



When?

Part 5 of a 5 Part Series

by

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Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Sura al Fatiha

**AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L- ABSĀR.
ALLĀHUMMA ThABIT 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
YĀ KhAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUNʿI
YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YAʾJILUQDI HĀJATĪ
BI-RAḤMATIKA, YĀ ARḤAMA-R-RĀHIMĪN.
SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ HILMIKA 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 SALLI WA SALLIM ʿALĀ SAYYIDINĀ MUHAMMADIN, WA ʿALĀ ĀĀLIHI WA
SAHBIH**

INTRODUCTION

**BISMI-LLĀHI-R-RAHMĀNI-R-RAHĪM
WA-L-ʿASR
INNA-L-ʾIŅSĀNA LAFĪ KhUSR
ILLĀ-LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ WA ʿAMILŪ AS-ṢĀLIHĀTI WA TAWĀSAW BI-L-HAQQI WA
TAWĀSAW BI-S-SABR**

**[I swear] by what remains of time –
[that] surely the human being is at a loss –
except for those who faithfully believe, and perform good deeds, and counsel one another to the
truth and counsel one another to steadfast patience. [Suratu-l-Asr]**

“What remains of time?” What remains of the day—a day we can never have back. What remains of our life? What remains of Time, of the life of humanity, of the life of our Universe—I swear by this, that surely human beings are at a loss, except for those who believe and do good, and counsel one another to truth and patience. What clearer message could we have from Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaaa*) to answer all our questions of when?

The concept of “when” has to do with time: the great constant in our lives and our universe. We are creatures ruled by time. We are born, we grow up, we grow old, we die; and one day, time will end. With all the money, power, and knowledge in the world we cannot stop time for even one second.

The question of when is: when will we realize how precious time is? When will we realize that we cannot control the “when” in our life? When do we learn to see Allah in every moment? When will we remember that every beat of our heart is under that control and the will of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaaa*)?

When will we have the courage, the yearning, the faith, the trust to fashion our outer life (in the brief time we have in this world) around the parameters, the values, the practices and the goals of our inner life—the only life that will transition with us beyond time’s limitations and opportunities?

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: **“Verily, the hearts of the Children of Adam, all of them, are between the two fingers of the Most Merciful as one heart. He directs them wherever he wills.”**

Then he said: **“O Allah, the Turner of the hearts, turn our hearts to Your obedience.”** [Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Number 6418]

When do we realize the benefit of obedience to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*)? When is progress made? When are we mature enough and capable enough to commit and surrender? How many of our decisions, commitments, and affirmations do we put off for tomorrow?

We say to ourselves: "Tomorrow I will be better at submitting; when I'm older I will be more pious, when I see this done, or that completed; then I'll be commit to a regular practice. When I have a career, or once I have a family, or when I'm more balanced, when my health is better...then I'll be able to be a better Muslim, Sufi, friend, student, person..."

What happens when you surrender first? What happens when you commit first, when you put your life in Allah's hands first? Perform good deeds today; counsel one another to Truth and patience, today; knowing that you do not know "what remains of time." Now is the moment. This and more is what I will speak about in today's dars on "when."

PERCEPTIONS AND MEASUREMENT OF TIME

All these questions of "when" are linked with time and our perception of time. The concept of time is not a simple one, but it is one that we take for granted, disregard, and even abuse.

Abu Huraira (*radiya-Llaabu 'anhu*) narrated that Allah's Apostle said, **"Allah said, 'The offspring of Adam abuse the Dahr (Time), and I am the Dahr; in My Hands are the night and the day!'"** [Sahih Bukhari 8.200]

Note that the word used in this *hadeeth* is not *waqt*, but *dahr* (time, vicissitudes of time). This *hadeeth* was narrated by Muslim (5827) from Abu Hurayrah. Other reports of this hadeeth are:

"Do not inveigh against time (al-dahr), for Allaah is time."

"Let not any one of you say, 'Woe to time,' for Allaah is time."

Human beings are sometimes called "sons of time," or "sons of the moment." *Ibn al waqt*. Everything we do is in time, measured by time, and we are reflecting upon time all the time, especially as we get older.

For human beings, time is momentary, a series of moments, connected by a memory of the past and anticipation of the future. Each momentary reality is a reflection of Allah's eternity. Our receptivity to the Divine constant in each and every moment, determines the quality of our own moments.

There are different levels of time. The Time of Allah: *dahr*, the moments of the human being: *waqt*. And the continual flow of moments: *zaman*. Allah's time stretches out from pre-eternity to post-eternity. But human time shrinks. Allah's time expands, just, as we know our universe is constantly expanding. While human time shrinks to a moment, an instant, a dot.

The moment we are born our time in the world is laid out before us, and from that moment on, our time is shrinking, until, eventually, it has no duration, and human time ends. All the things associated with time become irrelevant. All of our identification of things associated with time becomes irrelevant. We call it death.

At that point, there is no time left, and we transition beyond a world ruled by time. Having lived, worked, performed acts (good and bad) and now bereft of the ability to repent, we must depend for eternity on sincere *niyyah*, the actions of our life-time and the timeless Mercy of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*).

