



[Tanzil, Ta'wil, and Tajalli – Part 4](#)

The Ta'wil of Salat and the  
 Transformative Process of the Suluk

We know that the winds of *fitna* are blowing across the world, and we are on the front lines here trying to do some good. And we ask Allah Swt to give us the strength, and the ethic, and the morality, and the will, *inshā'a-Llāh*, to do good, and help us *inshā'a-Llāh* to appreciate the path that we are on, and to understand that what Allah has given to us is given to very few people. As unworthy as we all may be, it has been given to us, at least a doorway into this path. So we ask Allah Swt to help us to overcome whatever biases, fears, and prejudices we may have that stand in the way of taking advantage of what has been offered to us, and is continuously being offered to us, and given to us to use, and to help us grow, and to *inshā'a-Llāh* give to our children. We ask Allah to protect those who are traveling today, and help us to remember to do His will as best as we can, and to seek his forgiveness for our errors, *inshā'a-Llāh*.

In the previous *dars*, I was talking to you about *ta'wil* of *salat* / *namaz*, and about the time of ritual prayers based on different references in Qur'an. I think I ended somewhere talking about the six major prophets, and the significance of the five pillars of Islam, and of the 5 prophets preceding the Prophet Mohammed (sal), and that these prophets also represent the *latā'if*: *qalb*, *rūh*, *sirr*, *khafī*, and *akhfā*. I also mentioned Amir Khusru, who spoke of the *ta'wil* of the stages of time: beginning, middle, and end. The beginning stage symbolizes the prophet who brings revelation to us. The middle stage stands for the interpreter of the meaning of these revelations, and the last stage stands for the outer and inner, where the outer and inner are blended together. I want to continue to finish what I wanted to say about

the *ta'wil* of *salat*, and the *dhahir* and the *batin*, and how to transcend the limitations of time and space, if you will.

If we want to understand what transcends the *tafsir*, the exegesis, when we are studying Qur'an, we are talking about a process of cyclical understanding. At the primary level, we are talking about rituals and principles and doctrines of Islam found in Qur'an, and explicated in a much larger way in Hadith. They reflect history and culture. In so doing, they reflect the history of three different communities: the Jewish, the Christian, and the Islamic. But there are other stages. The second stage is when you begin to realize there is meaning behind all these rituals. There is meaning behind the principles and the doctrine. We transcend just the mere ritual of doctrine, and begin to understand the levels of meaning beyond the history of what is constrained by time. Remember the *tanzil* versus the *ta'wil*. *Tanzil* is the revelation that, like the chrysalis, is metamorphized by the *ta'wil*.

It is a mystical understanding, not just a theoretical interpretation that I have been trying to impart. It is something far beyond the normal exegetical process: the caterpillar becoming a chrysalis, the chrysalis becoming a butterfly. This metamorphosis and metaphor allows each seeker as one who is submitted and seeking real knowledge, an opportunity to understand, identify with, and resonate with the essential meaning revealed in Qur'an. After all, who of us wouldn't want to read Qur'an and understand it in the most depth every time we read it? Not one of us would say we don't want to have that. Since it is a gift-giving, endlessly-giving Reality, just to think that every time we can approach it, not only externally, we have all had the experience that we can learn something new, get a new understanding or idea. But with *ta'wil*, we can soar to the heights and dive to the depths.

I gave an example of music at one point, playing it exactly as the composer wrote it. I told you the story of the children here. You can get a sense of the moment the composer wrote it. I want you to blend this *dars* and this lesson with what I told you about auditory resonance. You really are there. When Allah says, “**Remember Me,**” you can’t remember something you never knew. He didn’t say, “Find Me or look for Me.” He said, “**Remember Me.**” The key to knowing yourself is to remember your Lord, which means you must have had some experience with Allah Swt. Put these two concepts together in your mind, and really contemplate the concepts of this *trans-tafsir* reality; it’s a mystical understanding. In fact, you are remembering something that you not only knew, but you knew from its very beginning.

In fact, we know from Qur’an that Allah Swt gathered all the souls before time, and asked them who will be the *khalifa* of this? Who will accept this *amanat*? We know this, if we accept what we have been taught and told in Hadith. There are certain things we take for granted from an historical point of view, like we pray toward the Ka’aba, but what about the concept of the *qibla* itself? It was originally pointing toward Jerusalem, Dar as-Salaam, Al Quds. The *qibla* is a point of orienting ourselves for prayer. Allah says in Al Qur’an, “**Set your face to Al Deen as a monotheist.**” A teacher on this subject pointed out that at one point, this is a point of orientation to the *hanif*.

What is a *hanif*? A monotheist. Like who? Like the Prophet Adam (as), like the Prophet Ibrahim (as). They oriented themselves toward the Ka’aba or Al Quds? Which one? And their prayers were not exactly like our prayers, were they? It hadn’t been revealed how to pray. They oriented themselves to a more mystical place in a more mystical sense. If you want to understand the *ta’wil* of this ‘*āyat*, it’s saying that the Prophet (sal) is an object to focus on for us. It is through the Prophet

(sal) that one turns and faces Allah Swt. It has another meaning. If you are on a camel, which way do you pray? You pray wherever the camel is facing. If in your heart, you are praying through Rasūlu-Llāh (sal), you are always, no matter which direction you are praying, you are praying in the right direction. You turn toward the Prophet (sal) in your heart. He (sal) tells us that Allah is in the heart, and we have him as our guide. Allah says, **“You will find Me in the heart of the believer.”** Depending on which school of thought you come from, you understand that there is this *tasawwur* or *rābita* of Rasūlu-Llāh (sal). You turn through the line coming from the Prophet (sal) back toward Allah Swt just as the Prophet (sal) turns his face toward the community of believers.

