegetarian, because no matter what the *shaykh* says, fear of the body and an expert from the outside has more power than the *shaykh*. But this place developed, and the proof of it is you, who are still sitting here. It continues to be, even at difficult times like now, *alhamdulillah*.

The root of this is patient perseverance is to whatever small degree those of us who are impoverished spiritually, those of us who are handicapped and disabled spiritually (and I include myself) could find some modicum of gratitude to Allah, Who, I remind you, overlooks most of our sins, most of our forgetfulness, and reminds us at times of things that are not so easily overlooked [that in turn] remind us to put a lot more effort in our repentance and our trust. I'm sure a lot of people who live in this community have asked, over the years, "What will happen when the Shaykh is gone?" Hopefully my body will go when my mind goes; that's my preference. We know and worry about many things, but we keep our hope that some people will come and look at the work we have done here in this community and all over the world and say, "That deserves to be continued for the next generation and the next generation." I hope that's what happens, but of course it is up to Allah (swt).

In Surah al-An'am, 'āyat 42, Allah (swt) says:

**We have sent [messengers] to nations before you and gripped them with misfortune and hardships so that they might humble themselves. (tadarra)**

Whatever we are facing today here, in this small nation, whatever grips us today, we have to remember that these hardships cause us humility. In Surah al-Araf, 'āyat 55, Allah says: "**Call upon your Lord humbly and secretly. Truly, He does not love the transgressors.**" Ah, why are those two phrases together? Doesn't that blow you away about the Qur'an? Here you have one thing, that's really clear; but why does he say that next? Maybe the Prophet (sal) drifted off for a minute and forgot the bridge statement? I don't think so. So who are the transgressors? You have to ask, "Who, what, why, where, when?" (That's our next series in Charlottesville.) They are the people who don't call upon their Lord humbly and secretly. Jesus, the Prophet Isa (as) said what? Go to a closet and pray. He didn't say to go build mega churches and buy time on satellite tv. He said, go to the closet and pray – secretly.

My version of that is go out into the forest and find a place in the forest; put your head on the ground, and rub your head in the dirt, and talk to yourself about yourself. Make sure there is nobody around. Speak as loudly as you can, and stay there well beyond the moment when you want to lift your head up, which is probably about 10 seconds into it. Then get up and feel good about yourself – not because you did that, but because you had contact with the earth. What do I mean by that? You came to the essential creation of Allah (swt) for this world.

Again in Surah al-Mu'minūn (1-5), Allah says, **“Successful are the believers – those who are humble in their *salah* – and those who shun idle talk** (I have a hard time with that) **and those who pay their *zakah*** (you can get around that by staying in a lot of debt) **and those who guard their private parts.** You may not know that there is a lot in that for most of us. Then, in Surah al-Hadid (1-6):

**All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and He causes death – and He has power over all things. He is the First and He is the Last and the Manifest and the Concealed, and He knows all things. It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six stages, [and] then assumed the Seat of Absolute Authority. He knows all that enters [into] the earth and all that emerges from her and whatever comes down from the heavens or rises up to them. And He is with you wherever you are, and Allah is Seer of all that you do. He is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and all things shall be returned to Him. He makes the night to merge into the day and the day to merge into the night, and He is the Knower of all that is in the hearts.**

Do you see the dynamics of that? When you hear it, do you hear the dynamic? We are here, we are there. We are here, we are there. We are in the earth, we are in the heavens, we are in our hearts, we are in the heavens, and in the earth. See the dynamics of that?



Why is that important? We are in the middle of it. Human beings are in the middle. This subject of humility is a very critical subject, an extremely critical subject. Not only is Allah telling us to be humble in many ways, before the vast earth and heavens of creation, but he says in the last *surah*, **“Is it not time for the hearts that sincerely believe to yield to the Messenger of Allah and to the message that He has sent down?”**

The implications are that humility is something that has to be worked on, that one has to yield to the belief, and one has to surrender. The best way to do that is to surrender to those qualities and attributes in yourself that are the good ones. After all, and many of you have heard me say this many times, this idea of resisting surrender is absurd. If you took a walk in the woods, you surrendered to the chiggers and ticks. If you drove down here, you surrendered to the other people on the road, whom you have no control over. If you flew here, you surrendered to the pilot. You trusted our cooks. [When you are on your trip home,] maybe you will stop on the way and get a sandwich from someone who you have no idea who they are and what diseases they are carrying. But we’re not going to surrender to Allah, and understand what submission to the *shaykh* means? How self-deceptive can that be?