**KULLU NAFSIN̄ DhĀĀ'IQATU-L-MAWTI WA'INNAMĀ TUWAFFAWNA UJŪRAKUM
YAWMA-L-QIYĀMATI FA-MAÑ ZUH̄ZIHA °ANI-N-NĀRI WA'UDĀKHILA-L-JANNATA FA-
QADĀ FA-AZA WA MĀ-L-HAYĀTU-D-DUNYĀ ILLĀ MATĀ°U-L-GhURŪR**

Every self shall taste death. And surely you will be paid in full on the Day of Resurrection. And whoever is removed from the Fire and admitted into the Garden shall have indeed triumphed. And what is the life of the world but enjoyment of illusion? [Qur'an 3:185]

Human time shrinks; divine time expands. Caught between these two modes, we human beings construct this concept of time called *zaman*. *Zaman* is the measure of most things in our life. It is the manifestation of the Allah's concept of time, *dahr* and the frame for the doorway of the moment (*waqt*).

We can understand *zaman* through certain models. The cosmological model is based on our image of the universe. Night and day come into being with the revolution of these spheres of the universe, set in motion; they are dependent on this solar reality of the sun. That is how we measure the daily passing of time. In every mystical practice, there is an emphasis on conscious attention to time, the cycles of day and night, to remembrance, to the power and beauty of a single moment.

**INNA FĪ KhALQI-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-'ARDI WA-KhTILĀFI-LLAYLI WA-N-NAHĀRI
LĀA'AYĀTIL-LI'ULĪ AL-'ALBĀB**

Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alterations of the night and the day are Signs for [all] those who understand. [3:190].

In the model of relativity, the world is seen as temporal realities between the Creator and the creation. Time, viewed from the sight of Allah is real, but has no existence apart from Allah. From the point of view of human beings, time is almost imaginary, and lacks any existence of its own.

Time is something we deal with every day, but it is immaterial and transparent, transient. We structure our lives around time and worry about it: when things will happen, when something is due, when should I be somewhere, when is it the right time to do something.... But, it is all very subjective, entwined with "me" and "mine,"

Even though there is an apparent reality to time, we treat it very subjectively, to the point that many of us deny the reality. We act as if we can pause time; we can become so engrossed in the event or the 'outer' that we lose awareness of time passing. The exception is when someone near or dear passes away. At that time, it becomes all too clear, all too real that time for that person has stopped, and moreover, we are on that same journey.

Whether or not it is conceived from the human or divine side, time is relative; it is part of a relationship that exists in an infinite reality. Just like empty space seems to be empty but is filled with 'dark matter', time is also filled with what we cannot see, Divine Presence.

AYNAMĀ TUWALLŪ FA-ThAMMA WAJHU-LLĀH "Wheresoever you turn, there is the countenance of Allah"... could also be understood in the moment as: When-ever you turn, Allah is present. When we turn to Allah, we become aware of Allah's presence or, Allah's presence becomes apparent when we become aware.

This inter-dependent relationship between our construction and perception of time and Allah's Real time, is described by Ibn Araby with the image of a circle: *Any point along the circle can be seen as a point separating the past from the future. While having no extension whatever, this point of the now is still part of the actual extent of the circular line.*

How can we relate to time? How can we conceive of something so big, so infinite that we cannot see beyond the horizon of our own experiences? With our imaginations (*khayal*). William Blake wrote:

This world of imagination is the world of eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. This world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation, or vegetation, is finite and temporal. There exist in that eternal world the permanent realities of every thing we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature.

Though a product of *khayal*, imagination, time is, in each moment, both virtual and actual. We are interacting with eternity at every moment, along some progression. Eternity, however, is nothing we can control. Eternity totally belongs to Allah, and Allah's creatures participate in moments of eternity, but have no effect on that eternity at all.

...

QULI-LLĀHUMMA MĀLIKA-L-MULKI TU'TĪ AL-MULKA MAÑ TASHĀA'U WA TAÑZI'U-L-MULKA MIMMAÑ TASHĀA'U ... TŪLIJU-LLAYLA FĪ-N-NAHĀRI WA TŪLIJU-N-NAHĀRA FI-LLAYLI WA TUKhRIJU-L-HAYYA MINA-L-MAYYITI WA TUKhRIJU-L-MAYYITA MINA-L-HAYYI WA TARZUQU MAÑ TASHĀA'U BIGhAYRI HISĀB

Say, "Oh Allah, King of the Dominion, You grant dominion to whom You will and You take dominion from who You will... You make the day enter the night, and You bring forth the living from out of the dead, and You bring for the dead from out of the living, and You grant provision to whom You will without accounting. [3:26-27]

UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTING TIME

Why should we struggle to understand this concept of time? Like it or not: our lives are ruled by time. Allah is Time, and he has dominion over all things. By understanding and accepting the nature of time, we can better comprehend our overpowering dependence on the Creator. The horizontal dimension of time-- that is, our own self-realization through our day-to-day interactions with what we consider reality--seems to be very momentary, irrelevant almost, in the vertical sense of time.

It is only through using our imagination that we can conceive of and comprehend time. The world of imagination partakes of the attributes of both worlds--the seen and the unseen. There are two levels in this '*alam al-khayal*'. One of them is closer to the world of the spirit and the other is closer to the world of the body. Everything manifested in the higher level of the world of imagination corresponds totally and correctly to the world of the spirit from which it gains its existence. But the lower level is colored by the nature of the receptacle, e.g. by the mental faculties of the person who perceives it.

