



THE PROPHET 'ISA (as)
The 'Abd of Allah, the Example of Adab
by
Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

Presented at the Zaawiyah of Shaykh Nooruddeen Durkee
Charlottesville, VA

19 May 2013 9 Rajab 1434

Surah al Fatiha

AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI
WA-L-ABSĀR.
ALLĀHUMMA ThABIT QULŪBANA
°ALA ŠIRĀTIKA-L-QAWĪM,
WA-J°ALNĀ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHĪN,
WA ŠALLI °ALA-Sh-ShAFĪ°I-L-HABĪB,
RAḤMATIL-°ĀLAMĪN, WA MANĀRI-L-NAJIYĪN,
WA MARSĀ-L-°ĀRIFĪN.

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 °INDA-Sh-ShADĀĀ'IDI
YA KhAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUN°I
YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YA'JILUQDI ḤĀJATĪ
BI-RAḤMATIKA, YĀ ARḤAMA-R-RĀḤIMĪN.
SUBḤĀNAKA °ALĀ HILMIKA BA°DA °ILMIK.
SUBḤĀNAKA °ALĀ °AFWIKA BA°DA 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.

INTRODUCTION

In thinking about the opportunity for this *dars* on the Prophet Isa ﷺ, I went through many things in my mind. Of course the history, or apparent history, or re-written history. I thought, “Shaykh Noorudeen is certainly going to tell us that and give it meaning.” And he gave us deep, deep meaning, and for that I’m very, very grateful. So I thought to myself, “You have to speak about Maryam ﷺ.” Of course, I will do that to some degree. Then I thought, “Papa is coming, and he only speaks about love. He exudes so much love, and so much insight that I’ll leave that, and hope that he will give us ‘the mother, the mother, the mother.’” Thank you, Sidi. Being third, that leaves you with me repeating things. And repetition is good – we don’t just say “*Lā ilāha illa-Llāh*” once in *dhikr*, we say it over and over again. So there will be some repetition. Some of you who know me know that I will try to bring it to today, *insha’a-Llāh*. By the will of Allah ﷻ, I am placed here, and we are here for a reason.

The Qur’an tells us that there have been 124,000 prophets throughout time, and it relates to us many of their lives and stories. Today, we are gathered to speak about the Prophet Isa ﷺ, the second to last of the Messengers, the last prophet before Rasūlu-Llāh ﷺ. As we move in this series on the Messengers, from Hazrat Adam ﷺ to Nūh ﷺ, and Nuh ﷺ to Hazrat Ibrahim ﷺ, and Ibrahim ﷺ to Musa ﷺ to Isa ﷺ—I say it in that way because I want us not to feel that we start and stop, start and stop, but it’s a continuum—we see that each represents something unique, while also reflecting and reinforcing everything that has come before. Each of these messengers was sent as a mercy from Allah ﷻ to teach the worship and remembrance of Allah ﷻ through a progressive unveiling of the potential of character that we have. Each was an exemplary human, who reflects the time they lived in, while showing the inner journey to perfection under very diverse and very real circumstances. Their lives illustrate how one’s demeanor influences the occurrences of one’s life and the lives of others. Each Messenger and message builds upon the other, until we come to the last brick in the building, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

By the time we arrive at the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, we will see even more clearly the progression through these prophets, from Adam ﷺ and the acceptance of the *Amanat*, and clarification of the Presence of Allah ﷻ in Names and Attributes, to the last Prophet (Muhammad ﷺ), who is not only a warner, a prophetic figure, a teacher and guide, but also a social and political leader, a mystic, and a living example of the human potential. Imam al-Bukhari related that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

The prophets are like brothers from the same father with different mothers. Their Religion is one, although their share’ah differed. I am the most akin to the Prophet Isa. There was no other prophet between us.

There is a special relationship between these two last prophets: Isa ﷺ and Muhammad ﷺ. Isa ﷺ foretold the coming of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ felt a special closeness with Isa ﷺ, who is a teacher, a murshid, who addresses the corrupt society of the Romans and the priests in the temple; who gathers *mureedeen* around him including his own cousin Yahya (who himself rises to prophethood); who comes at a time when guidance is needed ... a time of a disintegrating Roman Empire, corrupt and materialistic; an objectified Priest class; and people who are more and more forgetful of the spirit and the essence of faith. He was a guide not only in words but deeds, a miraculous individual born to the role of prophecy. He spoke from the cradle, and affirmed his own position and role by acts of kindness and mercy, by humility and faith, and by human qualities that enable us to identify directly with the challenges and choices that he had to face, because they are similar to the ones we have to face. Albeit, he lived that public life for only three years, it left an indelible mark on all of humanity to this day.

As we speak today about the Prophet Isa ﷺ, we acknowledge that there are many ways of looking at him and that he represents many things to many people. At the same time, as is the case with each prophet, there is a great deal of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of this prophet, cultural ‘baggage’ that has been accepted as true and undeniable. I will not attempt to outline those today; rather, I will stay to my purpose in these *duruus*, to point out

the relevance of his (Isa's ﷺ) life to all human beings: past, present and future, *insh'Allah*. Qur'an tells us in Surah al-Maa'idah:

WA QAFFAYNĀ ʿALĀ ĀTHĀRIHIM BIʿĪSĀ-BĀNI MARYAMA MUSADDIQAL-LIMĀ BAYNA YADAYHI MINA-T-TAWRĀTI WA AʿATAYNĀHU-L-ʾINJĪLA FĪHI HUDAÑW-WA NŪRUÑW-WA MUSADDIQAL-LIMĀ BAYNA YADAYHI MINA-T-TAWRĀTI WA HUDAÑW-WA MAWʿIDHĀTAL-LI-L-MUTTAQĪN.

And We caused Isa, the son of Maryam, to follow in the footsteps [of the earlier prophets], confirming that which was [revealed] before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Evangel (*Injil*) in which there is guidance and light and confirmation of that which preceded it from the Torah, and guidance and admonition for those who guard themselves [for Allah]. [5:46]

As usual, we could spend hours and hours on every *ʿayat* in Qur'an. But the general sense of this is there is a progression we are talking about, and the fact of a consciousness of a person, "those who guard themselves." There is an implication here that we care, that we want to know. Allah ﷻ refers to Isa ﷺ in Qur'an variously as the "*kalaam Allah*," the Word of Allah ﷻ, as the "*ruuh Allah*," spirit of Allah ﷻ, and also as the Messiah. He is a manifestation, in some way, of the same breath of Allah ﷻ that was blown into Hazrat Adam ﷺ and all of the progeny of all of the followers. That same *ruuh* is the microcosmic *ruuh* in the human being; and is the higher *ruuh* that must be drawn upon in all religions, and all the paths that we turn our compass to.