It is through that one attains the *batin* of the Dīn. It’s affirmed in the Prophet’s own lifetime. The *dhahir* is established to serve as a means for our community after his death. Those who come after him in the outer are the means to the inner. He said, **“I leave you my *ahl al bayt*.”** He leaves his family as a means / *wasila*. It’s affirmed by his life, about what will happen in his death. According to different teachers of our line and other *shuyukh*, there are different ways of looking at the prayer. For example, Nasr al Khusru said there were seven. I can talk about one of those seven as an example.

He said that the first one is *takbir*. How many of you make *takbir* every day? Anyone not going to raise their hand? What is the inner meaning of it? It symbolizes the taking of the pledge of the *mu’min*: Allahu Akbar. What is the *ta’wil* of this? A person who becomes a believer, and who really believes through experience, is silent and concentrates their attention fully on the performance of the prayer. In the same way, a *mu’min* from whom the pledge has been taken should manifest his or her search for the *batin* openly, because people would

misunderstand or misconstrue what they are saying and doing. So what is of the *batin* should remain silent. Do you see the parallel? You make a silent intention for your prayer, don't you? It is just like we make an intention for every day of Ramadan. Before you make your prayer, do you take 2 seconds to make *niyyat* for your prayer? There is the silent part of prayer, whether it's a silent prayer or not. Every prayer has a silent part to it, doesn't it? Have you thought about it that way before? *Inshā'a-llāh*, you have; but if not, now you can see the *ta'wil* of prayer. To establish that silence, what happens? What punctuates the silence? The *takbir*. You make your intention for prayer, and then you say, "Allahu akbar."

In the same way, the sincere student on the path doesn't divulge their inner pursuit to just anyone because people will misunderstand their words and motives. Mansur al Hallaj is a really good example of that. He said, "An al Haqq!" and they cut off his hands and his limbs because they said he was *munafiq*. He was just expressing something he was feeling, but he made the mistake to utter it. He came to a conclusion that everyone on the path who attains to the highest level of it understands. The "I" is not the same "I" everybody else is associating with.

The second one is *qiyam*. You are standing, and in that, you are making the affirmation of the believer to stand by your pledge, to stand by your *dīn*, your religion, by the *amanat*, to stand by your *ba'iat* / covenant, and not be distracted from it. This is what is happening during prayer. Standing means something. It means you are standing by your pledge to Allah Swt—your pledge, the pledge of your soul, and all the souls who are gathered. People used to say to me, "I didn't promise to Allah that I would be a steward of the creation!" Yes. All the souls to ever be born were gathered before creation. Guess what? You were there. This is what is

happening during prayer. You are standing by that covenant. You understand how *ta'wil* works in terms of this.

The third is reciting of the Fatihah, and one more surah. It also symbolizes a communication with the whole of the community. That is, you are speaking something not just to the *jamat*, but to the whole of the *ummah*. You are reciting something and conveying to the whole community the meaning of faith. And you are “elaborating it for them in your actions and belief” when you say al-Fatihah and another ‘*āyat*’ from Qur’an. You are affirming the faith of all the *ummah*, not just your faith. You are speaking of the “we.” How do we know that? Because in the *fard* prayer there are two parts to every prayer. In one part of the prayer, you are an element of the whole *ummah*, because you are standing shoulder to shoulder. You are moving in unison. But Allah says also there is your personal place with Allah Swt, so now we have the *sunnah*. It’s not in the same rhythm.

I have wanted to do this for a long time, but I haven’t found the mathematician to do it. I wanted to create an algorithm that visually shows in animation everyone praying across the world at one time. Anybody want to take that job on? You raise your hand, but understand what it means. Not everybody is choosing the same ‘*āyat*’ of Qur’an to recite, so you can start off and assume Surah al-Fatihah, but not at the same speed. The algorithm has to be so flexible it’s going to impose a constant variation in time. Every time you play that visual, it’s going to deviate in its frequency and sequence. What would you see, rolling across the world, like a wave? That’s the two parts of prayer. There is a third part, the *nafle*.

You have the *fard*, the *sunnah*, and the *nafle*. Why is the *nafle* different than the *sunnah*? The *sunnah* is encouraged. It’s expected on some level, though not *fard*, but

it's not really totally superogatory. Now what you have is three intentions to pray, or three dimensions of your intention to pray, when you make that intention. You are speaking in the *jamat* for the whole *ummah*; you are speaking as you are encouraged to speak to continue your faith and deepen it by the example of Rasūlullāh (sal), and the Sahabha, and the *taba'in*, and the *taba-taba'in*, and the *imams*. And now it's all up to you. What more do you want? This is the inner of the inner, *ta'wil* of the prayer. You are affirming the faith.

