



## “WHERE?”

### WHERE FOR THE LOVE OF ALLAH!!

by  
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*Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem*

#### Sura al Fatiha

AL-ḤAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L-ABSĀR.  
 ALLĀHUMMA ṬḤABIT QULŪBANA ʿALA SIRĀṬIKA-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 (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*), the turner of the hearts and sight.  
 O Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*), 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 KḤAFIYYA-L-LUṬFI, YĀ LAṬĪFA-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-HAMDU-LI-LLĀH  
 ALLĀHUMMA ṢALLI WA SALLIM ʿALĀ SAYYIDINĀ MUḤAMMADIN, WA ʿALĀ ĀĀLIHI WA SAḤBIHI

### INTRODUCTION: WHERE IS ALLAH?

The first question we may think of when we ask the question “where?” is: “Where is Allah?” But following that question are the questions: Where am I? And, where should I be? “Where” has many interesting and analogical interpretations. We can speak about “where” in the physical universal and “where” in the unseen universes, “where” in the inner, “where” in the outer; we can ask where we are on our journey, “where” in time, in station...

In one sense all these aspects are encompassed in the question: “Where is Allah?” This question can be asked in many ways: with an intellectual curiosity, with deep spiritual yearning, and even with desperation or confusion... We have all asked this question at one time or another in some way. Qur’an gives us very clear answers to this question:

**HUWA MAʿAKUM AYNA MĀ KUṢTUM.**

**He (Allah) is with you wherever you are. [57:4]**

And in Sura Baqara:

**FA-AYNAMĀ TUWALLŪ FA-THAMMA WAJHU-LLĀH.**

**Wheresoever you look, there is the Presence of Allah. [2:115]**

And in Sura Qaaaf:

**WA LAQAD KHALAQNĀ-L-’IŃSĀNA WA NAʿLAMU MĀ TUWASWISU BIHII NAFSUHU WA NAḤNU AQRABU ILAYHI MIN ḤABLI-L-WARĪD.**

**We created man and We know what his own self whispers to him. We are nearer to Him than his jugular vein. [50:16]**

If Allah is so clearly near to us, then perhaps the better question is, “where are we?” Why do we not remember how near Allah is? This path of life is really a process of remembrance, awakening, and realization. Remembering implies that we knew something once and forgot it. Realization means there is something more to understand. What is it we have forgotten, what is it that we don’t understand? As you know, Allah gathered all our souls together in pre-eternity and asked us:

### **ALASTU BIRABBIKUM?**

**Am I not your Lord?**

and we said:

### **BALĀ SHAHIDNĀ**

**Yes, Surely we bear witness to that.... [7:172].**

There is such profound meaning in that question; it implies choice and recognition. And yet, we forget. We live in a world created by Allah, surrounded by the beauty of His creation, in bodies made by Him and with souls under His command; where every breath and every heartbeat is by Allah’s will, and yet, we still ask: where is Allah?

Everything in this *‘aalam al-khalaq* (physical world) has a veil over it. And yet at the same time, everything is a metaphor, a sign, an ayah. That means we have to lift the veil in order to open the door and see what the metaphor is referring to.

**ALAM TARA ANNA-LLĀHA YUSABBIHU LAHU MAŅ FĪ-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-’ARDI WA-T-TAYRU ŠĀFFĀTIŅ KULLUŅ QAD ‘ALIMA ŠALĀTAHU WA TASBĪHAHU WA-LLĀHU ‘ALĪMUM BIMĀ YAF‘ALŪN**

**Do you not see that everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah? And the birds as they spread their wings—every creature knows its prayer and its exaltation—and Allah knows [all] that they do. [24:41]**

How many birds do we see every day, each one a sign of Allah’s nearness. We are surrounded by a creation glorifying and exalting Allah and yet we involve ourselves in our own material existence, we forget about pre-eternity, and our vision is clouded. We call it distraction.

In Tasawwuf, we understand that not only is life about worshiping Allah and turning life into worship of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ṭā‘aalaa*); it’s also about opening our eyes to Allah’s nearness; remembering our way back to the *Haqq*; the truth: the truth concerning the nature of our own essence, our own relationship with Allah the creator.

The difference in knowledge *ma‘rifah* ( ) *baṣeerah*, insight, and *hikmah* is apparent between those who are aware of, humbled by, and blessed by the Mercy, the Grace, the Blessings of Allah swt and those who don’t see those

blessings. People, who have been blessed by knowledge, look behind the veil of the apparent, in a profound and intimate way. One who does that sees that all creation is knitted together in a set of manifestations that individually say one thing, but when they are put together; create a pattern of divine purpose which is very complex and yet unified.

## WHERE IS EVERYWHERE: THE UNITY OF CREATION

When we look at nature from a perspective of seeing, we see how complex the apparent elements of creation are; and yet when it is all put together, even segmented into larger groupings; there is a very profound sense of unity / *tawheed*. The nature of this *tawheed* / unity is such that whatever we do in one aspect has an effect on the whole.

