



A Community of Tariqah

Allah Swt revealed to us in the Holy Qur'an:

And the believing men and the believing women are protecting friends of one another. They enjoin right and forbid wrong. They establish worship and pay zakat, and they obey Allah and His Messenger. For these, Allah will have mercy upon them. Lo, Allah is mighty and wise.

In a *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammed (sal) said:

The similitude of the believers and their compassion and mercy and affection for one another is like a single body. When one organ ails, the whole body is drafted with the sleeplessness and the protection.

I want to talk about again about community, since we will be broaching the subject again at meetings, in a more specific sense. In a way, to say that of all we have studied over the years, and not studied on Sundays, and came back to study on Sundays, which I hope we can, *inshā'a-Llāh*, get back to again; really the study of our self is very, very important in understanding this journey in life. Allah says in a *hadith quds*, **"To know yourself is to know your Lord."** We study about Islam and about Sufism, and we need to take some time to study about ourselves: who we are and where we are, and what tools we have. To frame that in a most general sense is also to frame it in a most comprehensive sense.

So I'll talk today about community, not only because we are one, but because we are a community within a community within a community. We are a community which is here year round. We are part of the community of *tariqah*. We are the community of the Legacy participants when they are here, and *inshā'a-Llāh*, we are the community of all the Muslims who truly are that. We operate hopefully at high standards in all of these communities, as Muslims, as mentors and guides, as fellow travelers / sojourners, brothers and sisters, and members of the same families. As you know, we belong to these many communities throughout our lifetimes. Some change; some don't. We define the communities we belong to in different ways – our families, our schools, our immediate geographical circumstances, the community of believers. It's good to remind ourselves of the relationship with those communities, because each one has different distinct duties and responsibilities, yet they are related.

Where are they related? They are related in us. The consciousness of reminding ourselves of community and the responsibilities and duties we have in each one that we belong to helps us to communicate not only to and with one another, but it helps us to better understand the essence and spirit of Islam, and to communicate better with Allah Swt. For after all, if we are communicating with and to one another in our hearts, we are communicating from the home of Allah Swt. As Allah tells us, ***"You will find Me in the heart of the believer."*** We can call that the *bayt al-qalb*. The house of the heart is also the house of *bayt al-islam*. Because of each community's independent and distinctive attributes and qualities, each one of these communities is included within Islam.

Islam doesn't try to negate any relationship, except the relationships between ourselves and ignorance. Indeed, Islam even speaks to us clearly about our

relationship with Shaytan. But a Muslim doesn't belong to one single community, as we realize. A Muslim belongs to all of the Muslims in the world, and all of the communities, and is a member of the Muslim *ummah*. But we are also members of communities that are not just made up of "Muslims," in this world. We are also members of the community of '*muslims*' with the small 'm' – those who believe in the truth and unity in God, and who are in submission to a higher truth, those who don't realize they were born as *muslims*. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, "**Lo, this your religion is one religion and I am your Lord, so worship Me.**" Allah is the Lord of everyone. He is the *Rabbi-l-ālamīn*.

Submission and peace is the ultimate religion for everyone. People just don't recognize it in its diverse forms. Of course, most of us realize that somewhere deep in our heart and soul, every one of us was submitted one time in our lives: that's the moment we were born, or when we were in the womb. We have been submitted in many ways in our lives as we have grown older, willingly and unwillingly at times. We know that Islam is more than just the definition of submission. It is the definition of peace, and gaining knowledge, and of focus, security, and safety. We who are Muslims, practicing Muslims *inshā'a-Llāh*, have a duty and a responsibility to assist and to help others to understand the safety and security, the peace, the tranquility, the submission that is available to them in believing in Allah Swt, believing that there is a Divine Presence / Reality – a presence to turn toward and seek within ourselves and to see within others.