What we experience in the now it seems fully relevant, or real, but there is another element; as we repair to the infinite either in dream, meditation or death. It is that moment, in a moment that we can see through the veil.

In the vertical sense of time, it is all a moment. We go through day to day life, interacting with each other and the physical universe, and apparently this is happening in time. From Allah's point of view, it can be inferred that it is just a dot, a moment. Hence, as you will hear me say later, our concern, mystically, spiritually, and practically in day-

to-day life, must embrace fully the significance of NOW. All efforts to delay, all torpor, all self-directed assumptions about self, role, purpose and direction are illusory imaginings that take us from the Now to the past or assumptions of the future.

Practically, this dilemma of self-direction versus becoming aware of the Will of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) is the key to spiritual success. Wasting time, putting off, distraction, is emphasized in life's idioms: "wasting precious time", or "running out of time", or "take your time and think it over", or "A stitch in time saves nine"...all reflect the relevance of the moment. When the time is right, that is when we will understand.

BE IN THIS WORLD AS A STRANGER

While ultimately there may be nothing lasting in human time, it is obvious that we are created to operate within it, make decisions in it and face consequences relative to it. It is constructed by the ordering of specific moments and events. Every Spring and Fall we are reminded of how un-real our measuring of time is when we collectively and selectively turn the time ahead an hour, or back an hour. What happened to that hour we lost? We never owned it. So too, we don't own the moments we live in, they belong to Allah.

But in this collection of moments and jumble of memories, Allah gave us something very important, and very powerful that allows us to touch the vertical moment of time, five times a day. A minimum of 5 times a day we can pause, we can create, reflect, remember. There is an order in this universe, and when we catch on to that we become aware that our existence is just the reflection of a much larger universe of truth.

We live in a time when it is so easy to make everything into material terms. We live in a time when there is no such thing as a lasting message, because there are a hundred messages coming into your in-box every few minutes. We are all guilty of rushing ourselves to think about timelessness; rushing our prayer based on material deadlines, putting off time for reflection, service, patience... because of a perception of time; a perception we have enough time, or most significantly, a perception that we control our time. Few understand the reality of time and what can be accomplished in Meditation, in Prayer, in recitation.

And Abu Huraira also reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: **"Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, said: The son of Adam causes Me pain as he says: Woe be upon the Time. None of you should say this: Woe be upon the Time, as I am the Time. I alternate the day and the night, and when I wish I can finish them up."**

Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) says: I am the Time. To question the relevance of time in any of its aspects, to curse time or waste it is cursing Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). How often do we say, "if only I had more time!?" Yet we all waste time, every day. When will we realize that it is where we are in the moment that matters more than how many moments we have?

Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) is the ultimate controller of time. That's the most important thing: not our jobs, our family, or anything in this physical world. What is important is how we use what's in the physical world to remind us of our Creator, our Lord, the Divine Reality .

We have to understand that what we apparently create, ultimately, is not real but only appears to be. Indeed, what we think we create is potentially a framework for remembrance or a context for directing our life toward Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) the only Reality.

We can use everything in this world as a reminder of how much time is running out on your clock. We can use everything as a reminder to anchor our consciousness in the Divine Presence (Allah swt), rather than in the things of this world—attending to the moment, surrendering to the Divine Will alone.

Abdullah Ibn Umar (*radiya-Llaahu 'anhu*) reported: **“The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) took me by my shoulder and said ‘Be in this world as though you are a stranger or a wayfarer. When the evening comes do not expect (to live till) morning and at morning do not expect (to live till) evening. Take from your health for your illness and from your life for your death.’ ”**

That is the answer to all our “when” questions; that is the way to interact with time. Be in this world as a stranger. Be engaged in every moment, as it could be your last.

BEING ENGAGED IN THE NOW (*WAQT*)

There is a certain kind of consciousness of the moment when a human being becomes independent of the past and the future, in this moment the influence of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) descends upon them, into their soul, and makes their heart “collected.” In that moment, one has no consciousness of the past, the future, only of the now. In those moments, you are so much in the “eternal now” that you become a possessor of time. Time doesn’t possess you.

Abu Sayed Kharaz said, *“Don’t occupy precious time except with the most precious of things. The most precious of human things is the state of being occupied between the past and the future, in the now.”*

And *Rasuulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, **“I have a time (*waqt*) with Allah in which none of the cherubim nor any prophet rivals me, in which the 18,000 worlds do not occur to my mind, and have no worth in my eyes.”** In this he is referring to the Isra Miraj, when the kingdom of earth and the heavens were arrayed before *Rasuulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), he didn’t look at anything—an act of consummate nobility, attending, only reaching to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*).

Rasuulu-Llaah’s “moment” of the *israa miraj* is an exulted example of being totally engaged in *ad-Dahr*, in the moment, in the now. In that sense, he was engaged only in one thing: *Tawheed*, the One. He was in the state of loss and gain; he was in union and not in separation; not concerned with the future or the past, only with the moment.

In our tradition we are asked to remember and to live in the moment of now. In fact, we are asked to live daily a moment from pre-existence, of pre-eternity, a moment when we were asked:

ALASTU BIRABBIKUM?