The role of the Isa ﷺ as a prophet is unique in history and understanding. In some ways, he was both the physical embodiment of the message, as well as the Messenger. Just as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received revelation from Jibreel ﷺ, Sayyida Maryam ﷺ was visited by Jibreel ﷺ in the form of a human being, with the revelation of a son and messenger-to-be. We will return to this later, but I point it out now to illustrate that in some sense the Qur'an in Islam is a parallel to what Isa ﷺ is in Christianity. The Qur'an—a direct revelation from Allah—is to the Muslim in Islam what Jesus is presented to Christians as being (fallacious as that analogy may be and is). He is seen not only by many as a Divine messenger with teachings for the time and for today, but as a living message. There is a vast difference between living the Message of Allah and being the message. I will assume, we as Muslims in this room grasp that difference and will not spend my time on that subject.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As we look today at the Prophet Isa ﷺ, we must also look at the context into which he was born. The Prophet Isa ﷺ came at the time of the Roman rule. The Jewish population was divided, under occupation, rapidly becoming corrupted by the prevailing social and economic realities; moreover, there was no real spiritual guidance in that society. Religion had been for the common person reduced to form and hierarchical authority, political expediency, and opportunism for the elite, marginalized by the Empiric forces, externally and internally. Some scholars feel that appeasement of the Romans was the order of the day, mixed with a healthy (or unhealthy) dose of paranoia.

Just as I drew the parallel in the last *dars* of modern Egypt with the time of Sidna Musa, so too we can see the parallel between the time of Isa ﷺ and the rise of a more materialistic, objectified society, one that affirms form over essence, power over humility, empiric designs over community in today's world. The Roman Empire was bloated with costs, and the colonies were heavily taxed. Their resources, such as grains, were used almost exclusively to feed the Roman population. Economic burdens fell on the lower classes, while the priests and the Roman population were given special favors and status, including the Jewish priests of the time. This in itself is an

interesting and compelling story in comparison to today's Western Empires, which I will defer to another text or time. But suffice it to say, timing is something that is truly in the hands of Allah ﷻ, as we have seen with the advent of each of the Prophets of Allah ﷻ. I ask you to follow this excerpt from a modern Christian scholar with a sense, not of the past only, but of the present.

The Roman Empire created the façade of peace and security, all the while creating suffering for other parts of the world... Empire was the historical reality that Jesus and the early church endured every day. Behind the text of Luke's gospel is a historical reality that cannot be ignored during readings and when interpretations are being made.

For Luke, the Roman Empire was a certainty that was inescapable as he recorded the story of Jesus [who] finds his earthly story beginning during the reign of Caesar Augustus. His entire life takes place in the context of being part of a dominated people, who believed that they were a special people in the eyes of their Creator. Luke's gospel takes full opportunity to situate Jesus within the time-space reality of Roman rule, and demonstrates over and over again how "the kingdom of Jesus subverts and overthrows the kingdom of Rome." This subversion does not come in through revolt-like force; rather, Rome's desire for domination over the world is challenged by Jesus' teaching, which is manifested through humility.

Time, place, person, and circumstance reveal a great deal to the seeker as each of us tries or should try to place our self in those contextual forms. The lives of these *Ambiyaa'* are best understood if and when we progress enough in our own spiritual journey to fulfill our inner and outer duties, in respect to this world we inhabit and interact within. In other words, it's hard to understand until you can understand. Isa's ﷺ teaching is fresh and different; he exemplifies not only faith but love, not only submission but also courage, not only compassion but forgiveness. These become the cornerstone to the teachings and life of the Prophet Muhammad, his mission of *akhlāq*, and comprehensive inclusive teaching, not for just family or community, or tribe, but for all humanity while still respecting the faith and practices of others. This is a quantum leap in prophecy.

These two factors: the evolution of the prophet-hood through each prophet, and the creating of the master/student, *murshid/mureed* relationship as a means of affirming the potential of all human beings, and reaching that potential to ascend to a nearer relationship with the Divine Presence, take their form from Isa ﷺ and culminates in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and those who follow—our *shuyukb*—leading us to a sense of completion in the outer. This *isharat* is an indicator or pointer to our own inner evolutionary process as seekers.

The circle of *mureeds*, the companionship of true seekers, begins with the Isa ﷺ within us. All the prophets are characterized for us by different *lataa'if*. The *lateefah khafee* (we call it 'the hidden') is the one that characterizes the Prophet Isa ﷺ. The discussion of the progression in *muraaqabah* through the *lataa'if* and the presence of the Prophets is left for another time, or referenced in many previous *duruus*; however, what is important is the concept of progress. Why I keep hitting on this word 'progress' is that each one of us identifies with progress on our spiritual journey. I don't think one of us sitting here is thinking that we have achieved the highest state, and that there is nothing else to learn. We remember a time when we didn't remember, when we didn't know, when we didn't know that we could know. So this progressive awakening is the progression of *tajalli* or lucent manifestation, the awareness of the *fayd* (outpouring of effulgence) from the Divine through the hearts of the *Ambiyaa'*, and from their hearts to the *anliyaa'u-Llaah*. As we come toward the end of these sessions, we are also moving vertically toward the synthesis of all the messages in the final Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

MIRACULOUS BIRTH

With that introduction, I want to return our attention to the beginning, to one of the most unique things about the Prophet Isa ﷺ: the story of his mother, Maryam ؑ, and his miraculous birth. In her story and the very act of the birth of Isa ﷺ, we find the message from Allah of this Prophet, and we find an example and teachings that ring true for us today.

She was Maryam bint ʿImran from the family lineage of Dawud ؑ. She was from a good and wholesome family of the Children of Bani Israel. Allah mentions the story of her mother’s pregnancy with her in Surah al-ʿImran, and how she (Maryam’s mother) dedicated her freely for the service of Allah. This meant that she dedicated the child (Maryam) to the service of the Masjid of the Sacred House (in Jerusalem).

...

FA-TAQABBALAHĀ RABBUHĀ BIQABŪLIN HASANIŨW-WA-AMBATAHĀ NABĀTAA HASANĀ ...

So her Lord (Allah) accepted her with goodly acceptance. He made her grow in a good manner... [3:37]

Thus, Maryam ؑ was raised among the Children of Israel in an honorable way. She was one of the most devoted female worshippers, well-known for her remarkable acts of worship and perseverance. Since those who served in the Temple were exclusively male, a special place was created for her – some say in the Dome of the Rock in the cave. Those of us who have been there are well aware of that presence. She lived under the care of her brother-in-law, Zakariya ؑ, who was a prophet and a great man of the religion, and who they would refer to in their religious matters.

...

KAFFALAHĀ ZAKARIYYĀ KULLAMĀ DAKHALA ʿALAYHĀ ZAKARIYYĀ-L-MIHRĀBA WA JADA ʿIŨDAHĀ RIZQANŨ QĀLA YĀ MARYAMU ANNĀ LAKI HĀDHĀ QĀLAT HUWA MIN ʿIŨDI-LLĀHI INNA-LLĀHA YARZUQU MAŨY-YASHĀĀʿU BIGHAYRI HISĀB.

Every time Zakariya entered the to (visit) her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: “O Maryam! From where have you got this?” She said, “This is from Allah.” Verily, Allah provides to whom He wills, without limit. [3:37]

In Surah al-Imran it explains that he would find her with winter fruit during the summer, and summer fruit during the winter. Then, when Allah wanted to grant her His servant and Messenger, ʿIsa ؑ, one of the five Great Messengers...

...

...

