



Who?

Part 3 of a 5 Part Series

by

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Bismi-Llaabi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Surah al-Fatihah

AL-ḤAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L-ABSĀR.
ALLĀHUMMA ṬHĀBIT QULŪBANA ʿALA SIRĀTIKA-L-QAWĪM,
WA-JʿALNĀ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHĪN,
WA ṢALLI ʿALA-Sh-ShAFIʿI-L-HABĪB,
RAḤMATIL-ʿĀLAMĪN,
WA MANĀRI-L-NAJIYĪN, WA MARSĀ-L-ʿĀRIFĪN

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

YĀ MAWJŪDAN ʿINDA-Sh-ShADĀĀʾIDI
YA KHAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUNʿI
YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YAʾJILUQDI ḤĀJATĪ
BI-RAḤMATIKA, YĀ ARḤAMA-R-RĀḤIMĪN.
SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ ḤILMIKA BAʿDA ʿILMIK.
SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ ʿAFWIKA BAʿDA QUDRATIK

O Existent One, O Thou Who are Present in all difficulties.
O Thou of Hidden Kindness, of Subtle making.
O Gentle One, Who does not hasten, fulfill my need,
With Thy Mercy, O most Merciful of the Mercifuls.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy Grace, after Thy Knowledge.

Glory be to Thee, on Thy forgiveness, after Thy Power.

BISMI-LLĀH, AL-ḤAMDU-LI-LLĀH

ALLĀHUMMA ṢALLI WA SALLIM ʿALĀ SAYYIDINĀ MUḤAMMADIN, WA ʿALĀ ĀĀLIHI WA ṢAḤBIH

INTRODUCTION

If I asked you today “who are you?” what would you say? You would probably tell me your name. Some of you might tell me where you are from, or what you do. You might tell me where what your background is, what your interests are, what you look like, or what other people say about you. But does that tell me who you are? Last time we sat here together, we discussed the question “why.” The question of “why,” I told you then, is often one of the first questions the spiritual seeker asks; it is the question that directs him or her to the path to seek deeper answers. The question “who”—“Who are you?” “Who is your Lord?”—is the question that governs our journey, from birth to death. We are faced with this question over and over again in our life.

In a sense, these two questions are inseparable, intertwined, and intersecting. We could say that the Sufi is one seeking answers at the intersection of “Who am I?” and “Who is Allah?” At that crossroads is an experience of awareness of *tawbeed*/unity and the interrelationship of all things, transcending the concept of an isolated self, “I,” identifying ourselves with an ultimate reality that we call *Hu*. **“Know yourself and you will know your Lord.”** At a certain point, every seeker must seek that crossroads with utmost sincerity and consistency. We must all ask ourselves: “Who am I, and who do I want to be? Who is my Lord and who does He wish me to be?” The willingness to do this is an expression of sincere yearning for *maʿrifah*, real gnostic *knowledge*, and it is the doorway to liberation from the base formalism of orthodoxy that lacks vision or heart.

HU IS THE ORIGIN OF WHO...AND YOU

I will return to the question, “Who am I?” but first let me begin with the most important question, “Who is our Lord?” This is the very first and the very last question we are ever asked. It is the question we all answered when Allah gathered together all the souls:

...

...

WAʿIDh AKhADhA RABBUKA MIM BANĪ ĀDAMA ... DhURRIYYATAHUM WA ASH-HADAHUM ʿALĀ AŅFUSIHIM, “ALASTU BIRABBIKUM?” QĀLŪ, “BALĀ SHAHIDNĀ” ...

And Remember when your Lord took form the children of Adam...their descendants, and made them testify of themselves, saying, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, Surely we bear witness to that....” (Qur’an 7:172)

This very first question also implies the answer to the question, “Who am I?” That statement of who we are begins this process of reflection and self-examination. If we know Who/*Hu* is our Lord, then who we are must be in submission to our Lord. When we pass away, this same question of “who” is also the last question we are asked. As Abu Hurayra (*radiya-Llaahu ʿanhu*) reported, the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) said:

When a dead body is buried, two jet-black angels with blue eyes come. One of them is called Munkar and the other Nakir... They ask the dead person, “Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your prophet?”

Who is your Lord? Who is your prophet? And who are you? These are the questions we need to know the answers to, in this life and the next. Who is our Lord? The answer, of course, is “Allah is my Lord.” But is it enough to name Allah, or are we really being asked: WHO is your Lord? What are the qualities of your Lord?

What is your knowledge of your Lord? How can we possibly, really answer the question, “Who is our Lord?”? We are told in Surah al-An‘am:

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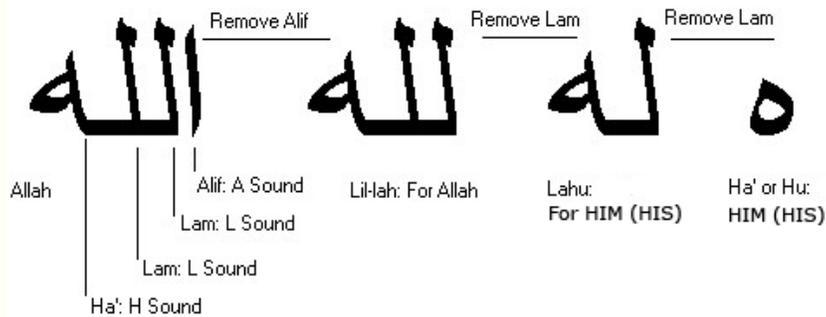
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...SUBHĀNAHU WA TA‘ĀLĀ ‘AMMĀ YAŞIFŪN
 BADĪ‘U-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-‘ARDI ...
 DhĀLIKUMU-LLĀHU RABBUKUM LĀ ILĀHA ILLĀ HUWA
 KhĀLIQU KULLI SHAY‘IN FA-‘BUDŪHU
 WA HUWA ‘ALĀ KULLI SHAY‘INW-WAKĪL
 LĀ TUDRIKUHU-L-‘ABSĀRU WA HUWA YUDRIKU-L-‘ABSĀRA WA HUWA-L-LATĪFU-L-KHABĪR

**Exalted is He and High above their descriptions.
 The Originator of the heavens and the earth...
 That is Allah—your Lord. There is no deity but Him.
 He created everything, so worship Him.
 And know He has everything under His Care.
 No vision can comprehend Him, whilst He comprehends all vision.
 He is unfathomably Subtle, the Conscious... (6: 100-103)**

We could spend days talking about that *ayat*. “He is high above descriptions and no vision can comprehend Him,” so how can we know Him or describe Him? Allah has provided us with a manner of addressing this question of the Divine in the form of *ishaarat* (pointing, hinting) at the *lateef* (indivisible, subtle and non-material). Terms such as “*hu*” are pointers toward the unfathomable nature of the Divine, without attempting to describe *hu*, hinting at *hu* to show the way, messages within messages.