Am I not your Lord?

and we said:

BALĀ SHAHIDNĀ

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

Every seeker has a moment of realization that this is not a myth or story, but a reality. Time is irrelevant; all the moments from that to this are insubstantial, all that matters is: **“BALĀ SHAHIDNĀ.**

Think about your life, your worries, your responsibilities: How much of today, had to do with something that was going to happen in the future or something that you were dealing with from the past? A lot. How much of today

were you just in the moment? How much of your life today has been ruled by: **BALĀ ShAHIDNĀ?**” For most people...not much.

We ask questions like: When will I make progress, when will my prayers be answered, when will I see this or that? The answers to those questions come in our relationship to that first moment, and to every moment, in our relationship to time. Progress, answers, and understanding come from relinquishing our impatience with time, relinquishing our need to control time, and diving into the moment.

Junayd recounted this story, offering insight into these questions:

I saw a dervish in the desert sitting under mimosa tree in a very hard, rough, and uncomfortable spot. I asked him, “what made you sit here so still?”

He said, “I had a moment (waqt), and I lost it. Now I am sitting here mourning.”

I inquired how long he had been there, and he said, 12 years.

“Will not the Shaykh,” he said to me, “offer up a prayer on my behalf that I might find my time again?” I left him and performed the pilgrimage, and I prayed for him. My prayer was granted. On my return, I found him sitting in the same place.

“Why,” I said, “do you not go from here since you have obtained your wish?”

He replied, “O Shaykh, I settled myself in this place of desolation where I lost my waqt. Is it right that I should leave the place where I found my understanding once more, and where I enjoy the society of Allah? Let the Shaykh go in peace, for I will mix my dust with the dust of this spot, that I may rise on the day of resurrection from this dust, which is the abode of my delight.”

No human being can get that kind of waqt/moment of understanding and clarity by exerting just choice. It is not a thing that comes within the scope of our acquisition. It can be gained by our effort, but it is not something we can buy in the marketplace.

One of our shuyukh said:

Time is a cutting sword. Time cuts at the root of the future and the past. It obliterates yesterday, and can cut away tomorrow from the heart in a moment. Even if you carry the sword on your shoulder for a thousand years, in the moment of cutting, it doesn't discriminate between the master's neck and the neck of another.

THE GIFT OF A MOMENT

We have all had moments in our life that that will never forget; the details may fade, but the meaning, significance, and flavor will stay with us forever. When *haal* (a state gifted to us by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*)) attaches itself to a moment, we never lose the memory of it. It becomes like a taste we have in our mouth, and we are reminded of it periodically.

When a *haal* descends upon us, it is moment of clarity, a lifting of the veils; we become stable. We consciously and purposefully turn away from the things of this world, our attachments, and we become absorbed in what is a moment of non-linear time.

When I was 4 years of age, I had an appendix operation ...I don't remember hardly anything else from that age, but I remember that operation with perfect clarity. This is analogous to spiritual states; certain moments have their effect and then depart. We continue this cycle of remembering and forgetting until there is a *maqam* (station) of remembrance attained by the sincere and submitted seeker.

Most of us go through life in a state of forgetfulness: trying hard to just remember all the things we have to do in a given moment. We wander through life like the journeyer who knows he is going somewhere but can't quite remember where. "When will I get there?" he asks himself; answering: "tomorrow I'll figure that out." We go through the day, not accomplishing much, and forgetful in the way we do things.

But at the same time there are the spontaneous moments, moments when we are in the right frame of mind, in the right spiritual track to respond to properly. Sometimes the "right thing" to do is not what you think it "should" be; but nonetheless it is the right thing.

This is expressed in the Islamic teaching: "*daru-l-mafasid yuqaddam 'alaa jalbi-l-masaalib.*" This means "the extirpation of evil takes precedence over the bringing of good." This means, for example, that if I am going to prayer (something that is good—*masaalib*), and I see a robber attacking someone then I give precedence to foiling that attack rather than going to the prayer—even though my assisting the victim may make me miss my congregational prayer, or even the prayer time all together.

While a simplified example, this is just another reminder that we must submit to Allah's time and timing, not our own sense on when things should happen. If one is taken up with the idea of fiqh, with order and "supposed to's" more than the essence of right, the wrong decision will inevitably be made, even though on the surface they may appear "right."

With these examples, I remind you that it is not only how we use time but also how our life is directed each and every moment that is important.

In some ways, being tuned to the meaning behind the moment is like when we were children and we were daydreaming. The teachers used to say, "Don't sit in class and daydream." In our case, daydreaming means paying attention to something other than what is going on in the world. The person who is in the state of *muttaqaween* becomes very stable, and becomes the possessor of time, *waqt*.

The person who is in that state usually is silent. If they are acting in some way, their actions are filled with that moment. We have all had that experience of total absorption in what you are doing; you are totally fulfilled and filled full in that moment. Words seem to escape you. When a *haal* comes on to someone, all the feelings and confusion are gone from the heart.