...IŨTABADHĀT MIN AHLIHĀ MAKĀNANŨ SHARQIYYĀ—FA-TTAKHADHĀT MIŨ DŪNIHIM HIJĀBANŨ...

...she withdrew from her family to place in the east—and she took a veil to seclude herself from them... [19:16-17]

This is interpreted by some to mean that she went to the eastern side of the Sacred Masjid in Jerusalem.

...

FA-ARSALNĀ ILAYHĀ RŪḤANĀ FA-TAMATH-THĀLA LAHĀ BASHARAÑ SAWIYYĀ.
QĀLAT INNĪ A^cŪDHU BI-R-RAḤMĀNI MIÑKA IÑ KUÑTA TAQIYYĀ.
QĀLA INNAMĀ ANĀ RASŪLU RABBIKI LI'AHABA LAKI GhULĀMAÑ ZAKIYYĀ.

...Then We sent to her Our Spirit (*ruhana*) and it took on for her the likeness of a harmoniously proportioned man. She said: "I take refuge in the Merciful from you, if you are from those who guard themselves [for the sake of Allah]." He said, "I am truly a messenger [from] your Lord, [sent in order] to give you a pure son." [19:17-19]

And as we know, she replied:

...

...ANNĀ YAKŪNU LĪ GhULĀMUÑW-WA LAM YAMSASNĪ BASHARUÑW-WA LAM AKU BAGHIYYĀ

QĀLA KADhĀLIKI QĀLA RABBUKI HUWA ^cALAYYA HAYYINUÑW-WA LINAJ^a-^cALAHU ĀYATAL-LI-N-NĀSI WA RAḤMATAM-MINNĀ...

"How can I have a son, when I have not been touched by any man and I am not unchaste?"

He said, "Just like that! Your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me. And We will make him to be a Sign for the people and Mercy from Us'..." [19:20-21]

Much attention and debate is put in today's world on this event of the miraculous conception as some kind of watershed between the rational and scientific and those of faith and belief, and those who scorn faith and belief. But as Muslims and Sufis, we understand that we can be both rational and faith-full. Maryam عليها السلام herself was incredulous when she received this message from Jibreel عليه السلام, but her piety prepared her, in more ways than one, to be the "bearer" of the Messenger.

IDh QĀLATI-L-MALĀA'IKATU YĀ MARYAMU INNA-LLĀHA YUBASHSHIRUKI BIKALIMATIM-MINHU ISMUHU-L-MASĪHU ^cĪSĀ-B^aNU MARYAMA WA JĪHAÑ FĪ-D-DUNYĀ WA-L-'ĀKhIRATI WA MINA-L-MUQARRABĪN.

WA YUKALLIMU-N-NĀSA FI-L-MAHDI WA KAHLAÑW-WA MINA-S-SĀLIHĪN.

(Remember) when the angels said: "O Maryam! Verily, Allah gives you the good news of a Word from Him. His name will be the Messiah, 'Isa, the son of Maryam, held in honor in this world and

in the Hereafter, and will be one of those who are near to Allah. And he will speak to the people from the cradle and in manhood, and he will be one of the righteous.” [3:45-46]

As you hear this story, as recounted in Qur'an, listen to the details that are brought forward. Rather than dwelling on the miraculous, Qur'an tells us of the realistic details of life: the pain of childbirth, the need for food and water, the ridicule and disbelief of family. It's a real story, about a real person, in a real situation, and that reality is real to many women in the world today.

FA-HAMALAT'HU FA-N'TABADhAT BIHI MAKĀNAN̄ QASIYYĀ

FA-AJĀA'AHĀ-L-MAKhĀDU ILĀ JIDh°I-N-NAKhLATI QĀLAT YĀ LAYTANĪ MITTU QABĀLA HĀDhĀ WA KUŅTU NASYAM-MAŅSIYYĀ

FA-NĀDĀHĀ MIŅ TAHTIHĀ-LLĀ TAHZANĪ QADĀ JA°ALA RABBUKI TAHTAKI SARIYYĀ

WA HUZZĪ ILAYKI BIJIDh°I-N-NAKhLATI TUSĀQITĀ °ALAYKI RUTABAN̄ JANIYYĀ

So she bore him [in her womb] and she withdrew with him to a remote place.

And [when] the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, she called out, “Oh the agony! Would that I had died before this and I were in oblivion, utterly forgotten!”

[Then] he called to her from below her [saying], “Do not grieve; your Lord has made [for you] a stream [flowing out from] beneath the palm.

And shake the trunk of the palm toward you and it will drop ripe dates upon you. [19:22-25]

As we know, after 40 days she brings this newborn baby back to her community and they are shocked, saying:

YĀ UKhTA HĀRŪNA MĀ KĀNA ABŪKI IMRĀ SAW'IN̄W-WAMĀ KĀNAT UMMUKI BAGhIYYĀ.

O sister [in the line] of [the Prophet] Harun, your father was not an evil man, nor was your mother unchaste. [19:28]

And she points to the child and they continue to ridicule her, until the baby speaks, saying:

...

...INNĪ ʿABDU-LLĀHI ĀTĀNIYA-L-KITĀBA WA JAʿALANĪ NABIYYĀ

WA JAʿALANĪ MUBĀRAKAN AYNAMĀ KUŅTU WA AWSĀNĪ BI-S-SALĀTI WA-Z-ZAKĀTI
MĀ DUMTU HAYYĀ

WA BARRAM BIWĀLIDATĪ WA LAM YAJʿALNĪ JABBĀRAN SHAQIYYĀ

WA-S-SALĀMU ʿALAYYA YAWMA WULID^hTU WA YAWMA AMŪTU WA YAWMA UBʿATHU
HAYYĀ

I am the worshipful slave of Allah. He has given me the Book, and made me a prophet, and made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me the *salah* and the *zakah* so long as I live—

And [He has made me] dutiful to my mother, and [He] has made me neither arrogant nor bereft of grace.

And peace be upon me the day I was born, and the day I shall die, and the day upon which I will be resurrected to life [once again].” [19:30-33]

Khalas! Or, in modern idiom, “Shut up!” Hold your tongue. Who are you? People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone. So we see in these *ayaats* from Qur’an, the eloquence of this prophet and how he described his own character (dutiful to my mother, and neither arrogant nor bereft of grace), and his role at the time (to enjoin *salah* and *zakah*) and for all time (to return at the end of time). The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said of him, “Hardly a single descendant of Adam is born without *Shaytan* touching him; the only exceptions are Maryam and her son.” When we hear this story, as recounted in Qur’an, of Maryam ؑ we can feel her anxiety, her struggle, and her trust. Why was the insistence upon the painful childbirth by the Sayyida Maryam ؑ, amongst the ridiculing and accusations of the people, and the suffering that came upon her? No prophet was born without a mother, except for the Prophet Adam ؑ, as the first created being. When we look at the mothers of these prophets, we see quite clearly, perhaps with more poignancy, the struggle and challenges faced by those bringing the truth. After all, they gave birth to the truth, in some form or another. And for each of us who are enjoined to speak the truth, *maruf* and *munkar*, we know how difficult it is, man or woman. The metaphor and the reality of it remain with Maryam ؑ and all these mothers in some way or another.