Take for example, the name Allah: If the first ‘*alif*’ is dropped from the word ‘Allah’ it becomes the word ‘*lil-Lab*’ meaning ‘for Allah.’ If again the letter ‘*lam*’ is dropped, the remaining word ‘*labu*’ means “for Him.” Finally, even if the second ‘*lam*’ is dropped, there leaves the single letter word ‘*hā*,’ or the pronoun ‘*hu*’—meaning Him. So we find infinite wisdom within this one word, just like the letter *hā*, which looks like the infinity sign. As you add materiality or creation/creator to it, the *Hu* remains within it. All is HIS (possessed by Allah).¹ All is His Dominion: “...His are all things in the heavens and on earth...”



The act of *isbaarat* in *Hu* is a subtle act, deep within the human being. These words of Qur'an are *isbaarat*, not pointing toward *Hu*, but pointing toward the inner practice and state that takes one towards *Hu*. Pointing at the *Sifaat* of Allah is pointing to that which is a doorway to travel (*sayr illaa-Llaah*, *sayr fi-Llaah*, *sayr ma'a-Llaah*). It is these inner doorways that the Sufi seeks out. To the Sufi, simply applying the names of the outer world is not sufficient. The outer answers to the questions, "Who am I? Who is my Lord?" are not enough. We strive to answer the question behind the question. There is something else that is transpiring and we are seeking it, but at the same time we are caught in this world. We have to live in, and walk in and speak in this world. In that sense, we are sort of "spiritually bipolar." We are in this world, but there is another world we are aware of. This understanding of both the outer and inner reality is similar to our understanding of the atomic or sub-atomic world that exists beyond the normal sensory perceptions. Our knowledge about the atomic reality of that world is not derived from direct sensory experiences. It is not described in our normal, ordinary language. As we penetrate deeper and deeper into the nature of this Universe, even in the world of physics (especially in the world of quantum physics), we have to abandon the images and concepts and the language we normally use to describe things. It could be a metaphoric term: deep space, warp speed, quantum leaps. Looking inside the atom and investigating the structure tells us about the limits of our physical capabilities, and of our science, and of our sensory capabilities.

The more we come to a deeper understanding of the *'alam al-amr* (the world of command), the more we realize we need different tools to comprehend. The way to those tools is through *dhikru-Llaah*, meditation/*muraaqabah* and contemplation/*fiker*, through submission, through love, through attraction and accompaniment/*md'iyat*. Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) provides us with the tools to understand Him, His universe, internal and external. In the external, He gave blessings in the form of scientists like Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg and others who provided us with quantum physics to give us a glimpse into the essential nature of things beyond the logical and reasonable. Just as He has provided external guides, He has also provided us with internal guides in the form of our Prophets, *awliyaa'* and *shuyukh*, with *Rasuulu-Llaah* at the head. Of course, all intersect within the greater universe of guidance and understanding of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*). Einstein said, "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain. And as far as they are certain, they don't refer to reality." That sounds like a Sufic statement.

Like the Sufis, those physicists were dealing with non-sensory experiences of reality, and non-duality. Like people of *Tasawwuf*, they had to face paradoxes. The models and images became similar to those of *Tasawwuf*, depending on other means of perception, definitions and possibilities. Certain knowledge, like knowledge of "who is our Lord?" cannot be described in ordinary language. Even the word "*hu*" is an example of this. Saying "*Huuu*" creates a vibrational pattern that opens up doorways to understanding that language, logic, reason, and other things will not open up. As Sufis we say, *hu*. Yogis say, *om*. But our *hu* comes directly from Allah. It is always attached to everything. It is attached to the end of the Name of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*). No amount of information in the *dbaahir* (outer) will truly answer this question of "who." But in the world of the *baatin*, you don't try to filter the information; you just try to be receptive to the perception. Language and imagination cannot deal with many of the wonders of our universes.

Sufis have been struggling with this challenge for generations and have developed different ways of dealing with paradoxical aspects of reality. If you read Hafez, Attar, Ibn Araby, Rumi, or Bayazid Bistami, or Omar Khayyam, there are many contradictions in their poetic language—powerful poetic language to stop your mind and throw it off its normal course with words and concepts that are symbolic that you are supposed to keep in your mind when reading that poetry. Here is a small example from the poetry of Hafez:

*Be not taken in by the dimple on the chin, since there is a pit on the way.
For what destination and purpose, o heart, are you making such a haste?*

Here the phrase “*seyb-e zanaxdaan*, apple of chin” is used. In Persian poetry, the chin and cheeks are frequently referred to as apple that signifies the fair and beautiful countenance of the beloved. The word pit or well “*caah*” is a metaphor of a well-looking pit down the cheek, and also signifies the perilous way of love, which makes many hardships and dangers for the lover. In other words, in the poet’s view, to fall in love is to deviate from the standard and conventional norms of the society, and to fall in the well is full of adventure and perilⁱⁱ.

For the Sufi, we have means for retraining our minds and intellect to see the hidden meaning behind the apparent reality. Through the transmissions and through contemplation and meditation, we can begin to see, just a little, through the veil of this world to the greater reality behind. We have all been invited to this unveiling of truth. We are cordially invited, because of our sincere interest and love, and because of our capacity to understand, to join this elect group of people who are given a key to doorways of understanding. Where other people will be standing outside those doorways loving and examining, maybe even worshiping, kissing and appreciating the beauty of the carvings of those doorways, we are the ones who ask what is inside the door.

Just as knowledge about just the sub-atomic world lies beyond our sensory perceptions, real knowledge about who we are and who our Lord is also cannot be derived just from sensory experiences or intellectual supposition or reasoning. The ‘*aalam al-khalq* that we are used to living our ordinary life in offers us ordinary language, ordinary images, ordinary senses, all of which are not adequate to describe the phenomena of the inner and outer universes. The deeper and deeper we penetrate into its natures, the more we have to abandon our images and our concepts of ordinary language, linguistics and semiotics. We have to abandon the assumptions that go along with, “I deserve this. I want that. This should have happened. This should not have happened. Why did this happen to me? Who am I? Why am I here? What am I doing? Where am I going? Where did I come from? What is life? What is death?”