Sidna Ibrahim (*alayhi-s-salaam*) was the possessor of a state of clarity, of *haal*, when he accepted the true nature of Allah, as we are told in Qur'an:

FA-LAMMĀ JANNA °ALAYHI-LLAYLU RĀA'A KAWKABAÑ QĀLA HĀDhĀ RABBĪ FA-LAMMĀ AFALA QĀLA LĀ UHIBBU-L-'ĀFILĪN

FA-LAMMĀ RĀA'A-L-QAMARA BĀZIGhAÑ QĀLA HĀDhĀ RABBĪ FA-LAMMĀ AFALA QĀLA LA'IL-LAM YAHDINĪ RABBĪ LĀKŪNANNA MINA-L-QAWMI-D-ḌĀLLĪN

FA-LAMMĀ RĀA'A-SH-SHAMSA BĀZIGhATAÑ QĀLA HĀDhĀ RABBĪ HĀDhĀ AKBARU FA-LAMMĀ AFALAT QĀLA YĀ QAWMI INNĪ BARĪ'UM-MIMMĀ TUSHRIKŪN

When the night covered him with darkness, he saw a star, and he said, ‘that is my lord!’ But when it set, he said ‘I do not love that which sets.’

And when he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said “That is my lord!” But when it set, he said, “If my Lord does not guide me I shall be of those who are astray.

And when he saw the sun rising, he said, “That is my lord! It is the biggest.” And when it set, he said, “Oh my people. I am free of what you associate with Allah.” [6:76-78]

We can see from these ayat of sura al ‘An’am, Sidna Ibrahim’s progression, through a series of fleeting moments, into a state of clear understanding (*haal*). In each progressive moment he moved from one state to another. His heart is distressed at the loss of the beloved, contemplating the separation, until he realizes that the true nature of his Lord, who transcends time, transcends reality.

In a moment of *waqt*, vertical time, there is nothing of this world able to interrupt, no matter what is happening in the outer. The world is going on around you, and you are in a state of no-thing-ness. You are now in a transcendent state. You are not limited by this world or held back by this world. The linearity of the world seems imperfect and transient.

Every Sufi eventually, if sincere in practices, enters and exits these states and stations. In a way, it’s a way of preserving one’s inner integrity, one’s spiritual integrity, the integrity of one’s soul. The soul has to have some freedom, but it has no real freedom locked in the body. So in sleep it becomes free, and in meditation it becomes free.

The soul takes this elevator called *waqt* that travels away from this physical world. The doorway to this elevator is found by focusing on love, paying attention to the *lataa’if*. These doorways appear to the persevering student who is fulfilling their obligation to Allah, with flawless intention and consistent, natural effort.

MAKING PROGRESS ON THE PATH

For the seeker consistent in practice, striving becomes like walking: you are exerting energy, you are exerting force, but you don’t feel it. If you are healthy like these young people, you go running, jumping, leaping. You don’t feel that exertion as exertion. So in the same way, the Sufi is seeking. It’s a strenuous journey, just like the strain on the muscles, tissues, fascia, and nerves when you are running and jumping. But when you are in shape, you don’t feel it.

When do we get to that station of health and vitality in our spiritual seeking? When we Practice; practice seizing the moment; practice diving into the vertical moment of time; practice remembering that all time, all existence, all of reality is in the “imagination” of Allah, who is time and is outside of time. Every joy, every moment, every challenge, every difficulty is an opportunity to practice seeing beyond the linear into the non-linear.

Junayd prayed to Allah to remove some kind of difficulty, and the response in his heart from Allah was, “I created the difficulty so you can learn patience. Why should I remove it from you? Then how will you learn patience? But understand that I am merciful.”

I often say: if you create your life around your spiritual life, you are going to be much happier, much more fulfilled human being than if you try to force your spiritual life and practices into your day to day life. Your day-to-day life is always going to distract you and always have these surprises. Daily challenges will always be a burden until, like Junayd, we see each one as a moment of opportunity.

Making progress on the path is a process of being cautious in order to be correct, and being courageous enough to use the blessings that Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’aalaa*) has given to make the spiritual decisions that have to be made,

trusting that they will be the right decisions, against the odds of all the strange things that go on in the world and Islam, and even Sufism.

Trusting in that, we can understand that deep learning, deep penetrating *baseerah*/insight comes time after time and regular practice.

The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, **He who will assume chastity with an effort, Allah will make him contented. And he who will assume forbearance with an effort, Allah will make him forbearing. It is said that once a Companion complained to the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) of his own hard-heartedness, upon which the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "Make a habit of stroking gently the heads of the orphans."**

This *'ibaadah* all takes place in time, yet the consciousness, the motivation and the loving kindness are doors to a result that is timeless. *'Ibaadah* is Practice and Practice is *'Ibaadah*.

How do we get there? Remove those distractions and be steadfast in the journey. A person who is steadfast in their journey is one who shapes their life around the decision to make the time to practice: to have intimate moments with Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) in meditation, in recitation, and the study of Qur'an; in reflection upon the life and the words of *Rasnuhu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).

Practice is hidden in it is completion, the reward of effort is ease; just as if you want to learn to play a piece on the piano: you sit down and you want your fingers to play the piece perfectly, but first you have to stop and read the notes, and practice and practice, first learning the notes then the phrasing and the message. But it takes 'time' and sometimes you become frustrated, and you give up making promises to return...and some do and some don't.

When you finally master a piece, it feels easy; you play it over and over again, and your fingers are totally cooperative with your brain, to the point where it is as if your brain is at rest, and your fingers are doing all the work. Those who play instruments know this. Your fingers take over. But to get there takes a lot of practice. That is steadfastness. It is frustrating, unless you learn to love practice.

This is also what happens if and when one formally, properly, seriously, and rigorously takes on the study *Tasawwuf: dhikru-Llaah* is manifest in every way and at all times.