Every sweetness, every beautiful object, every important document, every treasure, has some kind of protection over it—a veil. The skin of the orange is not sweet. It protects what is inside that is sweet and wholesome. Documents have been put in folios like this one that I brought my talk in. Children are protected in the womb of the mother. This is the *adab* of protecting what is valuable. Everything has its *adab*, because every modality, every manifestation of the Divine Presence requires *adab*. This *adab* can be seen beautifully in this story of Maryam ؑ. She turns toward Allah ﷻ to protect her and her child, rather than turning toward worldly means. She is the exemplar in her piety and her trust and her reliance on Allah ﷻ. We say the children are a mercy for the mother; and in return the mother cares for them. It is also said the mother should never curse the child, or backbite against the child, or accuse the child falsely, or make fun of the child. There are etiquettes of the mother to the child, too; and the father also. This attitude we find made manifest in the mother of the Prophet Isa ؑ. We see it in his love for and *adab* toward his mother. It becomes evident. She is an exemplary personification of the women who deal with loss and difficulty and sorrow; and they deal with it with dignity, and nobility, and faith.

ADAB, THE FRUIT OF LOVE

One of the common factors among the *ambiyaa'* is a perfected *adab*. This can be seen clearly in Prophet Isa ﷺ, who is also known as the Prophet of Love. To understand *adab*, we have to understand love. This is a little convoluted, but I want you to try to grasp it. If we are to understand *adab*, we have to understand love. The sustaining of *adab*, over time, through all challenges, is the fruit of *mahabbat*/Divine love. It's not just to have love for one moment, or *adab* in one circumstance. It's the sustaining of it that is the fruit of *mahabbat*. The fruit of *mahabbat* sustains *adab*, and the seeds of *mahabbat* preserve *adab*. If a person is to have true *adab*, they have to have Divine love. If they are to promote or uplift the character of human beings, then they have to have *mahabbat*. It is such love that we see as all-inclusive in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. We see that kind of deep love for the Divine in both the Prophet Isa ﷺ and his mother—a love that manifests as service and grace and nobility, self-sacrifice, loneliness, personal fulfillment, personal loss, a love that gives healing and breeds self-less sacrifice. As Isa ﷺ said in Surah al-Imran:

...WA'UB⁴RI'U AL-'AKMAHA WA-L-'AB⁴RASA WA'UHYI AL-MAWTĀ B'IDhNI-LLĀHI ...
INNA FĪ DhĀLIKA LĀA'AYATAL-LAKUM IN KUN⁴TUM MU'MINĪN.

And I shall heal the blind and the leper, and give life to the dead, by the Permission of Allah. Truly, in that is a Sign for you, if you are secure believers. [3:49]

There's a caveat here. If you are a secure believer, then you are going to see this, then you are going to understand it. The Prophet Isa's ﷺ love for Allah ﷻ was deeply refined, and this is clearly reflected in his *adab*, and manifest in his ability to heal and to love others. The more refined the *mahabbat*, the more sustained the *adab*. Sustaining for what purpose? Sustaining love for the Divine Beloved. If we don't have love for Allah ﷻ, and for those whom He loves, not only do we not have *mahabbat*, we don't have *adab*. The more the countenance of *adab* is made clear to the Lover, the more the presence of the Beloved is present. Simply said: treat others in the way you want to be treated. The Beloved wants to be with the Lover. The more the etiquette, the proper attitude, the comprehensive behavior, attitude, character is of the Beloved, the more the Lover wants to be with the Beloved. It's reciprocal. We call it in our line, reciprocal maintenance. To keep the universe in balance, we need to have this type of relationship.

Abu Uthman Ghairi said, "Once the *mahabbat* is truly genuine, it emphasizes upon the lover (or sits upon the lover, or resides in the lover) a binding by etiquette/ *adab*." This love of these prophets, and the love of the mother to the son, and the son to the mother in this case, and to the *murideen*, is what binds them together. There is no separation. Just like the child is bound to the mother in the womb. Once the birth takes place, now the binding has to take place in outer behavior, in society. Now it has to be in the home, the family. In any slave within whose heart the *mahabbat* is deeply rooted, you will find someone who strives very hard to maintain their *adab* for the Divine Presence. What should or could this mean to us? It means that we have to refine both the exterior, outer/*dhaahir*, and the *baatin*/interior in order to create fullness, to perpetuate our relationship with Allah, to refine the vessel (the heart), and the means of expression (the mind and the tongue) that carries and manifests such potential.

The more the one who loves draws nearer (*qurb*) to that Divine Presence, the stronger the desire is in the individual to manifest the subtleties of *adab*. Not just for general good behavior, but the subtleties: knowing how to serve before being asked; to give without holding back; speak with the most refined language. This also presumes and perpetuates the necessity for *mubaasabah*. Because if we don't account for ourself, how are we going to know where we need to refine ourself? And *mujahadah*, if we don't strive for that refinement, then why should it come to us? We know these subtleties intuitively. When we are in the presence of someone powerful, someone respected, some social or religious leader; some great scholar, we tend to feel some anxiety, some fear maybe. We want to be very, very careful or attentive or transparent. We don't want to make mistakes. We don't want our conduct to be improper. That's *taqwa*.

Imagine then, the more we are aware of being in the Presence or moving near to the Divine Presence (*sayr ilaa-Llaah*), what we can experience. Once the main *adab* toward the Divine Presence is obvious to us, we can begin to

see the Divine Beauty everywhere. We have consciousness that can be refined, indeed, directed as it was intended to be directed...toward the Divine. This is the message of Prophet Isa ﷺ through example, and of his mother. Just like the Lover who doesn't take their eyes off the Beloved, or the Beloved takes their eyes off the Lover, so in that Divine Presence we cannot change our attention or glance. There is a *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ, who said:

If the slave stands to pray, he is in the presence of ar-Rahman, the Most Beneficent. If he diverts his attention toward others, his Lord asks him, “Are you diverting your attention toward someone better for you than I? O son of Adam, turn toward Me. I am far better than that which you are paying attention to.”

This diversion of attention is translated from the word “*istiʿaal*.” It means a person of their own choice turns their attention away. It's not that you get distracted. You choose to turn your attention away. They are preoccupied with something else. There is a quatrain that speaks to this focus and presence:

*By love, whose dreams are perpetually in my eye,
its secrets well hidden deep within my mind.
If I remember “Hu,” I am nothing at all but a heart.
If I glance at “Hu,” I am nothing at all but an eye.*

One of the keys to understanding what *adab* is not to forget who we are and where we are. When you take it to its extension, it is not to forget you are in the presence of the Divine. That is one of the great examples of the Prophet Isa ﷺ who loved all people equally, and whose love for Allah ﷻ was so singular and focused that his surroundings were irrelevant to his teachings and work as a messenger. He was just who he was.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The Prophet Muhammad (sal) accepted many distinct roles of religious, social, political, and even military leadership. When we look at the Prophet Isa ﷺ, we can see that in a traditional model of the teacher he led primarily by example. The Prophet Isa ﷺ was an exemplar in *adab*, in remembrance of Allah ﷻ, and in service to his community. Although his birth was a message from Allah ﷻ, it wasn't until he was around thirty years old that Allah ﷻ activated the Revelation of Prophethood to Isa ﷺ and he began to teach. Like all the Prophets of Allah ﷻ, Isa ﷺ performed miracles. These miracles are referenced by Christians as proof of his Divinity, which of course proves only the power and compassion of Allah, not the Divinity of His prophet.