This is a responsibility that we all accept when we pray. A responsibility—that means something comes in my direction. I am a trustee of it. There are certain responsibilities, if I'm running a trust, right? And I'm held accountable in law for that trust, am I not? De jure. I'm accountable because I've accepted the *amanat*. I am held accountable because I have to distribute the wealth. I have to oversee what that will is. What will? *Irada*. When we leave a will, we leave an intention [for it] to be distributed in some way. It was my will. Are you willing to be my counselor for my will? Are you willing to do that? Will you bring your will with my will. I know what you're thinking. I know what you are reciting in your head: "I will with my will, my will is Thy will, I will with all my heart and soul." I hear you! And he says, "Yes." This is in *dunya*.

The *ta'wil* of this *dunya* reality I am telling you: *irada*. And if he says yes, he's not just helping me out because he's going to get a fee for it. What does that mean? He's responsible to a higher authority called the law. To us, the law is not the *shar'iah*. Don't misunderstand that. The law is Allah Swt that manifests through a structure. He's responsible to al-Adl, to do justice. We say in English: "You have to do me justice in this." "Do justice to the situation. Give your best to it." Even English has some deep things in it. "He really did justice to that work." Or, "That's a beautiful

photograph. You really did justice to that person.” You represent it properly. What does a lawyer say? “I will represent you in court.” What does ‘represent’ mean in English? “I will re-present the situation for you in the best way that I can, so that it reflects the truth (unless you are a corrupt lawyer!) And the truth shall make you free. You don’t have to say, “I am the guardian of the truth,” the truth is the guardian of you.

*Ruku* symbolizes the recognition of the inner meaning of everything. In *ruku* you are bowing down and recognizing there is a deeper meaning. During that bowing, you begin a momentary journey of disaffirming your physicality, of losing your awareness of the physical world. You are turning away, physically, from reality. Yet you have to keep your balance. Then you stand, and you stand by what you have said. You bow and say, “Here I am. I am bowing before You”—don’t think it; this is what is happening. “And now I stand before you.”

She’s Japanese (referring to one of the students in the assembly). If I just do like this (a very slight bow of the head and shoulder), she immediately bows her head. We play a game some time. She walks in, I bow. She immediately bows lower than me. Then I bow lower, and she bows lower. I get down on the floor, and she gets down on the floor, which is Japanese. What is she saying in the bowing? It’s a language, a form of communication. Then you stand by what you have said, and you go into *sujud*, which is a recognition of the cycle of creation and dissolution. Go back to the beginning. This is not just a metaphor. There is something in what I am telling you. When we pray, we should take the time for our bones to rest. It is Hadith. What happens? Can you not feel it when you take the time in prayer to let your bones rest in each position? Don’t you feel like an opening happens, a space is created?

We say the cycles of the Mujaddid (the Shi'a say the cycle of the *imams*), the cycle of creation is where you recognize that you are part of a transformative cycle that's happening outside of us and inside of us. It's been expressed in history as a recurring cycle of the prophets, the teachings of the *imams*; the cycle of each of the *shuyukh* and what they teach. And, there is the recognition in the *tashahhud* of the Deen, the transmission of the message—repeated, cycled. Even that has a meaning. Some don't like it; some don't do it. *Lā ilāha illa-Llāhu. Lā ilāha illa-Llāh ant.* Then we say, "*Asalaamu aleykum, wa rahmatullahe.*" That's the permission to manifest now by words what we have just said, the conversation we've just had internally with Allah Swt. We are saying that conversation is now ended: thank you, goodbye.

How many of you when you walk into an empty house, especially at night, say "*Asalaamu aleykum?*" Do you say it because you were culturally told to say it? (I feel a presence). (*Jinns*, maybe?) Yes, because the *jinn* want to be in your presence, especially the Muslim *jinn*. If you leave a door or window open, they want to be there so you greet them. "Oh, that's silly; crazy." Okay, well, then Allah's crazy; the prophet's crazy, because it's in Qur'an. The *jinn* are around. What's the *ta'wil* of that? There are many, many dimension in life, and it's our job because of the *amanat* to recognize them and give validity to them, so they don't feel invalid. Not because they are going to be mischievous or something, but because we are the ones who are given the task of validating their existence.

Say, we know you are present. We are remembering that you are present. When we build a building here, either I or, someone goes and tells a *jinn*: we are going to be moving into this area, and if you don't mind, please pick up and move somewhere else. They can build their cities somewhere else. They especially like the lowland, near water. So if you are afraid of *jinn*, don't go down to the water. That's the

permission to manifest by words, by conversation, and by actions our faith, to say that now we can speak again, now we can act again in the *dunya*. The silence has ended, and we are going to converse with each other. We have purified ourselves. The words we want out of our mouths are going to be better words, and the actions we are going to have are going to be better actions, and we are going to begin again.