Islam does not say in Al Qur'an, "This religion is the only religion." It says, "**This religion is one religion, the religion of the ones who worship Allah**" – not the twos, not the threes, not the many. We say in English, "the ones," which implies that all these people are one. The community of Islam, of Muslims, is defined as those

who believe in one Allah / one God. There are any number of means through which to believe in Allah, to realize what belief is. But to realize the expansiveness, the flexibility, the fluidity of that belief, [to realize] the largeness, the immensity of the *ummah*, is through Islam as we know it today in its essential form. Not in the form that is unfortunately portrayed today in the media, or lived out in the countries that call themselves “Muslim majority” countries, or Muslim countries, or Islamic nations. I question whether or not the Prophet (sal) would recognize it, just like we can question whether the prophet Isa would recognize Christianity.

Islam by definition, and *inshā'a-Llāh* by practice, is submission and peaceful submission indeed to Allah and His essence. Islam in its essence knows no conflict. Would that we could stand here today and say that there is no conflict in Islam, no conflict in the community of the family, of genders, the community of language, of historical realities. If we understood Islam as given to us, there is no differentiation. Unfortunately, when we look at the Muslim majority world today and see the conditioning and conditions people live in, or that we impose upon our lives or others' lives, we cannot clearly say there is no conflict. Indeed, we cannot even say there is one Islam, because Islam doesn't need anything for it to be Islam but believers, true believers.

How easy it seems to be: a religion of peace, knowledge, truth – a way of seeking, the way to assist others, a religion of submission, a religion of safety and security, of belief in Allah. Why is it so hard to find? A religion or way of life is not dependent on any pre-existing community or society, but there is meaning and context to all communities. Why is it hard to find that meaning and context? Perhaps we can understand a little better. Allah says in Qur'an about the preservation and

protection of the Dīn: **“We have without doubt sent down the message, and We will assuredly guard it from corruption.”**

Has Allah failed us? Are these two controversial questions to be asked, even in a *khutbah*: has He disappointed us? Did He lie to us? *Astaghfirh-Llāh*, Allah doesn't lie. The Truth cannot lie. Perhaps the protection is there, and we don't turn to it or receive it. Perhaps the guidance is there, and we are not seeing it. Perhaps it means, not that the religion can be corrupted, but the people are corrupted. Perhaps the truth is staring us in the face, but our fears and doubts and worries, living in the *dunya* of distraction, make it so we don't see it. We have a car, a road, and a destination. We have a thick fog. Who feels safe and secure driving in a really thick fog, or in sheets of rain pouring down on 81 the other night so much that the windshield wipers cannot keep up, as when Abu Bakr called me and told me he was in the midst of that rain?

All the elements to get where we are going are there: strong car, plenty of gas, a road, a destination. We are still who we are, but we can't get there so easily. Of course you need a really fancy car, a Cadillac that has Doppler radar. We do have that Doppler radar. It's called Islam. We fine-tune it with *tariqah*. But you also have to have *tarbiya*/ education, and knowledge. We do have the infrared sight in our car. Our heart is red, and it's infra... our faith, and our submission. If we trust in Allah, we see that the message and destination is clear. The objectives are clear. The immediate objective is clear, the goals are clear. But somehow we all get wrapped up in our work, our fears, whatever distracts us: our computers, our smartphones that make us dumb... our pastimes that are always passed time... our Internet experiences, and superficialities of what we think friendships are, and even the superficialities of what we think love is. It is someone else's responsibilities; not

mine, of course. All are like a fog that comes over us, heavy sheets of rain pouring down on us.

Somehow we know we have everything we need, but we don't use it correctly. We relegate Islam to religion, and all we know of religion is a day or a time or a place or a book, but rarely a living reality in the heart and mind. Hence we lose the opportunity to mine the wealth of the Qur'an, the Hadith, the teachings of the great *shuyukh* and put them into practice, unless we have such a blessing of community. The message may be clear, but the hearing is not so good. We are known here for having people who are hard of hearing. A person who is hard of hearing in one ear does not hear as clearly as a person who can hear with both ears. That's revelatory! Community, by definition should be beyond, above, and outside all the differences of individuals, families, and belief systems, and cultural nuances, other than our spiritual belief, which is one in Islam – true Islam.