Enjoy the fruit of your own practice, be humble to Allah, be grateful for the different stages Allah showers upon us.

There is the story of Abu Sayed Kiraz and Ibrahim Assad, and how they saw a friend of Allah on the seashore. They asked him what was the way to Allah, and he answered, there are two ways to Allah. One for the vulgar and one for the elect. When they asked him to explain this, he said,

"The way of the vulgar is that upon which you are going. You accept for some cause and you decline for certain causes. But the way of the elect is to see only the One who causes things and not to see the cause."

If we train our hearts to always turn toward what is divine and meaningful, then whatever state we are in, we are anchored in Allah.

WHEN CHANGE AND PROGRESS TAKE PLACE

The question of "when" that we are discussing today is a question of time and perception but it also brings us to the question of progress and change. Many times along the way to this state the student may think: when will I make real progress? When will I see change in myself? When will this become easy?

There is a saying in India; “*put your effort, let things happen*”; or we might say put your effort, and you will see the rewards, whenever Allah wills. Over time the seed or effort bears fruit/results, it is still in Allah’s time, now and forever. From this very moment to ‘always’, the possibility exists for the Mercy and Blessing of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’aalaa*)—if we put our effort and strive to make the changes necessary, to create the inner receptive, perceptive environment.

To truly understand our own change and the potential for change and progress in our society and our world, we must think of it in the context of time that I have spoken about already today: the continuum of moments that makes up Allah’s time in relation to creation. If we want to change our self, we begin now, in this moment, one moment at a time, until it flows from us like music until we understand that sincere effort is progress and is transforming.

Slowly, with practice, you begin to feel something in your qalb that will start creating a different type of *imaan*, a different type of understanding of Islam. You feel those feelings and develop understandings of Islam and *imaan* and *ihsaan*, that were never imagined before.

But unless your heart is strong and full, you can’t reach that place in your heart where Allah resides. Like climbing a mountain, we can see the mountain and know that it is possible to climb, but we can’t climb it until we train and practice and strengthen our heart with rigorous and disciplined exercise and have the special burning desire to reach its peak. No amount of training will be sufficient if there is no strong will and determination.

And all along the way Shayṭan will be trying to whisper in your ear: telling you to look for an easier way, that the mountain is too high, that others aren’t doing it... but if the heart is trained and strong, it rises up against the whisperer and the temptations and dispels the doubts, the whisperings of Shayṭan.

Against all odds, transformation is possible. Transformation took place in the *Sabaabah* by contact with *Rasuulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), contact with the truth. People who wanted to kill him became the Prophet’s most devoted followers. Individuals who heard Qur’an one time were overcome and became Muslims. They were transformed when their hearts were transformed.

Through *Rasuulu-Llaah*’s words, his breath, he was able to transform these people to one faith, one belief, one heart; he changed the way they thought, they saw, they felt. They acted differently; they saw differently; they spoke differently. But the effort must be made; it does not happen without conscious choice and effort.

Once a person begins to discover that aspect of themselves, that’s when Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’aalaa*) finds that person. When the heart tries to discover the Divine Presence, Allah finds that person’s heart open. Since Allah is limitless, the limitless takes residence in that heart and there is more limitlessness for any number of hearts.

YĀ AYYATUHĀ-N-NAFSU-L-MUT^āMA’INNA, IRJĪ^{‘ī} ILĀ RABBIKI RĀDIYATAM-MARDIYYA, FA-D^āKhULĪ FĪ ‘IBĀDĪ, WA-D^āKhULĪ JANNATĪ

O you soul whose self is at peace, return to your Lord well pleased and pleasing. So enter the ranks of My worshipers, and enter My garden. [89:27-30]

These are the people who become so beloved of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’aalaa*) that he was impatient for them. Some say; Allah is yearning for the people like the trees blossoming in spring are yearning for us to tell them how beautiful they are. We feast our eyes on them and take photographs of them. They are asking us to come to them just by being what they are. That’s how Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’aalaa*) yearns for the believer. That yearning is, itself, is a reflection of the attributes of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’aalaa*).

Part of that striving to seize the moment can be found in Suhbat. Suhbat is practical as well as subtle. Suhbat is a corridor (*majaaz*) with many doors that lead to refinement of attributes and attitudes (perceptions). Part of that striving is attending the dars. There is something about the moment of being present that acts on the heart.

When you look at our spiritual forefathers you see their pattern was to create the environment for these moments. They would gather for suhbat, to make dhikr...fully intent and focused on remembrance of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). It was not a social occasion, nor an occasion for acquiring recognition of spirituality or fulfilling the emotional nature's cravings for spiritual experiences, as it is in some instances today.

Suhbat is not a way to get motivated to do something spiritual...it is recognizing the company of sincere seekers, focusing on Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) and finding safety and security in the remembrance of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). *Suhbat* is not a *madrasah* or intellectual pursuit; it is the door to *muraqabah*; it is being present in the Presence, first of the Shaykh, then of *Rasuulu-Llaah*, then of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*).

If people are gathered but there is no presence of the Shaykh, either directly or through his qualified mureeds, there is no presence of *Rasuulu-Llaah* without his authorized representative; there is no presence of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) without His Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). And if that is the case; there is no true or effective suhbat. When there is true Suhbat there, the moment opens and becomes timeless in the Presence of all the *Awliyaa* Allah, all the Shuyukh, and *Rasuulu-Llaah*.