We can go through a higher level. We can now speak of the *dīn* not just as a *dīn*, but we can act and serve in accordance with that *dīn*. We can speak to people, and call them to Islam, *dawa*, but not by saying, "Come be Muslims! Come be Muslims! Come here so I can shove this book down your throat!" "See me? I'm the perfect Muslim. You are going to look like me, have a beard like me, have a dress like me. Your *thobe* is going to be the same length as mine." This is NOT calling people to Islam. First, we have to go back and remember what Islam is. We went through it this whole weekend. What is Islam? Form or meaning? What is Islam? It is safety, security, trust, and submission, *at-tazkiyat*/ purification. This is the *dawa*.

The *dawa* is to understand that everybody, at some level – some people at a higher level, and other people at an even higher level – you heard last night in our discussion that some people came to the path because they had yearning and yearned to know more about spirituality, and other reasons. Everybody is seeking at some level, and *dawa* is to respond to that call. *Dawa* is *their* calling, and we are responding; not we are calling, and they are responding. We can call: "Hello? Anybody there?" "I'm here." That's fine. You call by being a good person, by giving the message of goodness, by sacrifice, service, faith, because we have cleansed ourselves for a moment, and we are back on track.

Another thing of this *ta'wil* of *salat* is it is five times a day. Allah Swt knew that people were going to get "dirty," tainted. It is not once a day. It's not going to synagogue once a day if you are orthodox, or once a week if you are reformed. It's not going to church on Sunday. He said – how many times [a day to pray]...? It was not five. It was fifty, and then down, and down, and down, until it gets down to five. But every time it gets down, it's a bigger responsibility. If your wife keeps telling you every five minutes, "Take out the trash, it's still at the front door! You haven't taken it out yet!" We need this reminder. You are getting old and forgetful; and you don't feel like going down to the trash place.

So this is *ta'wil* of *salat*. When you complete that, the whole thing also represents something else: your whole journey, your whole sojourn called the *sayr al suluk*. Certain orders think there is no *sayr al suluk*, but we are all on *sayr al suluk*. It's just not looked at in exactly the same way. After all, you are born, and you change, and you choose a family, a career, and a place to live. We are all journeyers. We all, as Muslims and as people of *tariqah*, want to make that journey meaningful. So there is *sayr al suluk*. We are striving to fulfill that inner *suluk*. To do that, we have to recognize the steps along the way. The *ta'wil* of the steps within the *salat* is that they are stages in a journey, just like the *sayr al suluk* of each one of us as individuals. Each of us individually are making the prayer, and each one of our souls journey from its inception back to its Lord in search for the inner truth of the faith, and for the inner mysteries of Islam and Tasawwuf. It's not just the outer form we are looking for; we are looking at the software that runs that hardware called life.

The essence of that interpretation is summed up in the following way by Nasr al Khusru. Think of what he says in the terms of I just described to you.

*The dhahir of prayer consists of adoring Allah with postures of the body, and directing the body toward the qibla of the body, which is the Ka'aba, the temple of the most high situated in Mecca. (Qalb, protected by the ribs... protected by mountains... in the holy Ka'aba.) To understand the esoteric prayer, ta'wil al batin, means adoring Allah with the thinking soul, and turning towards the quest of the gnosis of the Book, and the gnosis of the marifat of positive religion toward the qibla of the spirit, which is the temple of Allah, and that temple in which the Divine knowledge is enclosed. I mean the Imam in Truth, salutations to him.*

Of course, Imam Khusru was speaking in those terms because he was Shi'a, talking about the Imam in Truth, the occluded Imam, the Twelfth Imam. We can also call him the *qutb*. Or you could say, because we have even more respect for Imam Ali after this weekend, *inshā'a-Llāh*, Imam Ali. But it doesn't matter. It means the real truth: the purity, the real *masūm*, the real infallibility. And you can say it's Rasūlu-Llāh (sal), because he is the manifestation of that light, chosen by Allah to create that family through which all things resolve back to. And we are of that family in Tasawwuf. Do you have a new family? Is it your blood family? Is it your family? Yes. We married into the family of Rasūlu-Llāh (sal). How did we marry into the family of Rasūlu-Llāh (sal)? *"My hand is over your hand. And whoever fulfills his fealty to Allah fulfills his fealty to me."* This is why Tariqah is very, very important.

When we study these kinds of examples of *ta'wil*, it's like learning a different language. When you hear a story or look at the ritual prayer, you are decoding it, like using a magic decoder ring. When I was a kid, if you bought Rice Krispies, you got a little magic decoder ring. A little plastic red thing and you became used to decoding the messages on the back of the box. Are you old enough to remember that? So when

you ask me a question, and I give you the answer, you wonder, “How did the Shaykh know that?” “You know, the Shaykh was talking about exactly what was on my mind. I went in there with five questions and he answered the questions! How did he know that?” I don’t know how I knew that. It’s the *ta’wil*. It’s who you are. It’s being able, through these practices, to trust my intuition, to be transparent.

If I have a vested interest in what you are going to say, I have less chance I’m going to be right than if I’m transparent. It’s sort of like the first thing you learn in law school is what? The person who has himself for a client has a fool for a client. Physician, heal thyself. It’s harder, when you are invested in what the case is, to be able to see it clearly. You need someone else. Are you invested in your own life? One would think so. So you need someone whose investment in your life is *fī sabīli-Llāh*—truly that. Not you for them; them for you. That’s the *ta’wil*. If I give you the answer, *alhamdulillah*, I don’t own it. You didn’t pay for it either, nor did you get a bill for it!