These questions imply that there is a logical answer to every one of them, but that is not always the case. We have to understand that there is so much left still to understand. What is the means through which we look? Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) has provided a means for absolutely everyone; it’s called the Qur’an.

QUL: “LAW KĀNA-L-BAḤRU MIDĀDAL-LIKALIMĀTI RABBĪ LANAFIDA-L-BAḤRU QABLA AN TAÑFADA KALIMĀTU RABBĪ WA LAW JPNĀ BIMITḤLIHI MADADĀ”

Say: “If the ocean were ink (wherewith to write out) the words of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than would the words of my Lord, even if we added another ocean like it, for its aid.” (18:109)

We are all invited to dive into that ocean to gain a deeper understanding of WHO. Rumi said,

*Come, come, whoever you are.
Wanderer, worshipper, lover of living, it doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come even if you have broken your vow a thousand times,
Come, yet again, come, come.*

This is the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*). This is the poetic description of the words of the Prophet Muhammad (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*). It is not from the imagination of Jelaludin Rumi; it is a statement of Reality. This is the invitation of *Rasūlu-Llaah* (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*). This is the laser light that shows the track. This invitation is to the person who can be, who can understand, who can live, who can feel, who can be humble and grateful, who can be kind, who can be tolerant, who can be patient. It is to that person who manifests the qualities of the Greater WHO. Those of you who are listening to me have all received the invitation. Most of you know this and some of you fear it, and some of you experience part of it but have not yet realized it. At some point, everyone must decide if they will accept the invitation. It has an RSVP on it. What you are really deciding is, “Am I going to be on a track to be who Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*) destined me to be, to become a person to whom the most amazing circumstance in the realm of human consciousness, *wahdat shubuud*, could happen? Will I let my container be emptied so it can be filled again by Allah?” If you do, concepts of time, space, matter, objects and causality will change. Quantum science deals with the interconnectedness of all things; so does *Tasawwuf* and so does Islam. It forces us to see the universe not as a collection of physical objects, rather a web of relationships in time and space. That’s how Sufis have experienced reality since the first time of the Prophet (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*).

As Sufis, we are given keys to the non-ordinary states of consciousness, those in which we can go beyond just the three-dimensional world of everyday life, and experience multiple dimensions, multiple realities in different time-space relationships. We are guided how to seize the moment (*waqt*) and use that moment as an entry point to the precincts of the Eternal...Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*). How do we seize the moment? Well, you begin by being guided to what it means to seize the moment. The way we look at our life and our work is different; we try to apply that greater understanding of unity to the specific experience in day-to-day life so that the physical reality itself can benefit from the spiritual reality. This is why I call it Applied Sufism. It is putting the template of the Eternal on the temporal. We spend most of our lives in “ordinary” consciousness, doing “normal” things in the “normal” world. Of course, the world isn’t normal; or is it normal, but not natural? That is how the vast majority of us survive, but who are you at your core? Who are you in your heart, in your mind? Who is the you that stands before Allah, naked on the Day of Judgment? Who is the you that you strive to be? We have to function in this macrocosmic world, but we can still come to the conclusion that all this impermanency can be experienced in a state of *fanaa*, and the reality underlying that is an experience of something that is formless and yet filled with knowledge. It is a container that contains something you cannot just touch and cannot see. That light reflects or turns you to the source of that light, instead of what the light is shining on.

In that light, we begin to see that all this in the world is illusory, and that what is real is what we experience in those moments, as brief as they may be, in the deeper realms of consciousness. This is multi-faceted or multi-dimensional experiences of a person who sits in *muraaqabah*, who serves humanity, who learns not just the social value of gratitude or humility or patience or love, but the mystical value of it. The mystical value of love is different than the social, phenomenological value. The mystical value of truth, or justice, or patience, or gratitude is different than just the outer forms of it. This experience of *Tasawwuf* is, in my opinion, a necessary experience to understand the deeper nature of things. We all got the invitation. When we stood together before the beginning of time, we all got the invitation. All of the souls ever to be born came before Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*) and He gave them an invitation. But then we woke up (or fell asleep) and forgot our invitation. When we remember that we were invited to a very, very important event, we might ask ourselves, “Who am I to deserve this experience, this challenge, this gain, this loss, this knowledge, this opportunity, this love, this patience, this path, this lineage, the relationship with the Prophet Muhammad? Who am I do deserve this?” Even our beloved Prophet (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) had to find answers to these questions.

WHO ARE YOU?

When Allah's Apostle returned with the first revelation, his heart was beating severely. He went to his beloved wife Khadija bint Khuwailid (*radīya-Llaahu ʿanhaa*) and said, “Cover me! Cover me!” She covered him until his fear was over. After that, he told her everything that had happened and said, “I fear that something may happen to me.” As she listened to the Prophet’s (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) words, Khadijah (*radīya-Llaahu ʿanhaa*) did not share any of these fears.

She realized that something tremendous and awe-inspiring had happened to her husband, and she was certain, knowing him as she did, that he was neither mad nor possessed. “Do not worry,” she said,

For by Him who has dominion over Khadijah's soul, I hope that you are the Prophet of this nation. Allah would never humiliate you, for you are good to your relatives; you are true to your word; you help those who are in need; you support the weak; you feed the guest and you answer the call of those who are in distress.

Imagine that moment. Would not the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) have been asking himself, “Who am I? Who am I to receive this message?” His beloved wife Khadija (*radiya-Llaahu ‘anhaa*) reminds him of who he is, reminds him (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) that he is someone who keeps good relations, who is honest and truthful, who helps the poor and destitute, who serves guests, and assists afflicted ones. These are the qualities of our Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), the characteristics he was known for by his family and by his Lord. What are the characteristics we are known for? Certainly, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) knows who we are.

FA-‘LAM ANNAHU LĀ ILĀHA ILLĀ-LLĀHU WA-STAGHfIR LIDhAMBIKA WA LILMU‘MINĪNA
WA-L-MU‘MINĀTI WA-LLĀHU YA‘LAMU MUTAQALLABAKUM WA MATHWĀKUM.

Know, therefore, that there is no deity but Allah, and ask forgiveness for your faults and for the men and women who believe, for Allah knows your comings and goings as well as your stayings. (Qur’an 47:19)

Allah knows your consistencies, your comings and goings, what you turn on and turn off, what you start and what you don’t finish, what you leave that you should have stayed with, and what you stayed with you should have left. Allah sees our passing words and our deepest wishes, but sometimes it is hard for us to see our own selves. Even the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) relied on his wife to remind him of who he was in those moments after the first revelation. As we struggle with our own questions, sometime the best question to ask ourselves is, “Who do you want to be?” This question is certainly a question that follows “Why?” (our previous *dars*) and speaks to something deep within a seeker, deep within our self that knows there is more to know, to understand. There is more to know, not just about the outer (*dhaahir*), but also about our inner self, who we really are in the eyes of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*), or rather, who we can become and the process required to attain that exalted station. That process and that goal is what I am speaking on today.