Then there is this concept of humility, this concept of resisting resistance. There is a long ‘*āyat* in Qur’an where it says the Messenger of Allah and those who are with him are hard against those disbelievers and merciful among themselves. This *āyat* is addressed to the Prophet Muhammed (sal). How many times does Allah address the Prophet by name in the Qur’an? That’s a quiz. You are not going to qualify for being an ‘*alim* unless you can answer that question, but you might qualify for a Sufi. [The answer is] four times.

**O Muhammed! See them bowing and falling prostrate in worship, seeking bounty from Allah and His acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from traces of prostrations.”** (If you don’t want to take the time it takes to be so pious, you can hurry it up by rubbing your head hard onto the

carpet.) **Such is their likeness in Torah and the likeness in the Gospel that rises like firmaments upon its stalk, allowing those who sow it, that he may enrage the disbelievers with the sight of them. Allah has promised unto them a belief and do good work and forgiveness and an immense reward.**

There is the formula again: Good deeds, belief in Allah, and forgiveness. It's a formula. Everything else comes from that. One of the realities of life that we have to try and grasp and understand the capabilities that Allah (swt) has given us, has implanted within us. That is the capability to be humble and the capability to be modest, and the capability to overcome. That's the way the *nafs* is overcome. Don't go wrestle in the Jordan River with the Shaytan. Who did that? Second quiz. But society works against us. Or is that working against us, working for us? It works against us if we don't know the formula. It works for us if we do know it. All the negative stuff in society can be the doorway to *dhikr* and good actions, or it can work totally against us, especially in the Westernized world, which is not north, south, east, or west, but the materialized world.

The world of MTV, the world of PG-13 animated movies, the world of advertising, which unfortunately, I have intimate knowledge of – these worlds go totally against this idea of humility and modesty. Yet, at the same time, they do give us a context to push against. Along with that kindness, patience, and tolerance, *kadara*/humility is the opposite of arrogance. It is the opposite of pride. We know we live in a world where there is no modesty. And I remind the men: just because you can pray with your pants just below your knee, and you can pray with your arms bare and in a T shirt, doesn't mean you should be doing that, whether the women are *muhajib* or not. It's just another choice Allah has given us to be companions and to share the burden, and to understand what it takes to think.

There is very little humility or discretion in today's world. Look at the way people use Facebook and Twitter. People I know, whom I respect, post things like: "I am such a slob. Someone please help me clean my house. My dog is full of fleas. I don't feel like

washing him today. I got plastered last night with 14 other friends.” We check everyone on Facebook now when we hire them. The problem is that’s forever stuff. If you don’t think it’s being gathered and archived by people who you don’t even want to think about, forget about it! It is. So, what’s the result? There is no humility. There’s very little modesty. If there’s no humility, there’s no thankfulness. If there’s no thankfulness, no gratitude... you got it, right? If there is no gratitude in the world, where is it heading? Well, I can tell you. How many people, including yourself, feel you lack self-esteem? We used to say, “Don’t wash your laundry in public.” There are still places, especially in the East, where you don’t say certain things in public. You don’t divulge certain things about your family or your ethnicity or whatever. Those of you who are first generation American, you have a wonderful opportunity to keep that alive and to plant it in this country. It died here about 50 years ago. I watched it die.

We have to allow the realization of our place in this universe, one’s place in the face of consummate compassion, consummate mercy, consummate love, consummate tolerance—not consummate greed, not consummate sexuality, not consummate stupidity and ignorance, not consummate militaristic nation building. Would you want compassion if you were in misery? Yes. Would you want someone to say to you, “I’m sorry. I would help you, but I have run out of compassion.” What do we say when something happens, and we have no compassion? “Too bad!” The statement that should be compassionate becomes sarcasm. The word doesn’t even exist in people’s vocabulary. “Compassion? Oh, compassion... Oh, I read in the Injīl that Jesus had compassion for...” I’m not talking about Jesus (as). Maybe “Jesus” the undocumented laborer down the street who always helps everyone.