**QUL MAR-RABBU-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-'ARDI QULI-LLĀHU QUL AFA-TTAKHADHUM  
MIÑ DŪNIHI AWLIYĀA'A LĀ YAMLIKŪNA LI'NFUSIHIM NAF °AÑW-WA LĀ DARRAÑ  
QUL HAL YASTAWĪ AL-'A°MĀ WA-L-BASĪRU AM HAL TASTAWĪ ADh-DhULUMĀTU WA-  
N-NŪRU AM JA°ALŪ LI-LLĀHI SHURAKĀA'A KHALAQŪ KAKHALQIHI FA-TASHĀBAHA-  
L-KHALQU °ALAYHIM QULI-LLĀHU KHĀLIQU KULLI SHAYW -WAHUWA-L-WA-  
AHIDU-L-QAHHĀR.**

Say, “Who is Lord of the heavens and earth?” Say, “Allah.” Say, “Have you then taken besides Him allies not possessing [even] for themselves any benefit or any harm?” Say, “Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Or is darkness equivalent to light? Or have they attributed to Allah partners who created like His creation so that the creation [of each] seemed similar to them?” Say, “Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Prevailing.” [13:16]

Unity is not static but dynamic; which is why some translate it as Unicity: “the condition of being united” it also reflects a creative force for the betterment of life through unifying principles and actions based on common values.

**MĀ YA°ZUBU °AR-RABBIKA MIM-MIThQĀLI DhARRATÑ FI -L-'ARDI WA LĀ FĪ-S-  
SAMĀA'I WA LĀ AŞGHARA MIÑ DhĀLIKA WA LĀ AKBARA, ILLĀ FĪ KITĀBIM-MUBĪN**

...Not even the weight of an atom in the earth or in the sky escapes your Lord. Neither what is less than that, nor what is greater, but it is [inscribed] in a Clear Book. [10:61]

We recognize this inter-connected unity ecologically and environmentally, but most people don't recognize it when it comes to their thoughts and actions. We tend to think we are the exception; our actions are somehow segregated from the rest of humanity, but it is not true.

Even that complexity within our own self points to Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), the *ayaat* and *sifaat* point to Allah, and even beyond the *sifaat* into the essence of prayer, of worship (*ibaadah*). Through that complexity and simplicity we can begin to see not only how insignificant we are, but also how significant we are. Out of the insignificance grows

humility, and out of humility comes a deeper understanding of unity; of where; a sense of peace and contentment with where I am and remembrance of where Allah is.

Those who have been blessed to see behind the veil in this profound way begin to understand not only the purpose of creation, but also the purpose of their own life. Something happens where things, concepts, and intentions from the *ghayb* make their way into the *dunya*, or from the *baatin* to the *dhaahir*.

We are that doorway; that is where we are: between the *dhaahir* and the *baatin*. And yet, how easy it is for us to forget where we are, the unique and honored place in which we stand; just as we forget the profound miracle of every breath, beauty of the return of Spring each year, the perfection of the sky or a flower, it is we who forget to stop, to look around and recognize where we are.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE

In seeking to understand our own place in this world, to recognize where we are and where Allah is, it is important to look again at our role as the cross-roads between *dhaahir* and *baatin*; which is the place that the heart resides.

Have you ever stood in a physical place and felt it move your heart? Does a specific place hold a special meaning for you because it holds a memory of a loved one? In that experience we are at the intersection of the *dhaahir* and *baatin*, surrounded by the Divine Presences and a sign of the perfection of the Divine Creation our self.

There is a strong correlation between where we are in the *dhaahir* and where we are in the *baatin*. Let me take a few minutes to speak on the significance of place in the life of our Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), in Islam, Sufism, and also in my own life.

Every Muslim should recognize the importance of physical place, the significance of some places over others. We have of course, the Holy Kaaba and the city of Mecca, as symbols to the significance of place.

**WA'IDh JA°ALNĀ-L-BAYTA MATHĀBATAL-LI-N-NĀSI WA AMNĀW -WA-TTAKHIDhŪ  
MIM-MAQĀMI IBRĀHĪMA MUSALLAÑW-WA °AHIDNĀ ILĀ IBRĀHĪMA WA'ISMĀ°ĪLA AÑ  
TAHHIRĀ BAYTIYA LIT-TĀA'IFĪNA WA-L-°ĀKIFĪNA WA-R-RUKKA°I-S-SUJŪD.**

**And when We made the House to be a refuge for people and a safe haven, (saying): Take the Station of Ibrahim as your place of prayer. And We made a covenant with Ibrahim and Ishma'il, (saying): Purify My house for those who walk around it and those who cling to it and those who bend in prostration. [2:125]**

The Kaaba is in the center of the earth. It was where Hazrat Adam placed it, and where Sidna Ibrahim rebuilt it. It is where the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) (again) rebuilt it with the Qureysh. It is where we turn our attention every day, aligning our physical form and our spiritual form, as guided to and instructed by Allah.

Certainly, place played an important role in the life of *Rasulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). We can trace the significance of "place" in his life from his birth in Mecca, to his hijrah to Media, and then eventual triumphant return to Mecca.

We mark our calendar, as you know, not by the birth or death of *Rasulu-Llaah*, but by the journey, from Mecca to Media, the journey to a new location and founding of the Ummah. It was only in the changing of the physical

location that the Ummah was able to find the safety and security to grow. So too, we must also sometimes change our physical location in order to prepare our inner locations.