Underneath this reality is a kind of hermeneutical foundation. As the *ta’wil* expresses it, it moves away from the *dhahir*, from the factual. It moves away from what is temporal, to the cosmic, to the eternal. It’s historically rooted in Islam, not something from outside of Islam. It is rooted in the Traditions and Hadith, but it is dynamic and shapes itself again and again, until each individual experiences it as a part of their own spiritual growth. You know you are growing spiritually and making progress as these recognitions and understandings become part of your intellect. When I give you an interpretation of something, it seems to be me. It takes on my face, but it is something that transcends me as an individual.

There was a science fiction movie a few years ago about people living under the sea. All kinds of terrible things happened to them! One woman was out walking on the floor of the ocean, and up from the depths came this angel-light things. Did you ever see that movie? It's a really cool movie. These angel-light things at the end save them, and take them to a world of light under the sea, cities of angelic-light beings. They were shaped out of water with lights inside of them, but they took the shape of her face. She made a face and stuck out her tongue, and it made the face and stuck out its tongue, with her face. It's like that when you practice this.

Dive deep, and not learning interpretation, but see yourself reflected in Qur'an, in Hadith, in the heart of the *shaykh*. See yourself reflected in the *muridīn*. See yourself reflected in the loved ones, in nature. It becomes second nature. It's part of your *'ilm*, your spiritual growth and knowledge. Ultimately, you would want that every time you prayed. Every Muslim would want to be in dialogue with the inner meaning of reality, the meaning of life or the cosmic realities at the heart of the *irfan*, real Tasawwuf. Everything has meaning, and you want to be in tune with that meaning. You don't just do ritual just for the sake of doing ritual; you do it because at some point you began to understand it, and you want to understand more of it. It may not be this prayer, or this *ra'ka*, but you know there is more to understand because you started to understand it.

You'll never understand it unless you try to, unless you seek that understanding. Most people do it just because they are supposed to do it, or fear they are going to go to hell if they don't pray, or whatever you think the punishment is. The real punishment is ignorance, when knowledge is withheld. If you don't think that's true, look around the world we live in today, and how tyrants punish people by withholding knowledge and the opportunity to learn from them. They control them,

because they know that knowledge has freedom attached to it. The real reward is knowledge. If you don't like the idea of keys, how are you going to open up the door? The other side of the door is what you are looking for. You are still looking for the key, even though you don't like the idea of the key, for whatever reason. How are you going to get through the door? Tell me. You need a key for most doors.

What's the worst thing you can do with a key? It is to leave it in the door and go inside. Then what? Someone comes along and comes in. In Washington, I have a neighbor who periodically leaves his key in the door, and I go knock on the door. He did it twice in one day when I was up in Washington. I knocked on the door the second time, and he opened the door and just put his hand out! I handed him the key, and he said, "Thank you," and I said, "You're welcome," because I'm a good neighbor.

There is recognition of the *batin* in something like *namaz* or *salat*. "*The adoration with the thinking soul is prayer.*" I love that phrase. The soul has the capacity to think in different ways, and it is the adoration of Allah that complements the *dhahir*. So that in our outer actions, in the case of the outer actions of prayer, the person is simultaneously involving their intellect and all their spiritual capacities, and their faculties, in the prayer. There is never eventually only an outer prayer. You are fully engaged in the prayer. It's not just remembering that you are praying; it's that you are involved in the moment to moment of that prayer, *tafsir*. You are not standing away from it making commentary—that's the normal *tafsir*. You are involved in the dynamic of the prayer outwardly, and inwardly something is changing inside of you.

Remember the first talk I gave you. The *ta'wil* affects you internally before you ever know it. This knowledge from Allah is like a pulsating knowledge in communication

with what's called Al Qur'an. You can look at it and quote it, and see on the surface what it means; but now you are inside it. How many of you would like to pray inside the Ka'aba? Some people every year are given permission to do so. Guess what? Before you pray inside the Ka'aba in Mecca, you can pray inside the Ka'aba here (in your heart). Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī (ra), who was the founder of the Mujaddidi line of Naqshbandis, was told to go meet Baqibillah (ra) in Delhi. He was on his way to Hajj. He went, and Baqibillah (ra) in just a few minutes realized that this man was going to be a great *mujaddid*. He was going to be *al-alfath-thānī*, the thousand year *mujaddid*. He actually studied with his own *murīd* at some point, not officially; but he learned from him. His *murīd*, Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī (ra), said he was headed toward Mecca, and Baqibillah (ra) told him, "Go back to Sirhind. Mecca will come to you." He followed his Shaykh's guidance, and went back to Sirhind, which is about five hours from Delhi by car. He was standing where his *mazar* is now, and the image of the Ka'aba came. Mecca came to him, and the mountains surrounded him, and a spring came up from the ground, which is still there. He prayed and made his Hajj in Sirhind. You can still visit there. You can say it's a myth or not, but it's what happened.