Do you want there to be an end to people who love you or who you love? Of course not. Yet that’s the world we are living in. That is how we have to be. We have to sincerely confess that everyone seems to be much better than myself – not from the point of view of having low self-esteem – but from the position of elevating others in your eyes and putting yourself in a place of saying, “I am a servant.” ‘Making you a servant / ‘abd’

means that everything becomes eventually *ibada* / worship. “Everyone is wheat, I am the chaff.” Then the inhabitants of Paradise will kiss that one on the head when they arrive. There is a narration attributed to the Prophet Muhammed (sal) where he said: **“Whoever is humble, Allah exalts him; and whoever is haughty, Allah humiliates him.”**

So the first thing you should say, other than, “Why me?” is “Where is my arrogance? Why not me?” Imam al-Ghazali said, *“This is because sometime in the future I will be arrogant, so this is a way to avoid my being arrogant in yet a worse way; humiliation, alhamdulillah, has come to me.”* If you cannot find how you were arrogant up until the moment, then you have to say, “It is because Allah is saving me from an arrogance far greater.” But our greatness is somehow inversely proportionate to behaving as though we were great and important. Just as one’s humility is adversely proportionate to behaving as if you were somebody. I think it is divided in many ways. Seeing oneself as having no virtues, or treating others with respect, or seeing oneself as the worst of all humanity is one aspect of humility – something our *shuyukh* have taught over the years to specific people under specific circumstances. Some people can actually pull that off.

[Humility is] to be aware of one’s nature, one’s *nafs ammāra*, one’s temptations, to be aware of one’s faults, to be aware of one’s weaknesses but to be aware in a way that makes you strive to change them. That takes this – the support of others in *suhbat*. I have seen it very rarely in any other form. I have seen it; but very rarely and in very special people, people who could actually be what Sufis are accused of being, pietists (mostly accused by the non-Sufis.) But we are not pietists. We are the people who changed Islam and made it acceptable to the world. We brought Islam to Indonesia by good works and good acts.

To be aware in such a way that we don’t let the negatives take over us, humility has to be felt by your own self – modesty. Try to remember: no one can see the effort you are making, to whatever degree you are making it. They may only see the surface of what

you are doing. Don't expect anyone, even the ones closest to you, to understand fully what is on your mind, what is going through your heart, the time frame you are operating in, the frustration you are feeling, the anxiety, the hope, the love you are feeling. But try to get enough of it to come to the surface so the person can say, "I can see that you are making an effort. Thank you." If you can't see that, the only thing you are seeing is "I."

Maybe parents can see it clearly in younger children; hopefully, you have the right relationship with your husband or wife. But that's all effort. It's all building – building a structure and tearing it down, building a better structure and tearing it down. It's the Mila Repa story. Marpa comes to Mila Repa and tells him to build a house. Then he tears it down and has him build the house in another place, and then again and again. Finally Marpa's wife feels sorry for him and assists him and feeds him. Mila Repa goes into a tirade against his wife. But it's about building and tearing down, and rebuilding on a foundation. If you are striving very hard in your life not to be arrogant, striving very hard to be tolerant, to develop good virtues, and behavior; and if others don't see it, and others don't get it, well, that gives you extra impetus not to be arrogant, not to be angry or frustrated. But if we are angry and frustrated, we hope that tells us it's time to repent, time to apologize, time to change.

Allah (swt) accepts our repentance. Our wife, our husband, our brother, our sister, the neighbor, the stranger are not going to accept it as fast as Allah has accepted it. You have to find comfort in the fact that if you are sincere, that repentance has been accepted. Now it has to trickle down, trickle down into the mentality of someone else, who has their own issues, their own problems. All you can hope for is to keep some kind of balance, some kind of communication, so that you connect every once in a while. You have a better chance of that in *suhbat*, because everyone comes to *suhbat* with some submission.

If the *shaykh* plays any role, it's at least a focal point so you are not thinking about yourself in the moments you are sitting with the *shaykh*. If that's the only role we play, it's a valid role. For those moments you are sitting here listening to me, where you are

wanting to be sure about your *adab*, or you are making an effort to do something you wouldn't normally do, or you are seeing a story that can be told that might help other people, or your mind is not on yourself in a negative way – maybe that's enough. We have to pretend we have knowledge, but all we have to be is a sword in the ground to which you can pray. Allah says that you can make a *mihrab*; stick a sword in the ground, that's all you need. You understand I don't mean pray toward the *shaykh*, but just a focal point.

The last of the *nafs*, the last of the ego relates to those people who really, really, really, really are sincere. It is not because they have necessarily overcome every aspect of their *nafs ammāra*, but their sincerity is counted by Allah (swt). It is not because they are perfectly humble, perfectly resistant to the *fitna*, not because they no longer have to struggle, but because they have one key thing: *niyyat*/ intention. It is because the intention is there, and Allah creates out of intention. All this is created out of the intention of Allah. All change comes from intention. The Prophet (sal) said, “**Actions follow intentions.**” Good intentions = good acts.