It was through the Prophet Isa ﷺ that Allah ﷻ cured those with seemingly incurable illnesses: a man afflicted with leprosy, as well as a man who was born blind. Once, the Prophet Isa ﷺ supplicated to Allah to bring back to life one person who had died and was being carried to the burial place. These and other apparent miracles testify to his nearness with Allah ﷻ and the value of pursuing such nearness, devotion, trust and submission. What we forget is when you have that nearness, when you have that *adab*, when you have that love, these things come to you and they mean nothing but what it means in the moment. They are not a reason to strive for anything; they are a result of your piety and your love. One of the miracles of Isa is mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah al-Ma'idah, verses 112-114, which tells about a time when he and the people who were with him reached a place where there was not enough food for all the people. The students of Isa ﷺ asked him to supplicate Allah ﷻ for food, which would come down on them from the sky. Isa ﷺ made supplication to Allah ﷻ, and the angels brought down the food before the eyes of the people. Hundreds and hundreds of people ate, and there was no sign the food had diminished in quantity.

The Prophet Isa ﷺ lived on earth actively as a Messenger for only about three years. He used to travel from place to place, calling people to worship Allah ﷻ. He was so detached from the worldly matters that he did not worry

that he did not even have a place to rest his body at night. He used to sleep wherever he was when night would come. He wore clothing made out of unwoven wool. He ate from the raw plants of the earth, without desiring to cook them. And, as we know, he did not marry or have children; albeit, there is controversy as to this with regard to Mary Magdalene, who according to some Christian scholars was said to have washed his body before burial. This, of course, is contrary to dominant Islamic belief that the person crucified was substituted for the Prophet Isa ﷺ—something I will return to later in this talk. These are the things that make things complicated.

His example is the example of the true *faqeer*, one who has no need other than to be near Allah ﷻ. What is the lesson for today in this example? It is a lesson of humility, of reliance on Allah ﷻ. His example is a reminder that in a time of such complexity and selfishness, corruption and conflict, what is needed is simplicity and trust in Allah ﷻ, more attention to self and home community or nation. It is the same example we see, refined even more, in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, an example of “being in the world but not of the world.” How do we follow this example? We must constantly remind ourselves who we are, and who we are not, yet – where we are, and where we are not, yet. Not to show off and provoke or invoke some attention on ourselves, nor impose our self, individually or collectively, on others. We can constantly ask ourself: What is it I value? What is it I strive for? What is this life for? Is it for power, fame, wealth, domination of others; or nearness to Truth, to Love, to Mercy to Allah ﷻ? And what is it to love? How do you love properly and not improperly? How do you know what is a mercy and not a mercy? That should take a lifetime.

We should strive for the trust of Ibrahim ﷺ, the submission and perseverance of Nūh ﷺ, the faith and conviction of Musa ﷺ, the repentance of Adam ﷺ. What is it we treasure? What we treasure is where our attention is, and our attention is our intention. Our *muraaqabah* is a road to our heart, and our heart is the dwelling place, or where we find Allah ﷻ. As Allah ﷻ says, we will find Him in the heart of the believer.

Heavens and earth failed to contain Me, yet I am contained in the heart of a believer.

THE TEACHINGS OF PROPHET ISA ﷺ.

In the Injeel, there are many teachings that we can learn from and that resonate with our inner and outer way. For example, it is attributed that Jesus said, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Matthew 6:21) In our heart we can seek the spiritual wealth, not the wealth of this world. This is the spiritual poverty of the *faqeer*. To be of the *fugabaa'* is to find the spiritual wealth before material wealth. Prophet 'Isa ﷺ also said that there is another kind of spiritual poverty—one that we should seek. He said, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matthew 5:3) What did He mean? We must be humble in our spirit. In other words, when we come to Allah ﷻ, we must realize our spiritual emptiness and not be self-satisfied, thinking we don't really need Allah ﷻ.

In a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School two decades ago, Hans Küng pointed out that Islam provides a true witness to the life of Jesus —not the edited gentile Hellenistic version, but a genuine Semitic tradition that probably preserves the Jamesian perspective that was naturally closest to the reality of Jesus.

Evangelicals often work hard to learn scripture in Hebrew and Greek, but unless they actually learn and study the Quran in Arabic, they will never truly understand Jesus and his messianic mission, for the Quran in Arabic represents the oldest, least tampered tradition of Jesus. Closely reading verses of the Christian and Hebrew Bibles along with ayahs of the Quran can elucidate the plain meaning of all three texts and show unexpected connections.

This is the beginning of an interesting article by Joachim Martillo on language and the Bible, rather than go further into it now, I would be happy to share this with anyone interested.

It is enough though to say that the Beatitudes (especially when understood in their original language) present a new set of Christian ideals that focus on love and humility, rather than force and compelling. They echo the highest ideals of the teachings of Isa ﷺ on mercy, spirituality, and compassion. Built upon the Torah, they represent one of the cornerstones of the personal journey, only to be refined again and presented once again by Allah ﷻ in the revealed Qur'an and through the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (sal), beginning with the incredibly powerful and concentrated and vital foundational affirmation: *Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Rabeem*. This is the root of all the Names of Allah ﷻ, because Allah ﷻ says, it is clear. It doesn't say *Bismi-Llaahi-s-Sabuur* or *as-Salaam*. So we note that the Beatitudes are the Vulgate translation, and quite different from the Arabic.

Blessed are...

...the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:3)

...those who mourn: for they will be comforted. (5:4)

...the meek: for they will inherit the earth. (5:5)

...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled. (5:6)

...the merciful: for they will be shown mercy. (5:7)

...the pure in heart: for they will see God. (5:8)

Isa ﷺ and his character set the stage for the perfection of *akhlāq* of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This is the foundation. There are many more examples from Injeel of his character, and of efforts to refine the character of his followers. I'll just tell you the topics. Isa ﷺ was inclusive. He showed compassion toward social outsiders (lepers: Matthew 8:1-3, Luke 17:11; Mark 1:40-44); he protested gender inequality (Luke 10:38-42; Matthew 9:19-26; John 20:11-18). He embraced the excluded (Luke 18:15-17; Matthew 18: 1-7); and challenged cultural practices such as racism (John 4:1-42, Luke 10; 25-37, Matthew 9: 9-13). Isa ﷺ confronted the powerful, challenged unjust behavior. He confronted the spiritually arrogant and reordered political power (Luke 19; 1-10. Luke 6:1-11; Matthew 23: 1-3, 23-28, Mark 12: 13-17). And, as we have discussed already today, he was an advocate for the oppressed: for the poor, hungry, sick and imprisoned. (Luke 14:12-14, Matthew 25:31-46).