In some it was a deeply difficult decision to leave Mecca for Medina, made only after the Year of Sorrow, after great loss and trials. But many things happened in Medina that couldn't have happened anywhere else.

Another example is in the place where he received the revelation. This is a beautiful example of the aligning of dhaahir and *baatin*. In the right physical location: removed from society and isolated in a cave in Mount Hira on the outskirts of Mecca; and in the right spiritual state: deep in contemplation and worship of Allah, *Rasulu-Llaah* heart was opened and the revelation could be poured in.

As we can see from these small examples from the life of *Rasulu-Llaah*, where one is spiritually also has to do with where you are physically. What happens in a place leaves its imprint. We all leave an imprint on this world. We can strive to leave a trail of blessings; a trail of light.

There are many places around the world of deep spiritual significance: Mecca and Medina, dargahs and mazars; Quds and Mashad... places hidden and known, scattered around the globe, centers of Baraka. These are the places where you can go and you can pick up the package that was left there for you. Just like going to the Post Office to get your packages, there is a package waiting in Medina, and in Mecca for you. You could pick one up in Jerusalem or Shiraz, or at the tomb of Abdel Qadir Jilani, Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi, or in Bukhara or Samarkand.

I've been to many of these places around the world, but not as many as I would like. What I find in those places that are the most beautiful? Peace. Tradition. Love. Brotherhood. Incredible service and hospitality and welcoming, even in the poorest of places.

I remember going to visit Shaykh Osman Sirajjudin (ra) near the Marmara Sea in a village in Turkey, many years ago. He always greeted me with such love and affection. There were always many poor, poor people there; but every one was fed and given a mat on the floor. Everyone was welcome. Why were all these people there? They were there because that is where the Shaykh was.

Or, in Syria, with Shaykh Ahmed Kaftaro (ra), in a huge masjid, 10,000 people could fit inside for the Juma prayer, another 10,000 outside in the street. Buildings, schools, everything was there; it was a village within Damascus, all were welcome. Or with Shaykh Ramadan, who was always taking out or putting something in the freezer, always cooking something for guests. Or praying at Omayyid Masjid, just steps away from the *zaamiyah* of Imam al Ghazali, where it is said that the head of Sidna Hussein is placed and the tomb of Salahuddin adjoins; places filled piety and the whispered prayers of thousands and thousands of believers.

These places, saturated in history and tradition, with the effort that every one of those people made to be near to their Shaykh, to learn and to do the practices, to serve, to carry on the tradition. One cannot be in a place like that and not feel your heart, not feel nearer to the presence of Allah, even if it is only for a moment.

## THE PLACES OF THE HEART

When we hear about these sacred and blessed places, we may ask ourselves the question: Should I be there? Is that where the answers are? We think that perhaps by simply being in a place like that we would find all the answers. But a place can only knock on the door to our heart, and perhaps show us a way, but we must be the ones to open the door and let the Presence of Allah in.

When we ask ourselves the question: where should I be? The best answer, the only true answer that will give us any true peace is: we should be striving to be in the Presence of Allah; striving to remember that we are in the Presence of Allah. Where you are spiritually is not about anything in your physical life; it's about something burning

n your heart and soul. The answer is: I should turn toward my heart with yearning and hope!

What happens, people ask, if I don't have spiritual yearnings? "If you don't yearn?" Then you can, as one of my teachers said, "Yearn to yearn."

What is the first step in yearning to yearn? Opening your heart to where you already are, seeing the Majesty that reminds us of Allah. Allah constantly reminds us of our desire to yearn through the beauty, vastness, and incomprehensibility of life; through its challenges, its beauties and its responsibilities.

We will not find Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*) in a particular masjid or mountaintop, we find Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*) in the heart of a believer.

### **Neither My Earth nor My Heavens can contain Me, but the heart of a Believing Servant, can.**

This is a description of the neighborhood that Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*) lives in. He lives in the core of the heart.

The different parts of our body are built to reflect the universe where we live in. Each part helps the other part. The ear helps the eye, the eye helps the ear. The tongue helps the brain to express. The limbs help the stomach, the teeth help the intestines; everything works together and is connected with something else. The core of all this, the place around which everything turns and on which every system depends, is the heart.

Within the heart is a courtyard, a sanctuary, an inner core: the *hawal al baatīn*. This core is the Haram Shareef of our self, like Mecca, it is the core, the center. It's has a form, but it is a mystery. Just as Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*) made places in our physical world that are sacred and unique, he also made this place within the physical body, a place within the heart that is sacred.

If we are truly a believer, if we are truly on this path, we recognize that we are walking around carrying the Haram Shareef in our hearts; carrying the home of Allah within our self. When we pay attention to our hearts, we are making the Hajj, the pilgrimage to the heart; that is where Allah is.

The journey of life takes place in the human heart. The journey of the human heart is the journey to eternity. The maqamat, stations on this journey, are stations of the heart. They take place here in the breast, the qalb, in fu'ad, the inner heart, and in ruh, in the intellect, which is in the heart.

These are the four stations of the heart; each is associated with different stages on the Path of Tasawwuf. The breast (sādr) is associated with the first stage, which is where a person becomes or realizes or accepts they are Muslim; that they are in submission to a higher power. The next station in the heart (qalb), that of siman, corresponds when a person is mu'min, a believer. Not only a Muslim, but really a believer committed and fulfilled in what is expressed in Quran and Hadith. The next is the station of the inner heart, (*fu'aad*), is when it becomes filled with the light of gnosis (*ma'rifah*). And finally comes the light of the *'arif*, (*lubb*) the knower.