Those who strive to be consciously aware of Allah in the sense of *dhikru-Llāh*, those of us who in our prayers don't forget others in need, those of us who get up in the night and remember to remember to remember that person who said, “O Shaykh, keep me in your *du'ā*,” we will immediately see, by those intentions, the rise and the fall of our *nafs ammāra*. Really, I'm scared every day, because I know I have forgotten people who asked me to make *du'ā* for them. I should have written it down, and it scares me, because I said, “I will.” So when someone says, “Keep me in your *du'ā*,” I try to make a *du'ā* right then and there, just in case I forget it at *tahajjud*.

We are all maybe somewhat addictive personalities. We ought to be real careful what we are addicted to. There are exceptions. There are people I know who won't drink fake beer, which has less alcohol in it than a coca-cola, because it's in a beer bottle. They are rightfully concerned that it might be a first step in drinking alcoholic beer. *Alhamdulillah*-

*Llāh*, they came to that conclusion. People know their addictions. What happens when someone goes with someone through addiction and they help them, and they come out of it? Do they usually stay their friend or not? No, they don't. Why? Because "they knew me when." That's not what happens with the *shaykh*, with *Rasūlullāh* (sal), and Allah (swt). That's not what happens among the brothers and sisters. That's usually covered in other societies by tribalism. You are bound by your tribe and the rules of your tribe, and you can't get out of it. It becomes a prison. But understand who the friends are.

*A companion of the Khalifa Umar (ra) saw him carry a pitcher of water on his shoulder and he said, "Ya, Umar, what are you doing, O Khalifa of the Messenger of Allah (swt)?" Umar (ra) said, "Some envoys have come from other countries and I felt some arrogance in my own heart, so I wanted to suppress it. I felt better than the ones who came out of the country to visit us, so I decided to carry water to them."*

This is Umar of the anger. This is the conqueror of Jerusalem. This is the *khalifa* some people don't name their children after. *"He used to carry bags of flour on his back. Once, he was accused while giving khutbah, and he kept silent. When people questioned or criticized his actions, he would fight to keep silent, because he knew his own nature."* This is how you overcome arrogance. You don't drink the beer if it is going to remind you of alcoholic beer. You carry the water to the people who need water. You keep silent when your anger starts to rage and come out. There are stories after stories after stories.

So my brothers and sisters, there is more to be said. Not too much more, but enough to stop here. I think you have the idea. I promise you if you are really interested, I'll put it in the printed version as a gift to you for coming here and spending so much time, developing patience and tolerance, by sitting for so many hours with me and listening to us. We'd like to send you a copy of this if you would like to have it. But Allah (swt) is

Merciful. One nice thing about forgetfulness is, if in any way you are discomforted here, you'll probably forget about it within a few hours.

*Trust in Allah and you shall obtain every good and spiritual perfection, as well rid yourself of your own claims to capacity and potentiality, Ibn Abad said in a letter to Yahya. This conforms to sincerity. It denies the nafs of any value or station. Abide between fear and hope. Testify to the benevolence within the manifestation of the severity Allah (swt) has given to you. And if you accomplish this, you will no longer hear by your own ears, nor see by your own eyes, nor grasp by your own hands, walk by your own feet, or even comprehend from your own heart. You will either be confined to an asylum, or you will be seated upon raised couches among the people who are the friends of Allah and who have intimate knowledge of Allah.*

*Asalāmu aleikum.* Does anyone have any questions or comments?

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Student: I find through focusing like this for a short period of time, it brings up other thoughts I want to contemplate deeper. In one of my meditations I realized that [the Qur'an speaks so much about gratitude and humility,] and wondered if you could comment on why that thought was so strong.

Shaykh: It's taken as an admonition in many ways. You will find it also in the Injil. We have a very specific time-frame we are given. There is physical death, and the death of the *nafs*, spiritual death. The concept of being reborn has been taken by the evangelical Christian community to mean that you die to your old life and you are reborn in Jesus. The message, to me, is that statement has always meant that moment to moment there are always things to end, and others to begin. There is even the philosophy that we are born and die moment to moment, physically, actually – and we don't see it. It's in another dimension. All that carries us through moment to moment is our memory of the previous moment. There is a whole school of philosophy in Islam about that.