In a simple phrase, one could say that the goal of a spiritual life is to be someone who constantly keeps all the parts of their body and their complete heart (all the chambers of the physical and spiritual heart) occupied in the remembrance of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*). Someone who is in obedience to the *Haqq* of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*)—obedience, meaning in submission to the *Share‘ah* and following the path laid out by the *Sunnah* of *Rasulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*). Allah says, “**Kun fa-yakun,**” be and it becomes. We are becoming. The degree to which this process of “becoming” leaves the realm of rules and regulations (which is often full of effort and resistance) and enters into the truly blessed and sought-after-realm of conscious and natural remembrance of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*), becoming our second nature, is the degree to which we are fulfilling and fulfilled, living a life of peace and harmony. The goal is to become a person for whom it is not a burden to practice the *deen*, is not a burden to pray, to make your *wudu’*, to fast at Ramadan, to treat your brother as yourself, to speak in a kindly manner, to be kind to strangers, to remove a stone from the path. The goal is to live a life that is conscious, a life lived from the core, the center, the *lubb* of the heart, which is the pillar where the light from the *‘alam al-amr* enters into the *‘alam al-khalq*; a fount of light that enters the manifesting door of the heart...*fu’aad*.

When a concert pianist sits down at the piano, he or she doesn’t have to think about the piece they are playing. She tells her fingers to play and the fingers play beautifully, as if they had a mind of their own. Indeed, consciousness is everywhere, in every cell of your body. We all want to be people from whom good character pours out, like music

pours out of the hands of a master pianist. When the music is the music of righteousness, the music of *aqeedah*, *akhlāq*, then the beauty and the majesty is effortlessly exuded from every pore of the individual. Their default is consistent tranquility and harmony. Many of you have heard me tell the story of when I was in Pakistan, in Karachi. I was being driven by a very accomplished surgeon. Sitting in the back seat of the car, I am hearing, “*La ilaaha illa-Llaah hu*” over and over. “*Astaghfirhu-Llaah*, Sidi,” I asked, “are you Qadriyya?” And he said, “Yes, how do you know?” I said, “Because every pore of your body is singing, ‘*La ilaaha illa-Llaah hu*.’”

We all want *dhiker* to be our station and our expression in the essence of every word we speak. We all want to be constant in our piety and sustained in *nisbat md'a-Llaah*. How sweet and revealing Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) has made His Reality; it is our reality too. This journey to *Hu*, in *Hu*, with *Hu* is hidden in the *dhikru-Llah*, just as the sweet honey is hidden in the nectar. The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) was reported to have admired Bilal (*radiya-Llaahu 'anhu*), the consistency of his character and sweetness, saying: **“The example of Bilal is that of a bee, whether it ate the sweet or the bitter, it is entirely sweet in what it produces (its honey).”**

If you want to understand that flow of good character from the *dhaahir* to the *baatin*, and to see how these two are connected, look at the life of *Rasuulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) who was a most perfect being, always moderate in his actions. His actions were *'ibaadah*, and his habits were free from extremism; therefore, his life was the path of *Tasawwuf*. Following him, everyone can find moderation. The Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:

Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately. Always adopt a middle, moderate, regular course, whereby you will reach your target (of Paradise). (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Hadith 470)

When we talk about moderation in society today, we might assume that any “normal behavior” is moderate in comparison to the extremes that exist around us. But in fact, there have always been those extremes: there were extremes of materialism and base behavior during the time of the *jaahiliyah*. There has always been political intrigue, ignorance and injustice. To be moderate is not to simply be at a center between two extremes. It is not only what you don't do; it is who you are. It is a very specific place based on what we know as *Sharee'ah*, *Sunnah*, *Tareeqah*, *Haqeeqah* and *Ma'rifah*. It is action based on the personal expression of the Divine Attributes (the *Asmaa'u-l-Husnaa*), and of the light that reveals the unity (*tawheed*), the *tajalli* (lucent manifestation) that changes the heart from an organ of selfish sentimentality and duality to one of unity and selflessness.

One who truly follows *Rasuulu-Llaah* follows the path of moderation and balance in everything and admonishes themselves when they leave that path, even for a moment, “*wanting for your brother what you want for yourself.*” This is the path of choosing Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), of choosing Truth over desire and want. It's also wanting for yourself what your brother has when it comes to moderation, too. When we see something exemplary in someone else, it's fine to want that for ourself, because it's exemplary. It's what the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said we should have, so he gave us this example. This is the process of choosing the truth. When you follow the *awliya-Allah* and the *shuyukh*, you follow the path of tolerance and patience; you follow a path of calmness, a path of love and moderation. You follow a path of even rebuking your own self (*nafs-i-lawwaamah*), and you follow a path of *tambah*. It is not just making *tambah* to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), but it is uttering those words to someone you might have offended, or where your words have been too harsh, or your gaze has been too stern, or your hands have been too active.

This is **who** the Sufi is or can become. This is **who** the Muslim should be. It's **who** the Christian and the Jew should be. This is the **who** each of us can become when *meezaan*, harmony and moderation enter the core of our heart (*fu'aad*), from the pillar of light (*lubb*) emanating from the *nuur-i-Allah*. When this occurs, we realize that pillar of light is *Rasuulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), because he immediately changes our character; works on our demeanor and makes us humble. One's point of view, one's experience of fulfillment transforms with the joy of obeying Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), however long it lasts. Just the *dhawq* (taste) of it for one second tells us its reality. This person enjoys the company of your brothers and sisters, enjoys the *subhat*, and enjoys the company of the *shaykh*. In this state, one does not find oneself attracted to the things that are *haram*. Who we are at the core, the *'abdu-Llaah* (the servant), emerges from behind the veil of worldliness and duality. No longer invested in duality, no

longer feeding duality, no longer choosing sides, we now become the servant to all, receptive to the outpouring of the Grace (*Ni'mah*) of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*).

