

December 10, 2008

Wednesday

Title: Ghaus Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani / The Company of the Awliyā

DVD title: Celebrating the Memory of 'The Rose of Baghdad'  
And Contemplating Being in the Company of the Awliyā

*Dinner blessing:* O Allah, give us consistency and constancy in our journeying in this world. Open to us a way of ease, and give us the means of traveling inwardly to You that will bring joy and happiness to our hearts. Help us, Allah Swt, to look at the provisions You have given us in our spiritual life and in our outer life and to be consistent. Help those who are ill to embrace the gift of their illness as a means of remembrance, and those who are well to be humble in their wellness and to remember You in gratitude. And give us good direction, Allah, in our work on a day to day basis, that we may realize the blessings You shower upon us every day. *Amin.*

*Suhbat:* Tonight is the special celebration of Ghaus Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani of the Qadriyya [Order]. It was his *khierka* that was held and given to Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra). There was a discussion about whether or not he was really a Sufi by many people. But if you read his writings, I don't think there's any doubt. He was a reformer also. He said,

*The walls of religion are falling, and their foundation is cracked. Let us come together, O people of the earth, and rebuild what was ruined, reestablish what fell. This is not acceptable, O sun, O moon, O day! All of you come, O people, the religion is crying for aid and assistance, holding its hands above its head in its distress, due to all the profligates, insolent*

*ones, innovators, perverters of the Divine law; the heedless folk, the unjust, the tyrannical, those who falsify the Divine knowledge and lay claim to it, when in fact it is not in their hands.*

This was said in the 12<sup>th</sup> century/6 AH. Ghaus Shaykh Abdul Qadir (ra) in his *suhbat* would enjoin people to do good and abjure them from doing wrong. His advice went to rulers and administrators and governors and judges, as well as common *murīds*. It was reported by Ibn Kathir, the great historian:

*Standing in the mosque, he reprimanded publicly the rulers who committed wrong... He avoided any sort of political appointment, and never feared anyone in his speech except God Almighty, and was unaffected by the reproach of anyone.*

*There was a story that the khalif of the time appointed an unjust person to be the chief judge. Sayyid Abdul Qadir Jilani stood up in the largest mosque in Baghdad to give the khutbah on the jumah. And in his sermon he spoke directly to the khalif. He said, "You have appointed the worst of the unjust ones to judge the affairs of Muslims. What will be your answer tomorrow in front of the Lord of the World, the Most Merciful?" Upon hearing this, the ruler shook with fear and shed tears, and quickly went after the prayers to dismiss the judge.*

This is the character of Abdul Qadir Jilani, and the character we should all strive to be like: someone who calls people to correct themselves, to purify their hearts, to divest themselves of excessive love of this world, and to clean their hearts. He was a person who encouraged people to fill their hearts with the love of Allah and his Messenger and the *awliyā*. He, himself, was an example following the way of the Sunnah and the *Sīrah*

of Prophet Mohammed (sal). He abhorred hypocrisy and rancor in his heart and in the hearts of others. He called upon everyone to break their attachments to this world and dependence on this world. When you read him, you realize he had a very ascetic world view in many ways. The point was to turn your heart and gratitude and trust totally to Allah—in the terms of the day, “*to seek Allah’s good pleasure.*”

He is also known as the Rose of Baghdad. The story goes like this: *Baghdad was so full of Sufis at the time he arrived in the city, it was decided to send him a message. These mystics, teachers sent a message to him when he was at the outskirts of the city. They sent him a vessel that was filled to the brim with water, symbolizing that the city was sufficiently filled with learned people. The meaning was clear: the cup of Baghdad was full. Well, it was winter time and out of season, but Abdul Qadir produced a full blown rose which he placed on top of the water, which indicated not only his karamat, but also that there was room for him. When this sign was brought to them, they cried out, “Abdul Qadir is our rose!” And they ushered him into the city. Hence, he was called the Rose of Baghdad.*