We even react sometimes to those words, because if what was presented to us as Islam had a bad taste to it, every time we eat it we have to remind ourselves to find something better than the name – maybe the texture, maybe the smell, the fragrance, maybe the way it looks. Personal differences need to be resolved. That's not to say differences are bad; differences are wonderful. Allah Swt says in the Holy Qur'an that He made us different so that we might come to know and understand one another, not different so we could only disagree and fight with one another, be testy toward one another.

We have to have systems and procedures with which the members of the community can identify themselves and understand each other's identity, uniqueness, and specialty. If there's no system, people need to devise a system and

abide by that system. Otherwise, they will lose their bonds to one another, their friendship, their love. Contemplate this. There are bonds between parents and children that are not conscious bonds. We can have bonds that are conscious, too. Bonds are not bondage, by the way, just for your information. One should not be biased or prejudiced against any Muslim, irrespective of their background or social structure, or their ethnicity, or their gender, or their race. I'm purposefully defining Muslim in its most broad sense, because Qur'an gives substantiation for doing that. We can define it as one should not be prejudiced against anyone who is not an avowed Muslim who practices Islamic faith, who practices the rites and rituals and philosophy and beliefs of Islam as they know it in its limited sense. That's true; you can do that. And unfortunately, too many people do that. But I'm talking about it in the most broad and comprehensive sense.

Anyone who believes in one Allah, who submits and respects and honors other people's beliefs, who worships Allah, who accepts the Book, who accepts the Prophet Mohammed (sal) as the Prophet of Allah and Messenger of Allah, along with all the other prophets we have been talking about – that is a Muslim. Now, they don't necessarily have the full benefits of understanding what a Muslim may have as a religious believer, but they certainly have an incredibly good basis. Allah commands justice, doing of good, liberality to kith and kin. He forbids all shameful acts, injustices, and rebellion. He instructs you that you may receive admonition. Whomsoever should lead the group has to learn how to lead, to give good examples to others, to embrace others, to be humble, to know how to repent, and never commit either spiritual or physical removal or genocide. Unfortunately we don't have many leaders like that.

It is among those of *tariqah*, of Tasawwuf that we have more of people like that than we can find anywhere else. That's why people are attracted to Islam, through Sufism. We have a better means, beginning with our Prophet (sal) who stands firmly on the Qur'an and who is our *wasila*. As I said before, it natural to have differences. It is encouraged to have differences of opinion. It's to be expected to live with different points of view. Different opinions give us flexibility and dimension to our lives. They keep us alive, keep us thinking, keep us young, keep us seeking meaning in finding what is right. It raises questions we need to have answers to. It makes life exciting. We are not the people who look forward to retirement, not at all. In fact, we'd like to get our tires retreaded! We look forward to retreadment.

We may disagree with each other at different times (rarely!), but we should not be disagreeable in our disagreement. We should be open to agreement also, by the way. We should disagree in search of agreement. I'm just pausing here so you can think of the last time you disagreed with someone. It didn't take you very long, did it? How many of you were thinking of a specific instance when I said that? No? Then I better pause a little longer.... Now has anyone thought of anything? How many thought of something that time? Better pause a little longer.... Now think about how you could have been open to agreement, just in that instance. Are you doing it? Don't pretend.

One has to accept the honor that the opinions of others, and other schools of thought have. Whether they are in general terms of Shi'a, Hanafy, Maliki, or Shafi in that form. We should honor and accept them as they exist, that the Shar'iah is at their foundation. If we find that in any way is against the Qur'an and Sunnah, then we have to take a stand and help people understand why they are not going on the straight path. We should be very sure of ourselves, though. This also applies to our cultures, and our way of communicating. We are trying to come to the same goal.

Maybe the goal is to make Saturday night dinner, and use up all the food we ordered that week. There are different preferences, different ways of approaching the kitchen, different expectations. These are all wonderful opportunities. We should understand that underneath it all, there is commonality, community. We should seek that commonality and understand that historically, some things have gone awry. People have revised history at times. Have you ever revised history? Told a story that wasn't quite the way it happened?