You may say, "O Shaykh, I can't achieve that. How can I ever achieve that? That's too hard." Don't be it; become it. Don't look for exceptions; don't look for excuses. Don't say, "I can't do it. It's too late." My answer is "I'm in old age and I'm still trying to become. It is never too late." In this state, we are neither attracted to the good nor repulsed by the bad. We are enveloped in the state of grace, thankful and loving of the ONE, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) Who is the Lord of all the Worlds (without distinction). Our mission becomes seeing the truth and living in the ONE, *Ahad*. Only goodness flows from our actions, only sweetness from our words. All our intentions have love behind them.

As we know from the *hadith qudsi*:

...When I love them, I am the ears with which they hear, the eyes with which they see, the hands with which they strike, and the feet with which they walk.

The ears that hear what? The eyes that see what? The hands with which they strike...strike at what? And the feet with which they walk...toward what, toward whom?

No longer does our fear keep the darkness alive in our life. No longer is our resistance to the status quo of society motivating our apparent good actions. Now we, having shed the worst of the ego (*nafs-i-ammaarah*) and having wrestled with the reality of desires, works, recognition, uniqueness, power, name, fame, pride, even pride of humility (*nafs-i-lanwaamah*), find peace (*nafs-i-mulhamah*) and serenity/*sakeenah* (*nafs-i-mutma'innah*). Light upon Light (from within our core) illumines our manifest from our un-manifest. We see clearly, dispassionately, humbly and we are fulfilled. From *nafs-i-ammaarah* to *nafs-i-mutma'innah* and beyond to the fulfilled and fulfilling, that being is no longer just a human being. That being is *insaan-i-kaamil*. You may say, "It can't be me." Yes, it can be. There is a saying that if you begin the *masjid*, Allah completes it. If you begin the journey, Allah completes your journey.

It is wonderful to speak about the process and the goal. When you speak about the process and the goal, you have a momentary taste of who you can become. This is the reason of a poem: you speak of something for one moment, and you get a taste of it. That metaphor gives you a taste of the beauty. When we speak this way, it is not to say, "Here is the goal; here you are. You have to go there." No, we speak about it because in the deepest consciousness of the heart, at the center core of our body where Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) has put this organ, there is a memory of that moment in the *ghayb*. There is a moment when Allah put the soul into the heart, and remembering that, even just speaking on this, gives us a taste of the reality of it.

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING

A healthy person eats because they enjoy food; they desire food. Both the sick and the healthy person are eating to live; both are benefitting from the food. On the surface, there seems to be no difference between the two, but in reality there is a significant difference, one which may even influence the healthy effect of the food on the individual. Similarly, there is a world of difference between one who makes the *'ibaadah* because they have longing and love in their heart, and one who has to force themselves to make *'ibaadah*. It is apparently the same *'ibaadah*, the same prayers, the same practices, the same hours of the day, the same kindnesses; but one person is healthy, and one is trying to get better from being sick. Who are you? Are you the sick person, or are you the healthy person? We are all sick some time, and we are all healthy some time. We are both. Today I'm a health person, but my knee is bothering me. Yesterday I was a sick person; I had a cold. But today I'm healthier, relative to what? Most of us, *inshaa'a-Llaah*, are somewhere in between: a well person who has some minor symptoms or illness with a weak immune system that can still be fortified. As we become more and more the healthy person, we do the things we sometimes find difficult to do: eating properly, sleeping properly, drinking enough water, taking supplements, whatever it may be. Then we find that the arguments we have, the tensions, the multi-tasking, the pride, the shame,

the fear all go away when moderation and love enter the heart. *Nuur* is developed in our *qalb*. The light that is in your heart illumines your life and,

QAD TABAYYANA-R-RUSHDU MINA-L-GhAYYI.

Truth stands out clear from error. (Qur'an 2:256)

That *nuur* that is developed in the heart begins to make clear what is light and dark, what is right and what is wrong. Nothing remains unclear. Nothing remains doubtful. This was the state of our beloved Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).

Anas said, "I did not touch any silk brocade nor silk softer than the palm of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). I did not smell any scent sweeter than the scent of the Messenger of Allah. I served the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), for ten years and he never said to me, 'Uff' nor did he say about anything I had done, 'Why did you do that?' nor about anything I had not done, 'Why did you not do that?'" (Agreed upon)

For ten years, Anas knew him and he never asked: "Why did you do that?" or "Why didn't you do that?" If we knew nothing else about the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), that should give us a taste of who he is – is, not was. How many of us could have our friends say that of us in the last ten days? How about in the last ten minutes?

Jabir reported that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "Those I love most and those sitting nearest to me on the Day of Rising will be those of you with the best character. Those most hateful to me and the furthest of you from me on the Day of Rising will be the pompous, the braggarts and the arrogant." They said, "Messenger of Allah, we know the pompous and the braggarts, but who are the arrogant?" He said, "The proud." (at-Tirmidhi)

Who are we? Are we one of those of good character? Do we spend our time among those of good character? Who are we becoming? Or are we among the pompous and the braggarts? Can we say that we are a little of both? Can we say that we are among the proud, but striving to become of better character? How do we change who we are? Maybe we don't change who we are. Maybe we just do what changes us. We must begin with submission; submission is deep and surrender courageous. Our salvation comes from the Source of all salvation. When we surrender our beliefs and what we know, empty our self of our preferences and speak to our courage and to our true self—that is how we begin purification of the self.

Self-surrender is different from defeat; it is *at-tazkiyyat*. It is a cleansing, a purification, which is at the core of change and freedom. The light of true knowledge and illumination of true faith open the portals of the heart, the corridors of the *lataa'if*, to reveal **who** we are. And each *lateefah*, like a prism, has another view of the same one truth to reveal **where** we come from, **where** we are going, if indeed we go anywhere other than where we are, and become aware of **who** we are and **where** we are. Perhaps, at times, we feel disheartened by the gap between who we are and who we want to be. That would be an honest evaluation for most of us. But this process is organic, multi-dimensional and holistic; it is non-linear. Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) created us in a body that is always changing, always renewing, always refreshing.