He lived a long time for that time, about 89 years. He was born in Jilan in Persia, but left there at 18 and went to Baghdad. His Shaykh was Ibn Wakil, then Shaykh Mohammed bin Hasan al Baqlani, and Abul Zakariyya Tabrizi. He became a scholar of *tafsir* and *fiqh*, and of Arabic grammar and philosophy. He was of the Hanbali *madad*. As a *qadi*, he also gave decisions in the Shafi school, and was a *hafez* of Qur’an. He was taught under Shaikh Abu'l-Khair Hammad bin Muslim al-Dabbas and gave *bai’at* under Sayyid Mubārak bin al-Hasan. He received his *ijāzah* and leadership of the Tariqah when he was 50 years old from his *shaykh*. Even with all that knowledge and wisdom, he wrote,

*Very few people would come to attend my association. As more people*

*heard about me, the school became crowded, and the masjid I used to sit in became too small to hold the number of people who would come to hear me. They would even come at night time, carrying lamps and candles. When it would finally no longer accommodate the crowds, my chair of teaching was moved to the main thoroughfare, and later to the outskirts of the city, becoming a new place of gathering. People would come to attend by foot, by horse, by mule, by donkey, by camel. You could see 70,000 listeners standing in the circle at these meetings.*

In his gatherings he would enjoin people to do good and avoid evil. He talked to rulers, and avoided any kind of political appointment, though they were offered to him. In the Qadriyya order, it's important to take very serious commitment toward performing the prayers and trying to live by the Shar'iah, and doing the *sunnah* prayers and *wudu*. But [it was important] also to look very critically at your attachments to the world. In the sense he was a *mujaddid*, he called people to recommit themselves to their promises to Allah and to their Islam, and of course to praise Allah and to thank Allah Swt. What I read to you at the beginning was said to him when 400 scholars were attending one of his lectures, and that's what he told them about the religion of the time. This is the basic story. There are other stories. Once he gave his *muridīn* the following order: slaughter a chicken in a place where no one can see you and return it to me. You know the story, it's the banana story. Of course, only one person came back with the chicken still alive.

He comes from a long line of teachers, one of which was Junayd. I will tell you a story about Junayd, and then I want to talk about something else.

*Junayd Baghdadi earned his living as a professional wrestler. On occasion, the people would say, today Junayd Baghdadi will demonstrate*

*his prowess as a wrestler; anyone can challenge him! One day this old man stood up, shakily. He was shaking all over from age. He said, "I'll enter the contest." People couldn't believe it. They were laughing and criticizing and howling and clapping their hands. But the king was bound by the statement. He couldn't stop it. This elderly man was given permission to enter the ring. When Junayd entered the ring, he was absolutely beside himself, seeing this man. People were thinking, how will this old man fight? The old man said to Junayd, can I whisper in your ear? He said, "I know it is not possible for me to win this fight. But I am a sayyid, a descendant of Prophet Mohammed (sal). And my children are starving at home. Are you prepared to sacrifice your name and honor and position for the love of the Prophet Mohammed (sal), and lose this bout to me? If you do this, I'll be able to collect the winning purse and have the means to feed my children and myself for a whole year. I'll also be able to settle all my debts. Above all, the Master of all the Worlds will be pleased with you. Are you willing, Junayd, to sacrifice your honor for the sake of the children of Rasulallah?"*

*Junayd thought to himself, "I have a great opportunity today." So at the beginning of the fight he showed a lot of energy and strength and did a couple of moves, so the king wouldn't think he was going to throw the fight. He held back from using his full strength, and allowed the man to throw him on the floor and win the bout. The man put his foot on his chest and won the prize. That night Junayd had a dream of Prophet Mohammed. He said, "O Junayd, you have sacrificed your honor and your name, and your nationally renown position and fame in an expression of your love for my children of my family, who are starving. As of today, your name is recorded in the register of the awliyā." From that point on, he went on to defeat his nafs ammāra, and became one of the most well known awliyā of*

*all times.*

This was kind of mentality of Abdul Qadir Jilani, and what motivated him to be such an honorable human being, and to think in good terms about things, and to enjoin people to do good works, especially their practices, their prayers, their *wudu*. When you read him, compared perhaps to the teachings of Nizammudin Awliyya (both are great saints), but you find a very strong discipline in Abdul Qadir Jilani, something we should all remember today. Allah Swt gives to those who are sincere believers, honor and dignity, as well as wisdom and patience. Before those people, it is said that even emperors and kings will tremble, as was the case with Abdul Qadir. Real greatness is only achieved by anyone when Allah Swt has entered the heart of an individual. The heart of an individual is something not just to be assumed contains the love of Allah. The Arabs say there is a tent, and on the tent it says, “This is the house of Laylah.” But when we peek into the tent, we find there is a dog in the tent. Often when we peek into the heart of people, we find that what is labeled is not really there.