People find themselves now in situations that are not common with the majority of Muslims, not common with the majority of people who seek unity. If a person is a Muslim by definition, and they are not seeking unity in the name of some sect or diversionary form of Islam, then we have to try to understand what they mean or believe. We don't have to accept what it is, but we have to understand what they have to offer. Is it that much different in a smaller way to build real friendships and understanding among human beings? Do we not have to put each other to the test at times? I don't mean difficult tests, consciously testing our friendships or relationships? But do not our friendships, relationships, parenting, marriages have to go through some testing and trusting periods?

This is what Allah and the Prophet Muhammed (sal) represented from the very beginning. Not a man who received a doctrine from the mountain who passed it on to people only; rather, he represented the means by which a community of believers could develop and could grow. The means, relationships, had to be made, and they were difficult relationships to be made. There were betrayals, fearful relationships. There were people who came along for the ride because it looked like everyone else was doing that, or because things were going to be better for them. Then they

backed out. We call some of these people *munaḥiqūn*. They are among the Muslims; otherwise, they would be called *kafirs*.

There are all kinds of forces that act in a community of people within friendships: to want to be accepted, be cared for, to be on the winning side. Some of the most destructive forces in any community are rumors, gossip, misunderstandings, misstatements, allowing oneself to become inflexible, being unresponsive to positive change. All that has to be eliminated, and the best way to eliminate that is through education/*tarbiya*, knowledge, openness, through venues in which we can discuss things, addressing inner and outer futures, avoiding complacency, being generous – “generosity in all things.” Otherwise division spreads, and difference spreads, and even hatred and alienation is created.

If the institutions which exist within Islam for consultation, for discussion, for understanding are not used – and they are definitely there to help build deep relationships between people who have knowledge and people who are seeking knowledge – then people will not have the security, and will not be seeking the security they deserve and want to have. If anyone who has authority and position, no matter what the title – king, sultan, imam, *shaykh*, *hazrat*, boss, or whatever – we have a duty as Muslims and community of Sufis, as humane human beings of character, to support those individuals, if they are seeking to bring the true teaching of Islam to us in its broadest sense, as I’ve defined it today. No one has the right to interfere in the affairs of what that individual is trying to accomplish, as long as it is not against the teaching of Islam. If it is against the teaching, then it should be questioned as Hazrat Abu Bakr and Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Umar said, “*If you find me straying, set me on the straight path.*” And someone asked him, “*Even by the point of a sword?*” And he said, “*Yes, even by the point of a sword.*”

One of the benefits of community and friendships and these kinds of relationships is that we can find out what our faults are. It's so easy to see the faults of others. But to find out what our own faults are, and be open to those, and take action, making activities that are necessary to improve them is quite a challenge. There is no such thing as a static community or friendship or love in Islam. Everything is progressive, like the Qur'an is progressive and dynamic. With these and other guidelines, we can find peace and harmony among ourselves as we look to the guidance of the Qur'an and the Prophet Mohammed (sal). Without these guidelines, we have problems. We have to remember what the Prophet (sal) said about compassion and mercy, and affection toward one another, as if we were one body. And also what the Qur'an says in Surah at-Tawbah;

The believers, men and women, are protectors of one another. They make regular prayers. They practice charity. They obey Allah and his apostles. On them Allah will bestow His Mercy, for Allah is Exalted in Power and Wise.

Is that asking too much of us, to protect one another, to try to do what's right, to forbid what is wrong, to repent, to forgive, to observe our prayers, to practice charity, to obey Allah and the Prophet? Is that too much to ask for what we get in return? So let's bring our sincerity to our life, to our community. People who, from the heart, love one another are not just people who go through the motions of prayer and every once in a while give some *sadaqa*. If you do find yourself going through these motions, you have to ask yourself: Am I protecting? Am I enjoining? Am I being protected? Am I speaking to express the mercy and compassion that is within me? When you ask that question, you will get an answer; there is no doubt

about it. But will you be man or woman enough to listen to it and heed the answer you get? That's just one of the questions we have to ask ourselves. *Asalaamu aleikum*