The validity in that lies in the fact that transformation can take place both on the physical level and on the spiritual level. I go back to my conversation with Jonas Salk in 1983 or 84. Do you all know who Jonas Salk was? He won the Nobel Prize for the Salk polio vaccine. I was with him in San Diego at the Salk Institute, which was for me a model of what I wanted to do in this community and with Legacy. It's still a model in my mind. He was a microbiologist and philosopher, no matter what he was working on. He died while he was still working on HIV / AIDS, trying to find a vaccine. He had poets, philosophers, writers, countless people, sociologists, historians. He knew if he came up with a vaccine, he had to present it to the people, and there had to be ways to convince them to take it. He was a very comprehensive thinker.

At that time, though I was a Sufi and studying Sufism, it was before I got my *khalifat*. I still had a lot of yogic mentality in my mind. I had this idea and said to him (I hope humbly), "Is it not possible that evolutionary change can take place within one generation, instead of having to go through this whole process of mutation and biological change?" This was long before the genome had been sequenced. People were just talking them about DNA chains. If it's possible for the DNA and RNA to change, then is it not possible for behavior to change in one generation, even in an individual, if the DNA can be affected? That takes me to another subject of a man named Eugenio Dado who had about 100 patents and was a well-known scientist who invented some pretty far out stuff. If you are interested in that, I'll tell you about it. But Jonas looked at me and said, "Yes, of course it can be." I said, "Well, that's very hopeful."

So anything we see that manifests in human being's physical behavior or their physical health can be changed at the DNA level without the intervention of other methodologies, like chemicals. He said, "Yes, that's eventually what I want to work on." Where did I get that idea from? From spirituality, from Islam. So there are a lot of ways to die: die to the old. Dying sometimes takes a long time. I know it takes a long time to overcome anger. I've been dying to anger for years. Your mother (may she have peace) is now in her 14<sup>th</sup> year of not speaking after a stroke, while someone else [drops dead] and is spared

that kind of stress and strain. We don't know why. There are many things to die of. Then Suleyman dies and comes back to life, with a purpose. He didn't tell you about the stroke. He realized that he couldn't hear, not that he couldn't speak. Now look. Allah brought him back twice.

We die many, many times. It takes a long time to die to ingratitude. It takes a long time to die from being unforgiving. It takes a long time to die from habits, sometimes, but we have to die of those things before we leave this earth, this body. Here's the caveat (and you find it in other places in the Qur'an): you rely on Allah that Allah knows your intention. Who is this Allah? You know what I mean. Do I have to say it again? There is not Allah up there on the throne Who's taking account and checking it out. Yes, there are angels who do all that. But you rely on the truth; you rely on Allah; you rely on the goodness, on the compassion. You rely on the mercifulness and forgiveness. You say, "I'm really not as forgiving as I could be. I'm really not as compassionate as I could be. I'm really not saying the good things I could be saying. I'm really not as uncritical as I could be. I have to die to that stuff, for my own sake, let alone the sake of my sons, daughter, wife, husband, my brother, my sister, and humanity. I have to do that for my own self."

The same person who is not doing that is very selfish. You might as well turn your selfishness into something that is good. If you are going to be selfish, be selfish about that, and die before you die. If you die in that other state, you have created the next state. If you are a Hindu, you feel your last thought creates the next world you are born into. But as Muslims we believe a similar thing, that we are creating our place in paradise, in the *barzakh*. So you die to those things. That means you have to be courageous, and you have to look at yourself. We feel we don't want to be reminded by anyone: "I don't need you to remind me to die before I die, or that I'm unforgiving, not compassionate, intolerant, not this or not that." If a person's motives are not good, okay; but if they are loving, then accept that love. We were born alone, and we die alone. It's a one-way ticket. But the end of the line is not no - thing. It's no thing. We are not alone.

Sometimes we have to trust the people we don't trust for other reasons, so as to give them the opportunity to change. This is why sometimes you find things you don't understand in life. Like, when a plane goes down and 360 people die, was it the destiny of all 360 people that they were supposed to die on that plane? Do you know the answer to that question, from an Islamic point of view? You really want to know, don't you? I'm not going to tell you. It's in my talks. Is that an important question? Because sometimes we can die together to things. We can die to distress together. We can die to enmity together. Allah tells us in Qur'an, "**Where the enemy becomes as if the brother.**" What happened? They died to the enmity.

We better be careful what we do in life. If that's the purpose in life, we had better be careful what our job is, and how much we love our job. Unless our job is something that helps us accomplish what our spiritual goals are. If it isn't, enjoy your money or your status, because that's all you will have at the end of the day. *Asalaam aleikum.*