A person who acts pious or whatever, and in spite of that doesn't really keep their heart pure. All those people who wear their *topis* and properly cut beards and no mustaches—I don't want to cast aspersions on anyone—but when you look into the heart of someone, you see whether their heart is filled with dirt or cleanliness, or with the love and the will of Allah. It was the case of Abdul Qadir Jilani and his predecessors, and those people in our noble lines that when these people, the friends of Allah, are seen, you think immediately of Allah or Prophet Mohammed. You don't have to say anything; you just think about Allah Swt. The light of Allah Swt becomes almost material. It becomes like honey that drips from the eyes of the friends of Allah Swt. The tears of the people who love Allah and Prophet Mohammed (sal) are so sweet that the honeybees want to drink of the nectar, so they can feed on the light and perpetuate it for future generations. The role

of the bee is to keep things alive, to keep food on our tables.

Today is a very good day for us to contemplate our connection with Allah, with Prophet Mohammed, with the *awliyā*, especially the *sayyid*, the Ahl al Bayt, and to remember that in the line of these great prophets many wonderful and miraculous things have happened. Communities and nations have been built. Illnesses and death have been averted. Knowledge has been perpetuated. The exact sayings of Prophet Mohammed (sal), the *tafsir* of Qur'an, so many things have been sustained through this type of love and submission. Yet we can't maintain our own happiness and contentment for a day. Look at what Allah Swt has maintained for centuries upon centuries. Look how Allah Swt has maintained the exact words and teachings of Prophet Mohammed (sal) and the *khalifate* of Prophet Mohammed all the way to this day, centuries later—1400 years later, and more.

When we lose sight of the line we are a part of, of our paternity and maternity; when we lose sight of where we come from, not just in energy but in the history of humanity as Muslims, we really do lose our Islam. We really do lose our ability to discriminate well and serve others. We even lose our ability to celebrate what's good in the world. We forget how many months we were in near-starvation in the desert with the drought, like we had the past few years. When the rain comes we forget. When I was at prayer there was a big gray heron down by the *masjid*, I was thinking that during the summer, the whole stream was dried up, so the fish must have returned somehow for the heron to be fishing there. What a wonderful thing, how Allah perpetuates this cycle. We forget how much guidance and ability Allah pours into us, but how much do we take and how much do we use? Even among ourselves, there is a tremendous amount of knowledge and talent, but who draws on it? And what is it that stands in the way; just the ego?

Even if you have the skill, for example with the young ladies who have gone to college (or any of us who have worked in any profession), even if you have the skill to go through school and get straight A's, and you don't need anyone's help. You don't need to talk to anyone who has expertise here for any course you are taking, like economics or Middle East studies or communication, because you do it yourself and you can get straight A's. But how do you know that you are using the highest idea, that you could have gotten great knowledge from something? Or [you could have been] put on a track where you could do research no one else could do, and set yourself on a road to great knowledge. That's the history and tradition of real education: to study at the feet of masters, of people who have real knowledge. It wasn't even being graded; you wouldn't be taught if you weren't doing well.

Allah Swt gives us provision and capability, but why should we think that, even if I am by society's measurements having the greatest reward of A++, why do we confuse that with the ability to gain real knowledge, real depth, new thinking and inquiry skills, new critical thinking skills, and an ability to see beyond even where my teachers and professors are? We have to remember what *tawfiq* really means, this ability and guidance, this relationship we have; otherwise, we don't really respect what we are doing. If we don't strive to achieve the best at it, whether it's our meditation or our study, our class work or our business, the way we raise our children, or the way we stimulate our own self—how do you know unless you are really striving? It's not just a question of working hard at something and spending hours at it. Wouldn't you rather spend hours at something that reveals great insight and knowledge to you, than just getting a paper done, or doing what a client wants you to do, or creating something everyone else thinks is acceptable and fine, but you know you could have done better?