The heart is the home of the knowledge that is useful: *al-'ilmu-l-naafi*. This is a kind of inner knowledge, *haqeeqah*, that can only be given by Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*). You can't study it in a book. You can read about it, but you can't know it until it has to be bestowed upon you by Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālaa*). Even a teacher can only teach you about it. Your breast must be open, and your heart must receive it.

The light of the *fu'aad* is the *Nuur al-Ma'rifah*, real, deep knowledge / gnosis. This is associated with *Bas'eerah*, *firaasah*; with discrimination and insight; with *ru'ya*, with the vision of Reality and what the truth is. The heart has knowledge of reality; but the inner heart actually sees the reality.

I can know about something. I know there is a city named Baghdad; but I have never seen it with my own eyes. When I see it with my own eyes, then, that is a different kind of seeing. That is seeing reality through the inner sight.

This is a little about the heart. But the heart is just one of the five *lataa'if* (subtle centers of perception) that Allah has placed in us. Each has a physical location in our body and each is a doorway to stations on the journey. Although visualized in different locations in the body, the doorway to the origin of their unique *faiẓ* is in the core of the heart.

Each door leads to a different dimension of perception and degrees of awareness (consciousness) requiring us to place our self in an attitude of peace and tranquility, harmony in outer breath and attention (*mutawujjih*) and *raqaba* (*muraaqabah*) ( to observe, expect ; be or stand high) which unlocks that door onto the Infinite.

In this journey, the gateways of the *lataa'if* are opened by meditation, Dhikr, by penetrating the secret and sacred doorways of the letters and words of the Qur'an, and through the undying and unending love and blessings of *Rasulu-Llaah*. As one unlocks these doors, countless and profound blessings begin to flow toward and transform the wayfarer. One is drawn toward higher and higher, subtle and more subtle realms or perception and understanding; drawn inexorably deeper in to the Ocean of possibilities: of Truth, of Love and all the attributes and Qualities we call, but can never fully grasp, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*).

The requirements for opening and traversing through the threshold of these doorways begin with qualifying as a student and that begins with sincerity and yearning and of course a qualified guide who accepts who you can be, what you can accomplish and why you are worthy.<sup>1</sup>

## SEEKING THE PLACE OF ALLAH

For the one who commits to traversing the path, there are signs of entering or approaching these doorways, identifying them and becoming attuned to their effect on us inwardly and outwardly. These signs are signs of progress.

As Allah says in the Hadith Qudsi:

**...My servants continue to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love them. 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.**

That is how one comes to know that you are succeeding in your striving to be in the presence of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*). It is an almost indescribable sense of knowing. One hears His words, sees in new ways, is drawn more and more to good works and toward pious and good people. Literally, one is called to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*). When Allah calls you *muraad*, He has called you to awaken to His Presence.

As I said when I began by addressing the question: Where is Allah? Allah has left evidence of himself everywhere. *Ishaarat*, pointing to His Presence, but if we are not conscious of where we are, we will not see the signs, we will not know if we are in the right place. That is why we must unlock the doors of our heart; unlock the doors the keep us from seeing His Presence.

Although we can never physically be in Allah's (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) Presence, at least we can reflect upon the reflections of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) in Creation: much as we can see the Sun in its reflection upon the Moon.

*He who captured the rays of the sun  
Could not travel through the dark night of life*

*He who sought to know the paths of the stars  
Could not traverse the world of his own thoughts*

It is possible to be in a state where everything is illuminated by the light of Allah, everything reminds us of and point us toward Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿaalaa*), and *Rasūlu-Llaah* (*ṣalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*), who is here or *Hoozuri* (Present). That presence is always there, but when we are too distracted, we don't feel the attraction, we can't see what is right in front of us. Rumi wrote about this, saying:

*The minute I heard my first love story,  
I started looking for you, not knowing  
how blind that was.  
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.  
They're in each other all along. (Rumi),*

There are so many stories in the Sufic tradition of the seeker who looks everywhere, travels the world, seeking something that they already have, or finding someone, by apparent chance, someone near to them already. In fact most of the contemporary Shuyukh I know have stories of serendipitous meetings. Today, I would like to share with you the story of how my Shaykh, Hazrat Azad Rasool (ar), found his Shaykh. This is recounted, as he wrote it, in his last book: The Search for Truth.