Recent research has confirmed that different tissues in the body replace cells at different rates, and some tissues never replace cells at all. Skin cells are shed and replaced most quickly, while neurons in the cerebral cortex are never replaced. There are no neurons added to your cerebral cortex after birth. Fat cells are replaced at the rate of about 10% per year in adults. So you could say that on average, human beings replace all their fat cells about every ten years. Cardiomyocyte heart cells are replaced at a reducing rate as we age. At age 25, about 1% of cells are replaced every year. Replacement slows gradually to about 0.5% at age 70. Even in people who have lived a very

long life, less than half of the cardiomyocyte cells have been replaced. Those that aren't replaced have been there since birth.ⁱⁱⁱ

The message from Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) is clear. Again and again, we see and learn that what transpires in the body is a metaphor for the inner process of transformation. Everything in this physical world is a reflection of the non-physical world. That corridor between the two worlds, that *majaaz*, can only be understood by *ishaarat*, not by actuality. Just looking at the rates of renewal and the different physical sites reveals to us that outer change is most easily and quickly achieved, but internal change is slower. The heart is more influenced toward change when we are younger. The intellect/brain, although not renewable, can build new pathways and tracks of synapses based on intention, training, effort, focus and assistance of experts who act as re-programmers or re-trainers. Our destiny, albeit written, can be affected by choices, by *du'aa'*, and by circumstances that we introduce into our consciousness. New potentials are possible to reveal a multidimensional path toward ultimate fulfillment. Nothing is merely two or three dimensional; everything is multidimensional and in constant flux until we achieve *sakeenah*/tranquility.

If we acknowledge, my dear brothers and sisters, this very limited science (although it seems unlimited) that each part of our body has a replacement rate, then we must ask our self, "What is the replacement rate for our character?" If we are honest, we can see that we are not today who we were five years ago, or even one year ago or one month ago. If we are able to reflect, and if we make the initial intention to change and act with that intention, we are guided until there is little if any effort left in us, leaving only gratitude and humility, because we have defaulted to that process of transformation. Our body doesn't choose whether to replace the cells, because it is part of the initial command of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). So we have to submit, just as our bodies submit.

There is no instantaneous replacement program. It is a gradual progressive process. Even when we are involved with the good and have set our good intentions, we are still involved with other people and their attitudes and their responses, and our response to their attitudes. How often have you seen something so clearly that was resisted by someone else who doesn't see clearly? If we have a path, this interaction makes us stronger; if we don't, it makes us weaker. If we don't submit and become obedient, we become weaker and weaker – physically and emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Just because we can perform a good action, doesn't mean that action is good for us. The same *nafs* that makes us habitually involved in these things of this world weaken us. Even if we are getting stronger physically, something could be working inside, making us weaker.

The journey is progressive. Character qualities change progressively toward the positive or negative, toward the inclusive or exclusive. We are all familiar with the *hadith* of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) warning us to be careful how we change:

Abu Moosa al Ashari reported that Nabi (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "Before the hour comes there will be a *fitnah* like the patches of dark night. A man will wake up a believer and go to sleep a *kaafir*, or will go to sleep a believer and wake up a *kaafir*." (Abu Dawood)

Our habits and values can change sometimes so imperceptibly to us that one day we might find our self acting as a stranger to the person we know we are. Worse than that, we may never even see or accept that we have changed. But change for the better often happens beyond our perception. Our belief in the unseen and the *baatin* can become so powerful, so strong and so pleasurable that the most pleasurable worldly things are nothing compared to what you feel as a Sufi, a Muslim, as a *mu'min*, as an *'areef*, as who you are, as a fulfilled and fulfilling human being. Unfortunately, there are many people who are too attached to who they think they are to want to change.

We say things like, "It just the way I am. I have a short temper; it's the way Allah made me... or I'm a jealous person... or I'm hard to please...." wanting to protect the *idea* of 'my change,' instead of accepting a station that is defined and recognizable in anyone who has achieved that station, and documented by our *shuyukh* for centuries. There are any numbers of character qualities that we laud and hold up as a banner for why others should put up with us, or why we put up with ourselves. This is why the nurturing of humility is essential to make progress on the Path. No one is exempt from the transformative process, neither prince or pauper, nor *shaykh* or *mureed*. The

question to one's self is: "Do I really want to be that way?" When you pass away, should loved ones miss you because your physical presence is gone, or because they miss your light, your love, your patience, your tolerance, your consciousness, your kindness, your sincerity, your happiness, your wisdom, your exemplary faith and trust as well as the joy and the guidance you have brought to them in your life?

WHO DO YOU KEEP COMPANY WITH?

It is said that the first person to be judged on Resurrection Day will be a man martyred in battle. He will be brought forth to Allah (Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah), who will acquaint him with His blessings upon him, and the man will acknowledge them. Allah (Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah) will say,

"What have you done with these blessings?"

The man will say, "I fought to the death for You." Allah (Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah) will reply,

"You lie. You fought in order to be called a hero. It has already been said." And he will be sentenced and dragged away on his face, and flung into the fire.

Then a man will be brought forth who was learned in knowledge, and who taught it to others, and recited Qur'an. Allah will remind him of his gift to him. The man will acknowledge them, and Allah will say, "And what have you done with them?" And the man will say,

"I acquired sacred knowledge, and I taught it, and I recited it fee sabeeli-Llaah, for Your sake." And Allah will say to him,

"You lie. You learned it so you could be called a scholar, and you read Qur'an so you could be called a reciter. It has already been said." The man will be sentenced and dragged away on his face and thrown into the fire.

Then a man will be brought forward for whom Allah generously provided for, giving various kinds of wealth and power. He will recall for him the benefits given, and the man will acknowledge them. Allah will say,

"And what have you done with the benefits I have given you?" And the man will say,

"I have not left a single kind of expenditure You love to see made, except that I have spent it all on You for Your sake." And Allah (Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah) will say,

"You lie. You did so because you wanted to be called generous. And it has already been said." And he will be sentenced and dragged away on his face, and thrown into the fire.

How can we avoid the self-deception of the people described this *hadith*, the deception of the people who think, say or believe they are acting in Allah's name, when they are in fact acting for their own selves or for the sake of the world? To answer this, we must return to the question, "Who are you?" We must look to the humility of remembering WHO is our Lord, and we must also look into the mirror of the company we keep.

Imam Ali is reported to have said to his son, Imam Hasan Mujtaba (*radīya-Llaahu 'anhu*):

*Oh my son! Avoid the friendship of a fool, as he would tend to benefit you, but he would harm you in the process;
and avoid the friendship of a miser, as he would turn away from you when you need him;
and avoid the friendship of a sinner, as he would sell you for nothing;
and avoid the friendship of a liar, as he is like a mirage, for he would make far things look near and near things far.*

Whose company then, should we keep? Keep the company of those who remind us of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*). If nothing else, in the company of the pious, one repeatedly hears useful knowledge and guidance for putting this to practice in everyday life. This will motivate the clumsiest of the *mureedeen* to action. Additionally, there is the benefit

of *du'aa'* (prayer) of the pious. Seeing a sincere aspirant working diligently, they make prayers for him. *Inshaa'a-Llah*, by keeping their company, one starts to admire them, then one starts to imitate them, and then one starts to become like them. This hastens the spiritual progress.