Allah wants you, as a Muslim, to strive for greater things. The *jihad* is that striving.

Otherwise, you can live a life where you can get away with doing very little, and get a lot of praise for doing it from those who don't know. We usually listen and find these things out too late, then we justify what we have done. When you think about the history of people like Jilani, or even today, people cannot comprehend what we hope is true about President Elect Obama. People don't know how to comprehend that someone could actually win and be at a high level, without flattering and trying to win the favor of other people in power, or rich people. We live in times today where it is proven that the condition of a *murīd* is such that if a wealthy person comes and visits the *shaykh*, you find the *murīds* are talking to the wealthy person and not looking at the *shaykh*.

*Alhamdulillah*, that's not usually true here. The same thing applies to *shaykhs*, too.

There was one *imam* running about at a dinner I was at recently, whispering in everyone's ear, all the important people's ears. But I didn't see him go to the common people. I didn't see everything, so it's my intuition that is telling me that.

There is no benefit at all in running after this world or any of the things in this world. The only benefit of this world's existence is so we can learn and worship the manifestations and expressions of Allah in this world. If along the way there is benefit, or one's material success is balanced and also indicative of one's spiritual success so people can see a tie between the day to day life and the spiritual improvement, this is all the better. It's not that we are supposed to be monastic and hide out and live on grub worms and a few crusts of stale bread. It's much easier to live in a cave than it is to be able to restrict what you do in the secrecy and privacy of your own home. One would think when a person took to the mountains or sat in a cave that they would have the utmost privacy, because that's why they went there. But every single one of them realized at some point that Allah was watching over everything.

Allah does, in a sense, freeze-frame the process at times to let us enjoy things: the

beautiful things in this world, successes, families, seeing justice and mercy being doled out in this world. Maybe Abdul Qadir's advice to the *ulema* is also important to us. He told them, *"Before you take to preaching at the minbar, go and sit in the company of a wali for 6 months to one year, and serve them with humility, so the maula of the books you study may become manifest in your heart, and then your heart will become a possessor of light/nūr. After that, you will become a different person and you will spread the sweet fragrance of the heart. Wherever you go, whether the city, the river, the jungles, or the mountains, even in a condition where your clothes are tattered out of poverty, the people of wealth will salute you and search for you saying, 'Where is the one who is dispensing the tonic?(Meaning the fragrance of the heart) Where has he set up his shop?'"*

Each one of us is carrying around a lamp that is either turned very low or out, but it can be lit. It doesn't have to stay weak and dim. The problem is that the winds of life and death are constantly blowing, and we need a pretty bright flame. We have to keep the lamp of the love of Allah and the Prophet Mohammed (sal) bright. We have to try to light other lamps with our light, because at some point, the wind will blow our lamp out. To this effect, Rumi said, *"Quickly make an effort in lighting up another lamp, O people of the world! Jalaludin is not a fool. Through the blessing of Shems i Tabrizi, I have lit the lamp of Allah's nisbah by adopting the Sunnah and abstaining from sins. When death approaches and the eyes close, the Divine lamp of Allah's love is immediately set alight in the hearts of the awliyā."* This is the generator that is turned on, and the lights immediately come back. The eyes close in this temporary life, and all the buildings, houses, cars, business dealings, and beautiful men and women end, and we leave this world. It is in this refinement and in this effort to fulfill our role and our task, that Allah will fill us with the supreme reward, so that our life is the right kind of sacrifice.

We are always encouraged to be in the company of the *awliyā*. Abdul Qadir Jilani said, *“I urge you to attain the love of Allah from the awliyā. I take an oath by Allah Swt that the people of the world will rush to serve you. Do not become like the grape worm who wanted to eat the grapes, but was deceived by the green leaves, thinking a leaf to be the grape and spent its whole life and died on the leaf, and was deprived of the actual enjoyment of tasting the grape. So too many murīds have come to attain the love of Allah Swt, but lost in the glamor and glitter of this world, they leave it deprived of Allah’s love, even though it was there for them.”* He encouraged people to be good *murīds* and find a *shaykh*. That’s a good place to stop. *Asalāmu aleikum*.