I offer these perspectives and references from the Injeel for the specific reason. This is the source of the Christian worlds' precepts or examples of behavior, behavior of their guide and teacher that should be followed, just as we strive to follow the example and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Just as we strive and should strive to follow the example and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and all those who came before, because we are told to do that. So too we should understand that Christians should be held to the standard of the Prophet Isa ﷺ. And they should hold us to our standard, too. This is the *adab* of brothers (and sisters) in faith, that we should know each other's teachings and help one another to live up to them. But Muslims don't know this. They don't know the teachings of the Injeel, and when you start to know them, they sound familiar. But the next step in that is we should be held to what we are told, and they should be held to what they are told. I published this online and in a few other places, and got some very interesting responses a couple of years ago when I put it up—mostly positive.

THE ADAB OF LISTENING

But let me return now to *adab* of the Prophets: One of the greatest *adabs* is the *adab* of listening. This is the first *adab* of every prophet. Every prophet must be quiet enough—inside and out—to hear, to hear the revelation, to hear the message of Allah, to hear the response to his call. This is the *adab* that the Prophet Isa ﷺ displayed and fostered in others—from his birth, when he first spoke and created a context for listening; and in the years of his

prophethood, when he traveled and spoke and listened to the poor, and sick, and downtrodden. When people weren't listening, what did he say to Simon Peter? I'll put it in American idiom. He said, "Let's get out of here." He's in a boat, on the Sea of Galilee. He said, "Let's go to Damascus, because all they want to see is miracles. They don't really want to hear what I really have to say." That's the English version. You can read it in the fancy version, which was written by a bunch of monks somewhere a few thousand years later. What are we being told? Listen. He speaks, and clears his mother's record. The people won't believe it if somebody else tells them, or if it is written down. They probably wouldn't believe it if it was written in the sky. They will believe it from the lips of a newborn.

This *adab* is the ability or attentiveness to listen to the spoken Divine word, diverting one's hearing from listening to the *nafs* and the *'alam al-khalq* (created world), and instead paying attention to the *'alam al amr* and the Divine commandments. It requires turning away from the *'alam al khalq* and the whisperings of the world, at least for a period of time every day. It is to pay attention. This example can be seen again in the story of Maryam who, rather than run to her family or ask for help, secluded herself during the time of her pregnancy and sought refuge in Allah ﷻ. It is also found in the example of Prophet Musa ﷺ and the burning bush, which spoke to him in the speech of the pre-existent time, pre-eternity. It spoke the words, "**Verily I am Allah.**" It is the example of Yusuf ﷺ, who listened to the meaning of his dreams; and the example of Ibrahim ﷺ, who listened to the command from Allah ﷻ, and to his son; and, of course, it is the example of our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the cave on Mount Hira.

To hear, one must first be quiet and listen. "*Labatu samt,*" the Prophet ﷺ is told—*dhikru-Llah*. Be quiet. Remember. Learn. Let's remember this word *dhikr*. If I say to most Muslims, "What does *dhikr* mean?" They say, "Remembrance." What's another meaning of it? To penetrate, even to the point of drawing blood. And what is the womb of the mother? *Rahm*. It is the same root as mercy and compassion. What happens in the act of creation? We are told that at the moment of conception, we should be remembering Allah ﷻ. We have something we are supposed to say. The penetration takes place. It's very profoundly scientific. And the baby is born. So the word of Allah ﷻ to the breath given by Jibreel ﷺ penetrates her womb. What do you think the word might be? Was it just breath? Maybe he said something. Maybe he said "*Hu*." Maybe he said "Allah." I don't know. But I bet he didn't just (blow out his breath).

Reading the Qur'an, speaking the truth, or enjoining to do good, during worship or at other times, one must quiet the "noise" of the mouth and the mind, quiet the opinions and desires, the doubts and worries to the point where you can begin to hear. What are we hearing? We are hearing the voice of our own soul. To listen is to be aware that even one's tongue or someone else's tongue can be a conduit to convey the Divine words in the form of speech, so your ears can hear it—*samd*. In order to understand the Divine words of the Qur'an, one has to give up listening to all the others. When the Qur'an is read, we should listen and be quiet in our hearts, and receive the Mercy of it. When we look at the Prophet Isa ﷺ, who is an archetype of good *adab*, and when we look at what he said and did throughout his life (even as an infant), and at how his mother treated him, and at how he spoke to his followers, we can see why Allah chose him to be this example of love and of hidden secrets, hidden truths—*kebafee*. How is it hidden? In the ground? It's hidden by our own noise, and what else we are listening to. It's hidden by what else we are looking at. We all know that the best secret is the one that is right in front of you.

In the language of these prophets, we see that when they speak to Allah or about Allah, they are fully aware of the blessings that have come to them. In that love, lovers keep safe in their hearts their secrets. The secrets of that love can never be uttered. If you really love someone, a person, and they say to you, "How much do you love me, my dear?" You say, "I don't know. How can I tell you? A lot! Too much. More than I can say." What do you say? Even as human being to human being, how do you answer the question? "I love you as much as you love me and a little more." *Allahu Akbar*. It's in the comparative: greater than that. The secrets of that love can never be uttered. The deeper the love, there are no words to utter it. The Divine secrets, hidden in that *mahabbat*, through that *adab*, are another form of *adab*. That is how Divine secrets are kept, in the heart; that is the source of the inner strength of the Prophets. Because *adab* is not just how you behave outwardly; it is the protection around the secret of love.

Just think about the people you know – maybe your *shaykh*, my *shaykh* – who have such good *adab*. It's like they choose to open up a window, and love just oozes out of it. There is nothing you doubt, no question. That *adab* is a protection – the womb over the love, the words. So too, you see the Qur'an has a cover. We say that you cannot buy the Qur'an; you can only purchase the cover, the protection of it. But where is the essence of it? Inside the cover.

INNER REFLECTIONS OF THE AMBIYAA' (IBN ARABY)

If we want to understand something more inward about Prophet Isa ﷺ, something more than his life and the differences between himself and between Christianity and Islam, a good place to look is Ibn Araby. His perspective is fairly basic: that each of the saints / *walis* of Allah, all of the *shuyukh* (all of the *awliyaa'u-Llaah*), take their *maqam* at some point from one of the prophets. We look at it vis-a-vis the *lataa'if*. Each *lateefah* has a prophet, and a color, etc. Prophet Adam ﷺ, Prophet Enoch ﷺ, Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ, Prophet Daoud ﷺ, Prophet Musa ﷺ, the Prophet Isa ﷺ, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon all of them) all have their identities with one of the previous prophets.

In Ibn Araby's view, every age must have at least 124,000 friends of Allah—one heir for each prophet. The prophetic inheritances delineate the possible modes of authentic experience and correct knowledge of Allah, the universe, and the human soul. In other words, to attain true knowledge, one must know and act in accordance with the paradigm of human perfection embodied in a prophet. No one comes to know things as they are without these Divinely appointed intermediaries.