*As far as Muslim Sufis and saints are concerned, there was hardly an important shrine where I did not pay homage. I went to Lahore, Lucknow, Allahabad, Aurangabad, Trichinapali, and Nag Patam in the south- the resting places of great Muslim saints. When living in Lahore I had the opportunity of visiting the shrines of the saints and as I knew Hazrat Ali Hujwiri's (ra) book, Kashful Mahjub (Unveiling the Veiled) I spent more time at his shrine and undertook a forty-day spiritual retreat there. I also spent time in Dankur (Uttar Pradesh) with Hazrat Lutfullah Shah (ra) who belonged to the Chishtia-Nizamia Order and was one of the great saints of his time. Under his instruction I performed a dhikr that is repeated aloud thousands of times while holding the breath. Yet, after all the hard work and all the difficult ascetic practices, I still could not find the peace of heart and the contentment I wanted. The thirst and the longing stayed with me...*

*[Some time later] When I returned after completing my LT degree in education from Allahabad, I was appointed lecturer at Jamia Training College, and it was there that I met Mr. Rauz-ur-Rahman. When he heard of my anguished quest for the Truth, he advised me to meet with Hazrat Maulvi Mohammed Saeed Khan sahib (ra) who was a teacher of Arabic at Shibli school, Azamgarh, and also a Sufi Shaykh. He wanted me to meet him and seek guidance from him.... Like a drowning man clutches at straw, I immediately wrote a detailed letter to Hazrat.*

*At the end of the letter I wrote, "I have made every effort to understand the mystery of existence, to know reality and to find peace of mind. However, the more I have tried, the more my anguish has grown. I have been longing to meet you ever since I heard about you. I hope...after meeting with you, I will not have to wander anymore in search of a guide and through your compassion and guidance I will understand reality. That is my dearest hope and desire. I beseech you to;*

*Make me inebriated like yourself  
Let me lose myself in you  
Cast a lightning glance on the self I have boarded  
And let me reenact the story of Moses on Mount Sinai  
You are the cup-bearer, the tavern and the wine  
I am longing to be intoxicated, intoxicate me  
Inhabit my heart and soul  
Or turn them into deserts  
Rescue me from the prison of phenomena*

*Make of me whatever you will  
I dwell at your feet  
There is nothing more I have to say  
Make of me whatever you please*

*It so happened that after a few days Hazrat Maulvi Mohammed Saeed Khan sahib (ra) came to Mathura, a city in Uttar Pradesh, in connection with a refresher course for teachers of eastern languages. I saw this as a great opportunity and arrived in Mathura with Mr. Rauz ur Rahman's letter of introduction. I learned that Hazrat was staying at a mosque. When I entered the mosque from a distance I saw a Maulvi wearing a lungi (a cloth wrapped around the waist) and a round white cap, lying on the floor of a room with his hands under his head. He rose when he saw me coming. I had thought that I would tell him about my state in great detail, but when I entered his presence I went into a trance and all I could say was, "Hazrat, I have been searching since I was a child, I have read whatever I could read and I have done whatever I could do. I have looked everywhere but my goal has evaded me. Mr. Rauz-ur-Rahman says you have such tremendous spiritual power that if you were to glance at clay, it would come to life. It is this hope that has brought me to your door. Please bestow your favor upon me".*

*Hazrat listened to me quietly. After he had been quiet for some time he said, "This is a matter of experience. Begin and see what happens." Our meeting was brief but my heart was in a state of tumult. I was so deeply impressed with Hazrat that I spent the night in Mathura and started my training with him the next day.*

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF WHERE IN MY LIFE (FINDING COMMUNITY)**

Seeking the right place (and the right people) has been part of the journey of my own life. In my own search for truth I travelled to India every year at least once a year, for an extended time, for over 12 years and after that my Shaykh travelled to our Khanaqah in Bedford, every year, for 20 years.

Since we are speaking of "where" today, I want to take a few minutes today to speak to you more about my search for the right place and the finding of our Khanaqah in Bedford.

Many years ago I had a dream, a waking dream that never was far from my consciousness, a vision of the future. I dreamt that one-day people could live together in peace and security and happiness. Many people in my generation had the same dream, that there would be equality and equity that, with service and understanding, and community, there could be peace.

I dreamt of a community of people who shared these ideals. What I thought I conjured up in my own mind I realized later was a plan based on my Destiny created by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). Allah provided people, and place (and beauty, and nature), homes and gardens, with ample food on everyone's table. Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) provided us with the will to develop a new model, to gain skills we did not possess, to build relationships of trust, to learn the essence of forgiveness, love. Every person in our community has a story; every building, every tree has its history.

We are where we are because Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) placed us where we are. In this very minute, sitting together here or where we live and from where we work. The role that "where" has, in how we founded our community is very interesting. "Where" was not, in my mind, supposed to be Bedford, Virginia. Our community was supposed to be in New York, along the Hudson River; or up in Massachusetts, or here in Charlottesville... We looked at all those places, but we found our home in Bedford because that is where Allah placed us. Truly it was the last place we ever thought we would be.

We have built our lives there upon a foundation of love and hope and spiritual striving. A place we built (truly Allah alone knows how) with the piety, the *muraqabah*, the love, the dhikr, the blood, the sweat, the tears, the hopes, the fears, the doubts, the conviction and the faith of the members.

The young people who have grown up in our Khanaqah have asked me: How did I know this place was the right place? I didn't. In fact, I didn't think it was. Time was running out, money was running low, so we made a ridiculously low offer on the property that is now our community and the owner accepted the offer because she liked us. She, a very sincere and spiritually curious, open minded lady who said to me: "y'all have a special light, a special feeling in my heart." This was the first of many signs along the way affirming that decision to accept where Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) had placed us.

Today we have 60 people living in our khanaqah in Bedford. Each of them had to make a decision about where, what their priorities were, and who they wanted to be. I said, "Come to Bedford. Help us build a community." But for each person, it took courage, and a lot of trust to choose that "where" over every other possible life choice.