When sincerely reflecting on the value of the company we keep, it is essential to acknowledge that for the positive effects, this company needs to be for considerable duration of time (months and years, not minutes and hours), with sincerity and total obedience to bear its fruit. It is not that you go to the *halqah* and the *dhiker*, and then you keep the company of other people. It's not that you have all the excuses: "That's a nice person. That's a good person of this religion or that religion, of this belief or that belief. You must keep the company of those who also seek their awakening.

QUL, "ATĪŪ ALLĀHA WA-R-RASŪLA," FA'INŪ TAWALLAW FA'INNA-LLĀHA LĀ YUHIBBU-L-KĀFIRĪN.

Say, "Obey Allah and the Messenger." But if they turn away, then truly Allah does not love those who cover up [the Truth]. (Qur'an 3:32)

Being physically present in the company of the *shaykh* as much as possible is needed to make progress. Corresponding with him often via mail, e-mail, telephone, and Skype can be a substitute, if physical presence is not possible. Whatever one may say they value, it is where and with whom you spend your time and your effort that is important. What your heart and mind is occupied with, that shows what you truly value and who you truly can be, but also who you are already. You chose to be in this company. Allah reminds us of this in the strongest terms in Surah al-Furqan:

WA YAWMA YA'ADDU-Dh-DhĀLIMU 'ALĀ YADAYHI YAQŪLU "YĀ LAYTANĪ ITTAKHADhTU MA'A-R-RASŪLI SABĪLĀ.
YĀ WA YLATĀ LAYTANĪ LAM ATTAKHIDh FULĀNAN KHALĪLĀ."

And [on] the Day the oppressor will bite his hands [in utter regret] and will say, "Alas! Would that I had taken the path of the Messenger! Agony is mine! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend." (:27-28)

What stronger message could we have from Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) on the importance of the company we keep to who we are and how we are judged?

Hazrat Ali (radiya-Llaahu 'anhu) said, "Never talk with a bad companion, for he is worse than a poisonous snake. He will not take away your life alone. He will take away your life and your faith." And Rasuulu-Llaah (salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) has said: "A person is judged according to the company he keeps. So beware of the company you keep." (Abu Dawood, Hadith #: 4833, Narrated by Abu Hurayrah).

What is required of the seeker by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) is a firm commitment, not a token nod to the spiritual aspects of life. This begins and is sustained by obedience and sincerity. It is not sufficient to want to be a Sufi; rather, the emphasis on why you wish to travel this path and who you wish to become must be at the forefront of the mind and in the core of your heart. The seeker must surround themselves with the people who always think of the next world, and are *salih*. If you can't find pious people, don't make friends with bad people. If you can't find

the pious people, then read the books of the people who are pious. Don't talk to people who are ignorant of the value of compassion, mercy, love, tolerance and patience.

This is not always easy, even when we find the best people to be around. There were times when I was with my Shaykh, and I had to be somewhere else – I thought. I had an appointment; it was weighing on my mind. In the early days, I would get restless, because I had time on my mind. I would let him know I was restless. He'd be deep in *muraqabah*, deep in meditation. So I would cough, sneeze or make some noise just to bring him out of meditation so we would move on to the next thing. Typical American, I must say, thinking, "Let's move on to the next thing; my ankles are hurting. The mosquitoes are biting. The flies are driving me crazy..."

Jelaludin Rumi said in a couplet:

*Little time spent in the presence of the awliyaa
is more helpful than a century with taqwaa.*

And our esteemed predecessor, Khwaja Ubaidu-Llaah Ahrar (*radiya-Llāhu 'anhu*) said, "Nafl *salaat* can be performed any time, but our *subhat* will not be found again." This moment will never be repeated. You will never capture that moment of sitting with your *shaykh*, that moment of contemplation. So seize these moments, be patient with these moments. Make the time. Make your life revolve around your prayer, your *du'aa*, your *tafakkur*, your service. Don't try to shove them into your life, because they will never fit. How I treasure each moment I had with my beloved Shaykh, however hot or uncomfortable I was with my Shaykh (*alayhi-rahmu*), may Allah bless him.

Once, someone was recommended to attend a *subhat* of Bayazid Bistami (*radiya-Llāhu 'anhu*). "I am always in my own elder's *subhat*," he replied. "Bayazid's *subhat* is more beneficial for you," he was told, meaning that one receives *fiyd* from Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) proportional to their relationship with Allah. In the *subhat* of Bayazid, he would attain *fiyd* proportionate to Bayazid's capability—not his own capability. So when you are sitting with the *shaykh* or the *shuyukh*, you are getting the *fiyd* according to their capacity, not your capacity. If you are only in your own *subhat*, you are only going to get the *fiyd* proportionate to your own capability. So when you think of people like Bayazid Bistami or Imam Ghazaali, Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili, or any of our *shuyukh*, you will get the *fiyd* from them. When you are making your prayer, making your *du'aa*, making your *tasbeeh*, just think about them and bring them to you. You are getting the *fiyd* according to their capacity, not your capacity.

How do you get the benefit of their company? You can only get it through the authorized *shuyukh* of the *silsila*. Why? Who are the *Ahl al-Bayt*? We were told today that it is not a matter of genetics; it is a matter of accompaniment and achievement.

CONCLUSION

In these *hadith* and stories I have told today there is a deeper implication. There is the company we keep in the outer, and then there also is the company we keep in the inner. I will end today by asking you to contemplate who (or what) you are occupying your minds and hearts with. And how that changes who we are. There is an old Mulla Nasrudin story that reminds us of the importance of the companions of our minds.

One day, Nasrudin saw a man sitting dispiritedly at the side of the road, and asked him what troubled him. "There is nothing of interest in life, my brother," said the man. "I have sufficient capital in order that I don't have to work. I am only on this trip in order to seek something more interesting and entertaining than the life I have at home, but so far I haven't found it!"

Without another word, Nasrudin seized the travelers' knapsack and made off down the road with it, running like a rabbit. Since he knew the area, he was easily able to out distance him. The road curved, and Nasrudin cut across several switchbacks, with the result that he was soon back on the road, well ahead of the man he had just robbed.

He put the knapsack by the side of the road and waited for the distressed traveler to show up. Presently the miserable man appeared, following the road, more unhappy than ever because of his loss. As soon as he saw his property lying there by the side

of the road, he ran towards it, shouting with joy.