Herein lies perhaps one of the incentives to sit in *muraaqabah* and to come to realize the dominant prophet of your soul. What we need to do is study their lives, as we are doing this year, to understand each one's unique characteristics and role. We need to understand ourselves, to identify ourselves with those qualities. For that we have to reflect, and we have to sit in *muraaqabah*. And we come to know what aspects that we need to refine, in order to change ourselves. Knowing that, we now come into resonance with one of the *ambiyaa'*. When one looks in one's heart and sees the reflection of the *ambiyaa'* of Allah ﷻ, there is something that will attract your attention, and you will see that certain qualities or aspects of your own self are to be manifest through your identification with the specific prophet. Again Shaykh ul Akbar says,

Sometimes as death approaches, the prophet from whom the person has inherited will be disclosed to him. As the Prophet Mubammed said, "The possessors of knowledge are heirs to the prophets." Hence, as death approaches, he will see Jesus, Moses, Ibrahim, Mubammed, or some other prophet. And some of them may pronounce the name of the prophet from whom they have inherited in joy, when he comes to them, for the messengers are all among the felicitous. And while passing, such a person will say, "Jesus," or will call out "Messiah...." or will call out, "Musa" or "Mubammad ﷺ." Those present will hear the friend of Allah speak words of this sort and become suspicious, saying, "At death he became a Christian!" Or "A Muslim!" Or he would name Moses and [they would believe] that he became a Jew. But this person is one of the greatest possessors of felicity in Allah's eyes, for the common people never know this locus of witnessing, the lateefah that is his or her doorway to the next stage of existence. Only the people of Allah, the possessors of the unveilings know in their own soul.

Those of us who take the purity and sanctity and elevation of the *ambiyaa'* seriously understand this tendency is important. It is clear in doing that, one is not leaving Islam. Quite the contrary, we are affirming Islam. And we don't say a person cannot achieve some level of sanctity or purity through Christianity or Judaism, or that only Sufis reach nearness to Allah through Islam. Ibn Araby again says, "(Jesus) was my first teacher, the master through whom I returned to Allah." Even preceding his study of Sufic texts, with living teachers, and with his visions and dreams of saints in the *'alam al khayal* / the imaginal world, he wrote,

It was and is at Isa's hands that I converted, turned to Allah and the spiritual path. He prayed for me that I should persist in the Deen, and in this low world / dunya, and in the other. And he called me his beloved, and he ordered me to practice renunciation and self-denial.

As a result of the influence of Isa ﷺ, Shaykh al Akbar, a great Muslim saint, renounced the world for 18 years. The *awliyaa'u-Llaah* all have certain similar characteristics. The Prophet Isa ﷺ, as too with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, saw the best in all people and in all circumstances, despite their outer form or appearance. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ knew which characteristics and qualities represented the other *ambiyaa'*. He referred to them, as we do today when we say, "that person has the wisdom of Solomon," or "his poetry is like the songs of Daoud," or "she has the patience of Job." We say these things. But do we understand what it means?

On our *sayr-i-suluk*, we should understand that when we are experiencing certain qualities, we are accompanied by that prophet. In moments of compassion, it is the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ; in the moments of seeing the beauty in all things, the Prophet Isa ﷺ. They are your companions on the way. Certain of the *awliyaa'u-Llaah* inherit a kind of spirituality of sanctity from that particular prophet. What is most important is that those saints' lives, poetry, writings, words resemble the prophets. They bring out to us a sense of that. Even if we don't know what prophet it is, we sense a presence.

DEATH, ASCENSION AND RETURN

As I come toward the end of my talk today, I will return to the chronology of the life of the Prophet Isa ﷺ, and hopefully also reflect on the lessons and meanings we can take with us from his example. When the Prophet Isa ﷺ was 33 years old, only three years after he began teaching, the power-hungry among the offspring of Israel plotted to kill him. Ibn Abi Hatim and an-Nasa'iyy narrated from the words of Ibn Abbas the following account:

Prophet Isa ﷺ was in session with twelve of his elite companions in a house. He told them that among them would be one who would blaspheme in the future. Then he asked them, "Who among you would want to be made to look like me, be killed in my place, and be my companion in Paradise." The youngest among them stood up and said, "Me." Prophet Isa ﷺ told him to sit, then repeated his same question. Again, the same young man said, "Me." Again, Prophet Isa ﷺ told him to sit, then again asked the same question. After the same young man volunteered for the third time, Prophet Isa ﷺ received the Revelation that this young man would be the one who would be made to look like him and killed instead of him. Prophet Isa ﷺ was raised to the sky from an opening in the ceiling of the house. When the Jews came after Prophet Isa ﷺ, they saw that young man whom Allah made to look like Isa ﷺ. They took him, thinking he was Prophet Isa ﷺ, and crucified him.

Of course, the crucifixion is a central part of Christian theology, and there have been various debates in the Islamic community about the death of the Prophet Isa ﷺ and its significance. But Allah ﷻ says clearly and addresses this in Qur'an, in Surah an-Nisaa:

...MĀ ṢĀLABŪHU WA LĀKIN SHUBBIHA LAHUM WA'INNA-LLADHĪNA IKHṬALAFŪ FĪHI LAFĪ SHAKKIM-MINHU MĀ LAHUM BIHI MIN ʿILMIN ILLĀ ITTIBĀʿA-Dh-DhANNI WA MĀ QATALŪHU YAQĪNĀ.

BAL RAFAʿAHU-LLĀHU ILAYHI WA KĀNA-LLĀHU ʿAZĪZAN ḤAKĪMĀ.

...They neither killed him nor did they crucify him, but it only appeared so to them, and truly those who differ are filled with doubts. They have no real knowledge of it, just conjecture. And for

certain they did not kill him—rather Allah raised him to Himself. And Allah is Exalted, Wise.
[4:157-158]

Whether we look at it from the *nasut* and *lahut*, or in another way, still we have to deal with this issue, the difference between Isa and Jesus, and the way we feel and relate to this prophet. Just as with his miraculous birth, the end of his life is also known only by Allah ﷻ and must be accepted on faith. Rather than conjecture and doubt about what is possible, what is logical, or “what really happened,” we are shown by Allah ﷻ a way of Truth that is part of a great and miraculous universe, greater than our comprehension. If we leave this story with nothing but the understanding that we cannot fully understand, we’ve understood something very important. When we look with eyes that see at the universe around us, we see miracles all around us. We begin to understand that the birth of every healthy child is a miracle, the last breath of every person a gift, food on our table each day a blessing and sign from Allah. Do the explanations of science or logic or history make those miracles any less miraculous?

So, too, we are told that there are unexplained ends in our future, and that the Prophet Isa ﷺ will return to preside over them. It is told that He will descend to earth before the Day of Judgment, and his descent will be one of the great signs of the nearing of that Day. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed us that Isa ﷺ will descend to earth at a place on the eastern side of Damascus, with his hands on the wings of two angels. He will meet a group of Muslims getting ready to perform the prayer with the Mahdi as their *imam*. The Mahdi will ask Prophet Isa ﷺ to lead them in that prayer; however, Isa ﷺ will ask the Mahdi to stand *imam* for them—as a sign that Prophet Isa ﷺ will rule with the rules revealed to Prophet Muhammad, the final Prophet. After this one time, Isa ﷺ will lead the people in prayers. He will kill the Dajjal (Anti-Christ). He will perform Hajj, and travel to visit the grave of the Prophet to salute him, and to greet him by saying, “*As-salaamu alaykum yaa rasuul Allah,*” as narrated by Abu Dawud at-Tayalisiyya and others.