For some it took a longer time to come. Some came right away. Some people came for one reason and stayed for another. But all who stayed recognized the importance of place in the outer to development in the inner. Certainly, a person who is sincere on a spiritual journey can be anywhere; but where they should be is near to other seekers and near their Shaykh; where there is the sohbet of the heart. Of course that was a different generation; people like myself and others who were not afraid to commit to a spiritual path, to a Shaykh, to creating and sustaining a shared vision and moreover a spiritually significant corner (*zqaamiyah*) during times of great challenges and spiritual poverty. Still such a place is necessary; indeed even more relevant today perhaps, as we see the state of Islam in today's world; as we see the crass materialism and the religious cognitive dissidence...where name and reality hardly meet. But honestly, I don't see the courage, the commitment, the fervor and the ability or rather the sincere desire to mold ones outer life around ones inner life in this generation. I am sorry to say. Yes there is interest in Islam and in the rules and regulations of religion. But the vision needs to be reawakened in the hearts of you who are young as it was in our hearts. The time I spent with my Shaykh at his Khanaqah and his time with us at ours was the proof of the rightness of carrying on this ancient and necessary tradition.

Where to be is to be in the company of the *Shuyukh*; to be in the company of the brothers and sisters in *Tareeqah*; to be in the company of good people. This is the where the outer 'where' meets the inner 'Where', where only what and why matters; where who we are and who we can become becomes revealed and refined. The door of the heart is always open, the door of the *Khanaqah* is open for those who qualify and have courage and whose word is their bond, their oath of fealty.

## WHERE SHOULD BE A QUESTION OF SOHBET

In the world we live in today, you can be in the company of your shaykh through a device like the phone or the computer. But the truth is that there is difference, even then, between being near and far. There is no replacement for sitting quietly in the company of the Shaykh, not asking questions, not speaking, just sitting in companionship. Do you think my Hazrat's response to me would have been the same had he not walked into the presence of his Shaykh? We are molded by that contact and it is for each of us to submit and trust and be pliable to become what we can become by the command (*amr*) of Allah swt.

There is no replacement for serving your brothers and sisters with consistency, every day, or every week, year in and year out; putting your self second to their needs just as you put your self aside to be attentive to Allah swt in the journey through the stages of the Nafs. There is no replacement for sitting behind (or beside) the Shaykh in *muraaqaabah*, for being in the company of believers at the passing of a brother or sister, or the marriage of two who traverse the path together or the birth of a child. No replacement for walking to the mosque each day, as the seasons change, on the good days and the bad days, on the days of joy and of sorrow; as member of a community of believers and fellow seekers.

So the question we must ask our self, you must ask your self, is where do I want to be? Where should I be? What is primary and what is secondary in my life? When what I have described is secondary, then everything spiritual is

secondary. Because you will be trying to control your own destiny and never know what it is to surrender and trust and understand what life is and what it isn't.

For some this is a hard message to hear. We live in a society and at a time when things come to us, we don't feel the necessity to either make the effort to seek out what is needed. Or, in many cases, people resist deep sustained commitment. With the internet and technology we can find a dhikr on YouTube, we can watch our Shaykh via web-cast, we can create a Facebook group for our spiritual friends. People seek instant gratification and instant response without pausing to contemplate, let alone refine, their communication or reflection on their own assumptions and decisions. Words and speculations as if the ability to think was the qualification of knowledge instead of a tool to acquire and understand unique experiences based on silence and contemplation, meditation and recitation—hours talking and only minutes, if that much, contemplating in the heart.

The die is cast in the sense of technology but still we can create parameters of use that allow us to sustain our attention, pausing before Allah's vastness and subtleties. Lest we forget, all those things that we bring into our life, via technology, are coming at our own choosing, in our own time and often are stimulated by our changing habits of communication. It therefore takes an almost an anti addictive effort to change the habits that are so easily adopted. Information flowing to us is being tailored by our habits and desires, preferences and fantasies; every click of your mouse, every search and soon every word you speak into a 'smart' phone will determine the form and content of information. Today if 5 of us searched on our own phones or computers the exact same search we would come up with a different priority and probably different list of results due to our previous searches and predilections. We are not even where we think we are in cyber space...we are where someone else where an algorithm places us in relation to information...not knowledge. And then there is time. Believe me, people waste precious time even with regard to religion. Next dars I will try to discuss this in more detail...the subject of Progress.

Time is not the same in every place; circumstance changes the quality and even the capacity of time. When you are in the company of the Shaykh, you are on his time; you cannot control the lesson that will come to you, you must submit to the moment. Things transpire in that time internally that are immeasurable and cannot be reconstructed fully.

Perhaps it is more easily understood with the analogy of love. When we are separated from the one or ones we love, even though can talk to them on the phone and see them on the computer, we miss them and feel a yearning for them it is not the same as when we are in their company or meet them again. Ironically, all too often, when we are in their company we become desensitized to that love unless we turn our attention to their qualities, to our heart and to the core of that love in our heart.