This idea of a dynamic journey is at the core of the *ta'wil*. The practices are the fuel, and the *ta'wil* are the signs that tell you where you are. The *tanzil* / revelation is the vehicle through which you are traveling. The destination, if you want to carry this metaphor forward, is you begin your search for inner meaning but simultaneously there is a kind of analytical process going on, correcting, recalculating. Because we all decide we are not going to follow the GPS: "Recalculating!" Allah is saying, "I still want you to get to your destination. I'm going to give you another route, and another route, and another route." You begin to comprehend the meaning the minute you

look for it. It's a kind of evidential understanding of prayer, and the search for knowledge, truth, Allah becomes a living reality.

The prayer and practices are an introduction to a transformative process that makes it possible that we really access knowledge to inner meanings, as we step by step learn how to extract that nectar, that truth, from what is in the Qur'an, in the *salat*, in the *hadra*, and in the *sema*. Our ability to understand the story within the story, the narrative within the stories of the Qur'an, within the teachings of Qur'an, is an initiatic process. But to get there, you have to have initiation. You have to have the *wasila* to get there. (Recites *durūd sharīf*) The Prophet (sal), and the Prophet's representatives and family are the *wasila*. This initiation is exactly like that. "What are you doing?" "I'm initiating this action (we don't use the word in English much anymore)." Or, a lawyer says, "I'm going to initiate the appeal." I'm going to begin a process.

Each thread you put in the process winds up creating a tapestry. Every thread that's in this carpet can be broken by your hand quite easily, until it got into this carpet. Now it's hard to get it out. Every thread was one color, but when it is put together, look what it makes. The finer the thread, the finer the weaver, and the finer the carpet. There was an auction three days ago. Do you know what the Persian carpet sold for? 33.3 million dollars. It was 5 times higher than any carpet ever sold. Each thread you put in this process winds up being a tapestry. Each one is unique, and each one is somewhat flawed, unless the carpet is made by a machine. That flaw becomes valuable, because it's an identifier. In our case, it's not a flaw; it's our individuality. It's our uniqueness.

Allah Swt made each one unique. We are making the same prayer. We are reciting the same *‘āyat* of Qur’an. We are making the same *du‘ā*. We may even have the same intention for Ramadan, but each one of us is different. And yet we are using something that is universal and available to everyone. That’s how we have a personal relationship with Allah Swt. Our flaws are not bad things; they are what allows us to personally come to Allah Swt as an individual, and ask of Allah Swt, and offer to Allah Swt, what we have to offer, and to ask what we can receive. At some point, Allah says, “That person has gained value. There is value added to that person’s life – (if I can speak in business terms) –so I’m going to call that person to Me now before they come to Me and call Me.” That person has now gone from *murīd* to *murad*.

It’s how we have this personal relationship with Allah. It’s not a collective relationship. We have a collective relationship, and I told about that in the *ta’wil* of *salat* and the different parts of it—very important. We have this personal relationship with Allah – not a collective relationship only – because people live under different circumstances and contexts, and have different needs. They have different power, and different strengths. Look at the people in this world who live on a handful of rice every day. We would die if we were put in that situation. Whatever the *shaykh* searches for when it comes to the *muridīn* is trying to provide a moment when that person goes, “Aha!”—that Archimedial moment, where the person has the big Aha! Something really shocks the person from what was a life of torpor and effort and crawling along, where the daily life of that person was a difficult process, and now it has become Hajj. It was difficult, but meaningful, realizing the blessings of that Hajj, and realizing the difference between what you are asking for and what is coming toward you.

Let me tell you again about Nasr Khusur's conversion from his previous ways of thought. He became Ismaili, but let me tell you what happened to him. He starts his pilgrimage to Mecca, and on the way encounters and is converted to this new way of thinking. He doesn't care that it is called Ismaili, or whatever. Something changed inside of him. He found a way. He's not thinking, "Who's going to think ill of me, because I've now left this and become that," or whatever. It's not a political or social issue. After that, he's blessed with the role of teaching and preaching during that Fatimid dynasty. In an ode celebrating his transformation, the pattern of *ta'wil* is woven into this narrative. May I read it to you?

*His sleep becomes the equivalent of the state of ignorance. The figure in the dream is the catalyst that causes the act of awakening leading to his quest. The subsequent resolution is symbolized in the arrival at the balad al amin in the Qur'an. In reality, the secure abode of true understanding, which is the goal of the quest, becomes clear to him. The transformation is consummated through the act of commitment, the ba'iat, in his case, the imam.*

**"Indeed, well pleased is Allah with the believers," Allah says in Qur'an, "when they swore allegiance to you beneath the tree. And He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down inner peace upon them. And the reward to them with an imminent victory in the acquisition of much benefit, and Allah is Mighty and Wise."**

That showering of that bliss is *nu'as*. I don't have the time now, but I gave a series of talks on *nu'as*, and I suggest you listen. He tells a story in the *Kitab al Alam wa Ghulharam* where the protagonist, Abul Malik, is a kind of spiritual exile, who as a part of his mission has left his home. He enters a town incognito. The narrative

unfolds in a series of dialogues, so that a pedagogical process becomes evident. The process is a three-fold one, he says.