We need the help of the *Awliyaa*, of *Rasuulu-Llaah*, because it is difficult to make progress against the odds of this world; time is always ticking forward and sometimes it can feel as if we are standing still as time, all those moments, rush by us.

Making progress is dependent on what you work on inside of your own self and what you are sincere about; that transforms you. Sometimes we make a lot of progress. Sometimes we feel like we are treading water, and sometimes we feel like we are in quicksand. You know how to save yourself from quicksand? Relax and lie flat. Stop struggling and submit. Don't be vertical; be horizontal.

Sometime we have to change our life to make progress. To make progress we have to focus on making progress. It doesn't matter how fast, as long as you keep making progress. And it's through *Tasawwuf* that this happens.

FINDING A FIRM FOUNDATION

The effort it takes to turn the heart's attention from this world; can be as if we are moving mountains.

**IDhĀ RUJJATI-L-'ARḌU RAJJĀ,
WA BUSSATI-L-JIBĀLU BASSĀ,
FA-KĀNAT HABĀĀ'AM-MUMBATH-ThĀ**

**When the earth shall be shaken with a (severe) shaking,
And the mountains shall be made to crumble with (an awful) crumbling,
So that they shall be as scattered dust, (Waqi'a 4-6)**

“When the earth shall be shaken with a (severe) shaking.” *Ard* (earth) here can be seen as the land and also as whatever serves as a foundation of our lives. Mountains are the most solid visible realities in this existence; they anchor the mantle of the earth. If they can be torn free, then consider those things that are as flimsy as relationships or thoughts.

Everyone wants stability, whether in one's home, relationships, or in the economy. But those who seek absolute stability find that it only exists when there is trust in Allah. Every other stability is relative.

Even though it may last his lifetime, the seeker knows that the world and the cosmos are on a journey, and that the foundation upon which we have built our (relative) security may (and will eventually) get shaken and pulled out from under us. At the time of the shaking, the flimsy relative foundation, having served its purpose in this creational cycle, is finished. For the man on the path, such a calamity is regarded as direct evidence of the love of Reality for him. He therefore looks for some better foundation until he discovers the foundation of all foundations.

The fortunate one who has intellect comes to realize that what he perceives as the solidity of his foundation is only in his mind. Nothing in this world is going to last, whether it be health, wealth or children. *WHEN* that is recognized, the awareness, immediacy and urgency of the quest become the major preoccupation in his life, and all other aspects become secondary and transient. After this foundation has been shaken and destroyed, a new and much firmer foundation is built.

So, before our foundations are shaken and destroyed, we must make the effort to root ourselves in a firmer foundation. Indeed Effort is Progress: Can you say that you made the effort, from last dars you attended to today? Did you make effort to such a degree that you can feel that you made even one half of one percent of progress? Have these Sunday talks been taken to heart and the guidelines followed and the effort made so that you can, with assurance, determine the value of Sufism, the value of your own inspired efforts? After all, when we spend this time and when we create this format and when we delve into these subjects, we are gathering to inspire, instruct and encourage effort, commitment and practice. So why not strive for some small amount of progress from this week to the next? You will have to make the effort. Don't be like the student who thinks their homework will do itself. Maybe our words inspire you, but you have to study and make that effort and have a goal in mind.

We are the Ummah of *Rasulu-Llaah* (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), and we are following him. To follow means exactly that, you desire to follow, and you follow. It doesn't mean you stand still and watch others follow, if you do that, pretty soon, everyone will be out of sight.

TRAVELING ON THE OCEAN OF TIME

As I come to the end of my talk, let me give you the example of a swimmer in the ocean. We are all swimming in the ocean of time. If you are in the ocean and you are not swimming, the ocean itself pulls you out. Have you had that experience? All of a sudden you look up, and you are far out in the ocean. We are *saaliks*, journeyers on the ocean of time. We have to stay on that journey, and keep making progress. If you stop swimming, it doesn't mean we are stationary, it means we are swept out to sea.

If you stop making progress, you get pulled out. There is no stationary. You are either making progress or you are losing what you gained. There is NO Neutral. That is *taqwaa*. You want to fear something? Fear that you become so complacent that not only do you stop making progress; you get pulled out by the undertow. Fear that you lose your piety. But Piety is your protection. Remember that *Taqwaa* also means shield. Our Piety is a shield against distraction and loss.

Taqwaa is an internal compass on the path that leads towards Allah. *Taqwaa* develops one's behavior through cautious awareness of Allah. This consciousness and fear of Allah is a protection and a shield against wrongdoing. The abstention of evil through this consciousness ultimately develops one's love of Him.

The universal principle of submission to the Divine Will is beautifully expressed in the character of one who is a servant of Allah, an “Abd-Allah.” If we are wary, cautious, and we seek the protection *waqaa*’ of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’ala*) then we avoid the pitfalls of arrogance.

Most of us are arrogant. We don’t feel that we are drifting away from Allah. People don’t feel that, because they are still reciting, and doing their prayers on time. If you have any *taqwa*, then use it to make progress. Keep moving.

We have to overcome our lack of knowledge, and we have to overcome our lack of love by allowing ourselves to be loved. Striving for meaning, having purpose, having focus, making effort—when we do that, then we can understand what this path is really about.