Just as the heart expands and contracts to sustain our life so too our life expands and contracts to reawaken us to a reality of Divine Presence that we tend to dissociate our consciousness from. Effort is Progress: the effort to attend the suhbat, to be attentive to the words and the love, the effort to move in the company of the Shaykh and the muredeen, the effort to set aside the distractions and turn inward to the abode of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) in the heart, to retreat to the inner cave or mountain that mirrors the place where the revelations are and were revealed.

## WHY MAKE THE JOURNEY?

Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) called all His beloveds to make journey in order to be nearer to Him. He called Sidna Ibrahim to the desert, Sidna Musa to the Mountain top, Sidna Nuh to the sea, Sidna Yusuf to the silence of prison, Sidna Isa to the mountaintop and, he called our beloved Prophet (*salla-Llahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) to the cave, then to the highest dimensions of the heavens, and then again and again into the cave of the heart.

Why must we make the journey? Why is where so important? And where? HERE. The experience of the seeker and the dimension of the student's capacity to grow is affected by the distance and by effort. Which is why, in the

history of our *Tareeqah*, you find people traveled long distances to see the Shaykh or went to live near the Shaykh, went to live in Sirhind, in Bukhara, in Samarkand, in Baghdad, Nishapur, in Quds in Konya. There is a sense of being near, which is more than the words and more than the physical presence.

That decision and the means to realize it can only happen when one constructs their life around their spiritual commitment, their *himmat*; around an honest assessment of who they must seek guidance from, what they must do to be accepted, and where they must be to be fully engaged and to fully benefit. There is not time limit and no time to waste.

There is a deep significance in the decision to be near. Even though it may open up difficulties, struggles, confusions, and worries; that decision is also a doorway. What is it you are willing to give up for what you are going to strive for?

There are, of course, always the reasons and justifications, often, good reasons for the “where’s” that people choose. But when you set the intention to be somewhere, when you prioritize the spiritual above the mundane, Allah will make a way.

What I recognized, so many years ago, was that what is important is to be together in the *Khanaqah*, to have the community, and to have a place of spiritual growth and development. And Allah provided a way. When that is first, everything else falls in its place—sometimes, easily; and sometimes not so easily. Some succeed, others don’t...but it depends on ones integrity and ones intention, ones trust ...a trust that survives doubt, a trust that is sustained until it bears fruit, not just until a question or doubt arrives.

It wasn’t so long ago that people spent their whole life in one place. Today, the value of staying in one place, near one’s parents, near one’s family, is looked down on. If you go to Palestine, to Nazareth, you see how many levels were added to my friend and student, Bassam’s old house for the brothers to live with the mother and father and one another. Or at least next door. That was the social security—the nephews, cousins, brothers, sisters; the large family.

To be in community is a very specific, historically framed and founded reality. It is the place where the Shaykh resides, just as your heart is where Allah resides. Just like the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) resides in your love and in your heart.

Asking oneself the question “where” is a very important crossroads; often it is a question that takes us through the cross-roads of youth and adulthood. It has to do with tradition, culture, and responsibility. It even provides for the place of rest for the body after this life.

As a mature spiritual seeker, we realize that where we are on the spiritual journey needs to also be in sync with where we are in the material world. This is the place where the inner meets the outer again. We are at the juncture, the nexus between the *dunya* and the *akhirat*, the *ghayb*, the *baatin* and the *dhaahir*, and we want to find, secure, and maintain balance; and balance is dynamic not static, moment to moment.

How is that balance maintained? It must become the final habit, the foundation of life, our default so even when the vicissitudes of life distract and derail us, our heart, our consciousness our physical being returns us to where we are in balance, harmony; *mizan*, where we are progressing along the path in life .

## ACCEPTING WHERE ALLAH HAS PLACED US

In this work I often meet people struggling to find their place, to understand where they are and where they are going, what their main purpose in life is, and how it interfaces with the spiritual journey. We all have an innate sense

of needing a place where we can be at peace, contented, fulfilled, and find happiness; how we seek that place is dependent on many things.

Sometimes people change their “where,” in the hope that it will change their “who.” They think that changing their where will change their struggles and their destiny: I call this “the grass is greener syndrome.” Often this type of change (or desire) is fueled by fears and uncertainties about the future. Questions about “where am I going? Am I moving fast enough? What will be around the bend in the road?” For the people of the younger generation, this question of “where” can be a pre-occupying question: “where should I work? Where should I go to school? Where should I raise my family?”

As I come toward my conclusion, I will say this: We can have anxiety about Where. Where is the right place, and where is not the right place, but the lesson I have learned is: where we are is in Allah’s hands but we (I) must have the right intention, I must have an open heart and mind, I must learn to trust, to listen, to act. That is the where that matters. If we do not accept this first, then our choices may often contradict that intention and the our course through life will be ‘recalculated’ (like the GPS) and before we know it, we will have missed many opportunities for ‘reasons’ that are spiritually unreasonable, albeit rational,

Hence the subject of Surrender looms high above the worldly dances and dramas. What can be said just on that topic could take another 5 weekends. Suffice it to say, that without yearning and deep desire to fulfill our destiny, there would be no significant transformation of the self.