*Initially the disciples' sense of quest is aroused. And he is sensitized to the meaning of symbols and the use of ta'wil. This leads from the letter of the law and the teachings to the spirit. His desire for knowledge, having now awakened, the disciple is eager to know more about the figure in whose hands are placed the keys to inner meaning and spiritual heaven. In this case, he was talking about the imam. We are talking about our shuyukh or Rasūlu-Llāh (sal). In the further stage, he acquires a new name, symbolizing his entry into a new pattern of understanding and a way of life. In the final stage, the act of transformation is marked in a ceremony. What transpires at that ceremony is unreported. The text does not reveal the secret that has only been communicated personally to the disciple.*

The process of this *ba'iat* is very important. First the person has this desire for knowledge. Understand. Take your time. Don't jump to *ba'iat*, because it has to be the right one. Now, having the interest aroused, he or she develops the *ta'wil*. Because of that, secrets are revealed and the seeker wants to know more. They want to know in whose hands has the key of knowledge. Traditionally, because all the Sufic lines except Naqshbandi come from Imam Ali (and I made the case on the first day how that works), one says he is the key. The Prophet (sal) said that he is the door. And then you will take on a new identity which you understand very well. You have a pattern, *ta'wil*, of understanding life now, and the template has changed. It's not your prejudices. It's not your fears; it's not your doubts, your assumptions, or your intellectual ability that are going to lead you to this. It's something that is transformative, a transcendental way of unlocking mysteries, and you are slowly

being introduced to that process, transformed into someone who uses it, so it becomes automatic eventually. The ceremony, the *ba'iat*, is not recorded. You may have it on paper, but it is much more than a piece of paper. Traditionally, certain symbols exist, for example, the long journey to the mountain to arrive at the *khanaqah*, or the *zāwiya* of the *shaykh*. After the long journey, there is a kind of anonymity, and arrival at a center of religious action. There was a story.

*Three potential Sufis set out on the way to find a shaykh living far in the Northwest territories in Afghanistan. They traveled days and days. After about two weeks, they arrive at the khanaqah. They knock at the door. The door is opened, and they are welcomed in. They find the murīds and the shaykh are in this raucous hadra. It was loud with people falling all over the place, jumping up and down for hours at a time, screaming and yelling. One of these men liked it very much; he wanted to do that. Another said, "I don't know. This doesn't look like Islam to me." The third man didn't like it at all, and couldn't wait to get out of there. So they spent the allotted three days, and then they left.*

*All the way back, the first man was very anxious to return. He loved the taste of that. He was drawn; the jedhb was there. He comes to the other two men's huts and says, "I'm going back. I can't wait! Do you want to come?" The man who didn't like it said, "Are you kidding? Do you know what happened while I was gone? My kids didn't milk the cows right. I left my wife in the charge of her brother, and her brother... forget it. I'm not going back... for that? I didn't see anything there. You talked me into going the first time, and I shouldn't have listened to you in the first place." The second man said, "Well, you know, I have a lot of things to do here. It wasn't easy when I came back. There were a lot of needs in the garden, but I'm curious. Yes, I'll go with you."*

*So they went back. They knocked on the door, and it is opened. They walk in and everyone is sitting [silently, with heads down.] The first man said, "What's going on here?" They sat down. They were not fed, except once a day, some gruel. Before, they had this beautiful meal after the hadra. He wasn't comfortable. The second guy was curious. They stayed there for three days. The first man said, "These people are crazy! One minute they are jumping, the next minute they are sitting. One minute the food's good; the next minute the food is bad. I can't identify with this. I've been here twice now. I don't know if I came another time what I would see. I'm done with this." So they get back home.*

*The second guy is still curious. He calls up the first and third guys, and the third guy said, "What are you bothering me for? I'm still picking up the mess from the first two times." The second guy said, "What, you expect me to go back to those crazy people? One minute they are jumping and the next minute they are sitting. What I was looking for, I found; then when I went back it was not there. This whole Sufi thing, they are all crazy."*

*So the second man goes back and knocks on the door. The shaykh answered the door, "Asalaamu aleikum. Come in, my son." He looks around; there is nobody there. He sits down, and the shaykh gives him some Persian tea. He said, "Do you mind if I ask you a question now, shaykh?" He said, "No. That's why you're here, isn't it?" He said, "Yes. The first time we came, the people were jumping up and down. The next time, everyone was sitting in muraqabah quietly. Can you explain this to me?" He said, "Of course, I'm happy to. You came a long distance*

*to ask that question. It took you time. You had to make a decision. You had to be drawn back here to this place.*

*The first time, we had done other things, and it was time for them to express outwardly their love for Allah Swt, because they had spent a lot of time in inner reflection and meditation. As a group, the group needed to move toward Allah as reflective of the ummah, because their duty is to understand how to move groups of people toward the essence of Islam, to bring them into not the tariqah but to keep them on the siratal mustaqim.*

*The second time you came, they had done this to the degree that some of them had become very attached to the outer form of it, and thinking that their only job was to excite people. So they had to spend months in reflection to understand that once the people come, now you have to give them something deeper to open them up and make them receptive, ta'wil." "Where are they now?" "They are out doing their work. They'll come back here periodically. Some will come back here to teach." I call it, the work enterprise. "So, what's going to happen now?" He said, "You are the first person in the new group. Ahlan wa sahlam"*