When we move into that realm of love and our love will be returned in the form of strength and guidance. Like being out at sea and finding the warm Gulf Stream that is flowing toward your goal; you keep swimming but it is easy and enjoyable. If you have the *mahabbat*, the love of Allah, and Prophet Mohammed, love keeps pushing you. Love pushes you toward the Beloved. All the knowledge you want is of the beloved. All the feelings you have are for the ones you love. Rumi writes:

*Love rests on no foundation.
It is an endless ocean,
with no beginning or end.
Imagine,
a suspended ocean,
riding on a cushion of ancient secrets.
All souls have drowned in it,
and now dwell there.
One drop of that ocean is hope,
and the rest is fear.*

CONCLUSION

What we are talking about today is the potential of the human being; our potential to transcend time, to live a lifetime in a moment, and to be prepared for the final moments of our life.

You and I may never attain obviously and outwardly to those stations, although it is possible. It is probably more probable that we won’t but in these moments are doorways for our soul to find its ultimate rest.

Most of us identify with our outer physical being, just as we perceive time as linear and rigid. But just as there is more to us than our outer form, there is more to every moment than what we perceive. The more we are engaged in remembrance of Allah, and the more we turn our attention inwardly, at the expense of alienating ourselves at times from the world; the more we take that time and turn away and turn inwardly, the more our soul finds peace / respite.

The beginning of our journey of love is searching; and at the end is resting. All water flows toward the sea, and when it reaches the ocean, it doesn’t flow anymore. It doesn’t change the ocean’s movement. It has no taste until it comes to the ocean, and then it’s salty.

So many of us live our lives floating on the surface of the ocean, weathering the storms, riding the waves; never reflecting on the depths that lie below us. If you desire the pure moment, you find that in the seeking. If you desire the pearls, you have to get in the ocean and dive for the pearls.

Dive into the ocean. Allah put pearls in the oysters. Not every oyster has a pearl, but every one has the potential of having a pearl in it; you are not going to find it until you try. Until you dive, again and again, into the ocean of the moment, diving for the pearls of remembrance, patience, understanding... Dive into the ocean and find the pearl.

I will end by telling you a story about the importance of seizing every moment; no matter what the moment, there is the potential for depths of understanding in it:

A 91-year-old woman who had lived a very long and pious life filled with dignity and nobility asked in her prayer a question that had bothered her for a very long time. "If Man was created in fitrah (essential goodness) why do people treat each other so badly?"

She heard a voice that replied: each person who enters our life has a unique lesson to teach us; it is only through these lessons that we learn about life, people and our relationships with Allah.

This confused the woman, so the voice began to explain: in terms of WHEN:

"When someone lies to you, it teaches you that things are not always what they seem. The truth is often far beneath the surface. Look beyond the masks people wear if you want to know what is in their hearts. Remove your own masks to let people know who you really are.

"When someone steals from you it teaches you that nothing is forever. Always appreciate what you have. You never know when you might lose it. Never take your friends or family your own life for granted, because today and sometimes only this very moment is the only guarantee you may have.

"When someone inflicts injury upon you, it teaches you that the human state is a very fragile one. Protect and take care of your body as best as you can, it's the one thing that you are sure to have to carry you through life and be your vehicle for change.

"When someone mocks you, it teaches you that no two people are alike. When you encounter people who are different from you, do not judge them by how they look or act, instead base it on the contents of what is in their hearts.

"When someone breaks your heart, it teaches you that loving someone does not always mean that the person will love you back. But don't turn your back on love, because when you find true and lasting Divine love it is worth the pains and losses of the past

"When someone holds a grudge against you, it teaches you that everyone makes mistakes. When you are wronged, the most virtuous thing you can do is forgive the offender without pretense. Forgiving those who have hurt us is often the most difficult and painful of life's experiences, but it is also the most courageous thing a person can do.

"When a loved one is unfaithful to you, it teaches you that resisting temptation is Man's greatest challenge. Be vigilant in your resistance against all temptations. By doing so, you will be rewarded with an enduring sense of satisfaction far greater than the temporary pleasure by which you were tempted.

"When someone cheats you, it teaches you that greed is the root of all evil. Do not be distracted by failure or success and never let an obsession with achieving your goals lead you to engage in malevolent or haram activities.

"When someone ridicules you, it teaches you that nobody is perfect. Accept people for their merits and be tolerant of their flaws. Do not ever reject someone for imperfections over which they have no control but try to set them on the right course."

Upon hearing these words, the old woman became concerned that there are no lessons to be learned from man's good deeds. The voice replied that Man's capacity to love is the greatest gift He has. At the root of kindness and love, and each act of love also teaches us a lesson.

The woman's curiosity deepened. So once again the voice began to explain:

“When someone loves us, it teaches us love, kindness, charity, honesty, humility, forgiveness, acceptance, and all of these can counteract all the evil in the world. For every good deed, there is one evil deed. We have the choice to control the balance between good and evil, in him or herself but because the lessons of love are not taught often enough, the capability we have is too often unused or abused.

“When you enter someone's life, consider what your lesson will be. Will you teach love or a harsh lesson of reality? When you die, will your life have resulted in more loving or more hurting? More comfort or more pain? More joy or more sadness? Each one of us has the possibility to influence by our own piety and will, our own intentions and actions the circumstances in the world. Don't miss an opportunity to nudge the world's scale in the right direction!”

CLOSING DU'AA