During his time, the people of Ya’juj and Ma’juj will appear and cause great destruction to the earth and devastation to the Muslims. Prophet Isa ﷺ will take the believers to Mount at-Tur to supplicate Allah there to relieve them from these people. Allah will answer their *du’aa’* and destroy all the people of Ya’juj and Ma’juj. After that, Prophet Isa ﷺ will rule the Muslims and there will be a time when peace, comfort, and safety will prevail. Prophet Isa ﷺ will live for forty (40) years on earth after he descends. He will marry and have children. Then, he will die and be buried. Abdullah Ibn Salam said, “*It is written in the original Torah that Prophet Isa will be buried next to Prophet Muhammad.*” In a sense, we can say that at the time of the *masih*/messiah, the return of the Prophet Isa ﷺ, and the prayers uttered before the Mahdi are the compilation that comes in the Prophet Muhammad that is the Muhammadan light. It is the Nur-i-Muhammad made manifest. The last brick has been placed in the building. That last brick is the last brick of knowledge, of understanding. It is the keystone that holds the arch.

THE TEMPLATE FOR TRUST

What does this mean for us, here, today? Why is it important to know and to believe this? What we see in these *Ambiyaa’* are the models, the prototypes, or the templates for all of the *mureedeen*, for all of us who follow. Teachers exist for a reason. Templates exist for trust, for sacrifice, for submission, for service. What we can do is become lovers of Allah ﷻ. Lovers of Allah are lovers of all the prophets; and lovers of all the prophets are lovers of all those who follow those prophets. Lovers of all those who follow those prophets are people who have the qualities of those prophets: the patience of Job ﷺ, the perseverance of Noah ﷺ, the devotion and trustworthiness of Ibrahim ﷺ, the vision, strength, and power of Musa ﷺ and Haruun ﷺ, the love of Prophet Isa ﷺ, and the compassion and mercy of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings on all of them).

We can go into the parallels between people, between the mother of Musa ﷺ and the mother of Isa ﷺ, between the sacrifice of Isa ﷺ and the sacrifice of Ibrahim ﷺ. There are many parallels; the point comes again to the fact that Allah ﷻ repeats these cycles, and everything is analogous. There are certain basic lessons that we must learn to be successful in our return to Allah ﷻ: lessons of trust in the face of disbelief, of submission to the Will of Allah ﷻ,

of patience with challenges and suffering. If you don't see the story here, you can see it there. If you don't see it there, you see it over here. Eventually, we will see the aggregate of all the lessons and examples in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—the last brick in the building. This last brick is the keystone in the arch. I'm not saying that because I'm a Muslim. I'm a Muslim because it was shown to me.

Certainly, among all these prophets we find no little suffering. The Prophet Adam ﷺ suffers from falling. Prophet Noah ﷺ suffers from 950 years of frustration and seeing the loss of his family. Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ has to walk through fire, and then suffers at the thought of the sacrifice of his son. Prophet Musa ﷺ suffers from being separated from his mother; being in the Pharaoh's court, kills a man, and then has to wander in the desert for forty years. Prophet Isa ﷺ suffers from being betrayed, and being outcast, and doubting. Is it suffering? It seems to be. But what is the prophet experiencing in that moment? In reality, he doesn't suffer, because he has taken all of this compassion and all of this ability to see the good. It has become congealed in him; it becomes his being. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a lover and the Beloved of Allah ﷻ. All of these prophets accept and welcome, at some point, all the things that come to them because they come from the Beloved.

INNA MA'A-L-'USRI YUSRĀ.

With hardship goeth ease.

Just as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ prays to Allah ﷻ, so does Isa ﷺ pray to Allah ﷻ. Those who choose justice over injustice, or right over wrong, or Truth over lies, knowing that their life is to be taken for it are indeed the people by whose light darkness flees, by whose absence, presence comes and is replaced. It is replaced in the sense that one knows the nuances of their *lataa'if*, their subtleties of their bodies, the subtleties of their life. One can direct the light of the prophet through your body, through your capillaries, through your veins, through all the resources that your body has. If you bathe yourself in the truth, Allah ﷻ opens doors to us. Knowledge comes to us. The circuitry becomes complete. The light comes on. It's called knowledge / *ma'rifah*, *haqeeqah*, understanding.

These prophets represent a dynamic, living process. There is no quid pro quo in the *dunya*. There is no redemptive suffering. One changes because of their own will, their own submission to Allah ﷻ, their own good actions, their own faith, their own trust. There is no savior. We have to understand that when we are looking at the Prophet 'Isa ﷺ and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, we are looking at people, but we are also looking at what they believe. Until you know why you believe what you believe, until you understand why these prophets are linked together and why the Prophet ﷺ is the final prophet, [you will not understand] that the onus of all spirituality lays on us. It is not that Allah ﷻ is absent, but Allah ﷻ becomes present through our *shuyukh* and through other *awliya'u-L-Jaab*.

If you don't find Allah ﷻ within your own self, then you cannot find Allah ﷻ; because Allah ﷻ says, "That is where I live." If you can't open the door to your own heart, who can open it? Nobody can find Allah ﷻ for you. You can do many things. When we discover the precocious sacredness of a moment, we have to be prepared to seize it, and to savor it, knowing that we do not know the past or the future as Allah ﷻ does. Every moment and every breath belongs to Allah ﷻ, and He can and will recall us to Him at the moment of His choosing—as He did with His Beloved Servant Isa ﷺ.

CLOSING DU'AA

***Allahumma Rabba-s-samawati-s-sabi
wa Rabba-l-Arshi-l-Adheem:
Rabba-na wa Rabba kulli shai':***

*Munazzila 't-Tawrati wa 'l-Injili wa' l-Furqan,
Faliqa 'l-habbi wa 'n-nawa
A'udhu bi-ka min sharri kulli dhi sharr:
Wa min Sharri kulli dabbatin anta Akhidhun Bi-nasiyati-ha*

O Allah, Lord of the Seven Heavens
and Lord of the Mighty Throne,
Our Lord and the Lord of everything,
Revealer of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Criterion,
Splitter of the grain and the date-stone,
I take refuge with You from the evil
of everything capable of evil,
And from the evil of every crawling creature that You are grasping by its forelock.

*Subhana-Llaahi wa-l-hamdu li-Llaahi
Wa laa ilaaha illa-Llaahu
Wa-Llaahu Akbar*

Glory be to Allah, and Praise be to Allah,
And there is no god but Allah,
And Allah is Supremely Great

**BISMI-LLĀHI-R-RAḤMĀNI-R-RAḤĪM
ĀMANA-R-RASŪLU BIMĀ UŅZILA
ILAYHI MIR-RABBIHI WA-L-MU'MINŪN**

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful
and the All-Compassionate
The Messenger believes in that which has been sent down
to him from his Lord, as so do the believers. (2:285)