That's why you need time. In modern times, we don't do it in this order, unfortunately. People jump to things. They don't take the time. They like the social format. They feel, "If I don't do it now, I'm going to miss something." Fortunately or unfortunately, that's what happens—mostly unfortunately. If we did it in this order, it would be me sitting in a tent somewhere, with one person in a tent next to me, because that's the way of the world. But I don't do it in that order. What these stories tell, whether it's Khusru's conversion, or the story I just told, is that we all

have to pass through a kind of pre-initiatory process. Like all of this existed in pre-ternity, in the mind and intention of Allah. The key images of that process have been referred to by poets in many ways. We are asleep, and can waken. We are blind, but can see. We're deaf and we can hear. We're raw and we can be cooked – all poetic imagery. There is a story about that.

*A princess took a vow to taste cooked meat daily, until the secret of who her bridegroom would be would be revealed to her. The day the Pir was in the area (she didn't know that), the gamekeeper was unable to find any game to hunt for her meat. He encountered the animals in the jungle sitting around the Pir, who was playing a kind of song on the flute. They were all gathered around him, entranced by his flute song. He gave the gamekeeper one of the deer. The gamekeeper slaughters it, halal, and gave it right back to the Pir for him, which was the proper thing to do. And he takes a small bit for the Princess, for her meal.*

*It was cooked, and she tasted it; and she went into a ru'ya. She recognized the nearness of her future husband, and sent the vizier out to find him. He was just approaching her gate. She understood who he was. In time, the marriage took place, and this whole thing symbolized the transformation of her search, to being fed by the music of the Pir. That meat was infused with the baraka of the murshid, and it was because of that, the husband appeared, and she recognized him.*

Believe me, it's still true today if you know how to ask. If you have the sincerity to ask, that *baraka* will help you. That food before had no *baraka* in it. The transformation goes from seeking, to finding union. By the way, that potential

husband was in the city all along; she just couldn't see him. The truth is in front of us all along. That's the journey you are on: one of transformation and seeing. The core is the heart, the knowledge of everything, the universes, even, the Nūr. Let's see if we can find in the Qur'an, the *ta'wil* of what gives us this. Try to understand it now, not with your mind. You've read it a thousand times, maybe. Try to understand it from the *ta'wil* you have learned this weekend. You can maybe close your eyes and listen.

**Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. And the likeness of His Light is a niche in which there is a lamp. And that lamp is within a glass, and the glass is like a pearly white star. And lit from it is the oil of a blessed tree, an olive tree, neither of the East or of the West, whose oil all but glows and has no fire that touches it. Light upon light, Allah guides through His Light whom He chooses, and He sets an example for the people. And Allah is the Knower of all things.**

Go beyond the symbol of it. I am sure some of you immediately went to your heart. I'm sure, because I felt your *tawajjuh*. I felt you change your attention to your heart, in this room. I'll end with Khusru's poem.

*That sage set his hand upon his heart; a hundred blessings beyond that hand and breast, and said, "I offer you the remedy of proof and demonstration, but if you accept, I shall place a seal upon your lips which must never be broken."  
I gave my consent, and he affixed the seal, drop by drop, day by day.  
He fed me the healing potion, until my ailment disappeared. My tongue became imbued with elegant speech. My face, which had been pale as saffron, now grew rosy with joy.*

*I, who had been as a stone, was now a ruby. I, who had been dust, now was ambergris. He put my hand into the Prophet's hand. I spoke the oath beneath the exalted tree, so heavy with fruit so sweet, and with cooling shade. Have you ever heard of a sea which flows from fire? Have you ever seen a fox become a lion? The sun can transmute a pebble, which even the hand of nature can never change into a gem. I am that precious stone. My sun is he who by whose rays this temporous world is filled with light.*

*In jealousy, I cannot speak his name in this poem. Only to say that for him, Plato himself would have become a slave. He is the teacher, healer of souls, favorite of Allah, image of wisdom, fountain of knowledge and truth. Bless the ship with him as its anchor. Bless the city whose sacred gate he ever guards. Of countenance of knowledge, virtues form. Heart of wisdom, goal of humankind, of pride, of pride, I stood before you pale and skeletal, clad in a woolen cloak, and kissed your hand as if it were the grave of the Prophet or the Black Stone of the Ka'aba.*

*Six years I served you, and now, wherever I am, so long as I live, I will use my pen and inkwell, and my paper in praise of thee. And when the unrecited Name makes its abode in the interior, it makes a lamp which illumines the heart. The glories of true contemplation are felt within. The world's tinsel can no longer dazzle. The flame lit by recitation swallows all remembrance and devotion. Truth hovers on the master's lip, because, as he said, "I am always on its side." The world is dazed by brightness and turns away from the blazing glare. If you were to reveal the mystery of this radiance, the world would brand you a fool. "In my heart, I made a seat my seat," said the master. All 72 chambers ring with music. The dark of night is dispelled, and the concert of Jannans begin. The*

*unrecited name plays on and on; the symphony is heard within. The 72  
chambers are filled with music, though its essence is perceived by only a few.*  
*Asalaamu aleikum. Thank you for coming.*