“That’s one way of producing happiness,” said Nasrudin.

How many of us carry around our sources of happiness, our identity in a knapsack or briefcase—or in these days, on the screen of an iPad or smart phone? Just like the old saying, “You are what you eat,” could we also say, “You are what you focus on”? What do we fill our days, hours and minutes with? Are our minds and hearts filled with worries about the future, about money, family, career, health? Is that who you are? How much time do we concern our self with our soul, our purpose in this life, our inner path and how we reflect it in the outer? We do work all over the world. I pray to Allah that He sees the intent of the work. That’s what I pray for. If there is anything there to be extracted, I leave it to the Prime Extractor. I leave it to the honey bee to turn the bitterness of my work into honey, if it is to be turned into it.

Who is the Sufi, then? Above all, the Sufi is the person who strives to fill the spaces in their heart, their mind, their seconds, minutes and hours with the remembrance of Allah. Our goal is to live a life of *ihsaan*, forging of a link between our self and Allah. The best of the communities of Muslims and Sufism affirm spiritual self evolution, as it has been affirmed and confirmed across the centuries by saints like Khwaja Ma’roof Karkhi, Bishar, Hafi, Sari Saqati, Shafiq Balakhi, Bayazeed Bustami, Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani, Sheikh Shah’abuddin Su’rawardi, Abul Hasan Shadhuli, Khwaja Soman Harooni, Khawaja Mu’inuddin Chishti, Baqi Billah, Imam Rabbani, Abdul Bari Shah, Hamad Hasan ‘Alawi, Muhammad Sa’eed Khan, my Shaykh, Hazrat Azad Rasool, may Allah protect all their secrets.

Sufism is a challenging path, and one has to tread it carefully, as a journey where the journey is the sole mission of one’s life; where rewards are measured in kindness and worship, in trust and sincerity and the manifestation of *imaan*. If I were a surgeon, could I cut you open and find your *imaan*? The proof of it is found only in the sweetness in our heart, the patience, love; in the moderation, and tolerance of our character and actions; in the sincerity of our piety, the trust in our Lord; the contentment with where Allah has placed us; in the forgiveness we seek, and in the forgiveness that others in our *subhat* and circle give us. We all know we are fallible.

The Sufi gains knowledge and control of self and of Allah through *fiker* and *dbiker*, in the light of awareness, *muraaqabah*, introspection and meditation and remembrance of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaah*). Where? In the laboratory of one’s own self. Just like a scientific experiment needs to be repeated a number of times under the same and different circumstances, a person who is deep in *Tasawwuf* requires many years of training and experience, and mastery of complex elements. Some of these elements come from the *lubb* (pillar of light within us and descending upon us by the Grace of the Divine). Truly, both are from the Divine Presence. As we know from the *hadith qudsi*, **“Neither My Earth nor My Heavens can contain Me, but the heart of a Believing Servant can.”** Regardless of the experiment or the individual heart, the tool is always *dbiker* (remembrance). It is not just saying, “*la illaaha illaa-Llaah*,” or “Allah, Allah, Allah,” for when you say, “This is beautiful,” you have just said the name of Allah, *al-Jamal*.

As the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) told us, **“There is a polish for every rust and the polish for the rust of the heart is the *dhikr* (remembrance) of God.”** The basic aim of the *dbiker* is to silence the linear mind from its thinking, shift its perceptions away from the rational, intuitive mode of consciousness and achieve some kind of concentration or attention (*mutawwajuh*) on a single moment of *la illaaha illaa-Llaah*. In our Order, we put to use the skills that are developed through this process in meditation. Entering into meditation is a way of directing one’s silenced mind toward the Divine. When the rational mind is quieted or silenced, then something else comes forward. What comes forward is an intuitive mode that produces a supra- or extra-ordinary kind of consciousness. Accompanying that is a peacefulness or tranquility. The environment that is created in meditation is a very intentional and direct way of directing our mind and heart beyond the rational thinking and toward an experience of unity or oneness. This *tawbeedic* state brings us nearer to the One.

So my dear brothers and sisters, in closing, in my experience following this path and practicing with regularity for 40 years, this kind of *muraaqabah* is very effective. It is not, of course, the only way to really change your character and destiny, to fulfill the potential of “who” you can be, to return to the “who” that you were when your soul stood before Allah, and affirmed that He is our Lord, and the “who” you hope to be when you stand before Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) again on the Day of Judgment.

CLOSING DU‘AA

ALLAAHUMMA! YAA MUFATTIHA-L-ABWAAB, WA YAA MUSABBIBA-L-ASBAAB, WA YAA MUQALIBA-L-QULUUBI WA-L-ABSAAR, WA YAA DALEELA-L-MUTAHHAREEN, WA YAA GHYAAATHA-L-MUSTAGHAYATHEEN, ANANAA TAWAKALNAA ‘ALAYKA, YAA RABBU-L-‘AALAMEEN, WA NUFAWAD AMWARINAA ILAA-LLAAH, INNA-LLAAHA BAQEERUN BI-L-‘IBAAD, BI‘ALFI “LAA HAWLA WA LAA QUWWATA ILLAA BI-LLAAHI-L-‘ALIYI-L-‘ADHEEM.”

O Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*)! O Opener of doors! O Causer of reasons! O Changer of hearts and insights! O Guide of the perplexed! O Aid of those who call out for help! We rely on You, O Lord of the worlds and we entrust our affairs to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*). Surely, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) is the Seer of His slaves by means of a thousand, “There is no power and no strength but in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*), the Elevated and Tremendous.”

ⁱ “Tafsir on basmala” http://www.untiredwithloving.org/tafsir_basmala.html#bahaa.

ⁱⁱ Youssefi, Kazem. “An Analysis of the Translation of Metaphors in Hafiz’s selected poems.” March 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Evidence for Cardiomyocyte Renewal in Humans. Olaf Bergmann, Ratan D. Bhardwaj, Samuel Bernard, Sofia Zdunek, Fanie Barnabé-Heider, Stuart Walsh, Joel Zupicich, Kanar Alkass, Bruce A. Buchholz, Henrik Druid, Stefan Jovinge, and Jonas Frisén. (3 April 2009) *Science* 324 (5923), 98.

Dynamics of fat cell turnover in humans. Spalding KL, Arner E, Westermarck PO, Bernard S, Buchholz BA, Bergmann O, Blomqvist L, Hoffstedt J, Näslund E, Britton T, Concha H, Hassan M, Rydén M, Frisén J, Arner P. *Nature*. 2008 Jun 5;453(7196):783-7.