Our yearning comes from something deep inside of us, which comes from our *qadr* (destiny). There is something that says, I want to fulfill my destiny in the best way, in the right place. Hafez wrote:

*This place where you are right now,  
God circled on a map for you.*

*Wherever your eyes and arms and heart can move  
Against the earth and the sky,  
The Beloved has bowed there -*

*Our beloved has bowed there knowing  
You were coming. (Hafez)*

Let us occupy ourselves with that place we are now. Look around yourself. What do you see? Who do you see? What does the place and the people you surround yourself with bring out in you?

If you are sincere about your spiritual life, if you look for meaning in things, if you look for guidance from Qur’an and Hadith, if you see the efficacy of the teaching, if you understand the kindness and generosity of the people around you; if you see that life at best is awe inspiring and humbling, and you want to be at peace with it and to serve and worship as best as you can, then you can know that Allah placed you where you are supposed to be. If your work, your place, your life encourages or even challenges you to be more conscious of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) and seeking the Truth, then you may assume you are on the *siraata-l-mustaqeem*.

## WHERE, BEYOND HERE

In this brief lifetime, it is so easy to be wrapped up in where we are, or where we are not, that we forget where we come from and where we are going:

**INNĀ LI-LLĀHI WA'INNĀ ILAYHI RĀJI'ŪN.**

**Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return. [2:156]**

There is no question, we belong to Allah and we are returning to Allah; that is where we are going. Those among us who have looked in the face of imminent death, our own or others', understand the fragile nature of this life. All the questions of where and why have no meaning in the face on the eternal "where." What does it mean to be where Allah placed us? The real question is what does it mean to know that Allah placed you where you are; on the continuum of Life?

How do you develop that kind of iman, that kind of tawakkul, to accept where Allah placed you? I find today that most people resist where Allah placed them. They don't like this idea of not being in control. They want to place themselves. So they wrap themselves in religiosity and theology, with little dabs of spirituality, and they unknowingly manipulate their own spiritual situation, so they can be where they want to be, and think that spirituality, religion, or Islam is just being in a *halqah* once a week, going to Friday prayer, and marrying within the religion. It's a lot more than that.

I am not speaking just of a physical place. In some cases, Allah swt placed us in a spiritual state, with a spiritual longing. In some cases, Allah swt placed us with a goal or an *amal* / work. Our task is to recognize and accept that and then to move in that direction. Sometimes that means we must lead a different life from our friends, that we have a different path than our parents, but it is from Allah.

**Umar ibn Al-Khattab reported that the Prophet (saw) said:**

**If only you relied on Allah a true reliance, He would provide sustenance for you just as He does the birds: They fly out in the morning empty and return in the afternoon with full stomachs.**

How will we know when we are living with reliance on Allah? How will we know when we are where Allah wants us to be? Fireworks won't go off, bells won't ring, you won't get an email, or an angel descending on your head or shoulder and whispering in your ear. The one who knows, knows that they are in the presence of those they need to be in the presence of. The one who knows, knows they are in the Presence of Allah, every moment of every day. That is where we are and where we are is where Allah is.

We are under the roof of Yaa Siin, among our supporters, under the covering of the Divine Throne, under the watchful eye of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) with *Bismillaah Baabunnaa* (*Bismi-Llaah* as our gate) and *Tabaaraka Hitaannunnaa* (*Tabaaraka* as our rampart)

**FA-LLĀHU KHAYRUN ḤĀFIDhĀ.  
WA HUWA ARḤAMU-R-RĀḤIMĪN.**

**Allah's guardianship is better.**

**For He is the Most Merciful of the merciful. [12:64]**

**CLOSING DU<sup>°</sup>AA**

*Yaa muqaliba-l-quluubi wa-l-absaar, wa yaa daleela-l-mutahhareen, wa yaa ghiyaatha-l-mustaghayatheen, ananaa tawakalnaa °alayka, yaa Rabbu-l-°aalameen, wa nufawad amwarinaa ilaa-Llaah, inna-Llaaha baseerun bi-l-°ibaad, bi'alfi "Laa hawla wa laa quwata illaa bi-Llaahi-l-°Aliyi-l-°Adheem".*

**O Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta°aalaa*)! 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°aalaa*). Surely Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta°aalaa*) is the seer of His slaves, by means of a thousand, "There is no power and no strength but in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta°aalaa*), the Elevated and Tremendous."**

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<sup>i</sup> 1) acceptance as an "aspirant;" 2) guidance by a qualified murshid; 3) daily practices that are kept with discipline, and; 3) regular consultation with one's guide. Someone attracted to Sufism, but not practicing it is referred to as a "muhibb" (an "enthusiast"). Someone who is undergoing an evaluation to enter an active circle is called a "talib" (or student), while someone who is fully accepted as a practitioner is referred to as a "murid (directed one). It is often said that one can wear a dervish hat without being a dervish, and dreaming about being a "Sufi" is of little account. It simply remains one dream among many. Enthusiasm comes and goes, and one must learn to "walk the walk." To "talk the talk" is just a beginning.

Practice means landing on the ground, and all of this requires that one establish and maintain a "school." The maintenance of that school and its activities fall upon the murshid and murids, but muhibbs are encouraged to partake of some of the activities and they are also encouraged to help contribute to the school in multiple ways if they can. In our approach, we place a great deal of emphasis on self-responsibility and thus each wayfarer must show initiative in their actual utilization of the practices. This is their primary way of "re-paying" what they have received.