

January 3, 2008

Saturday

Title: [Turn Your Capacity to Obey and Surrender Towards the Teachings](#)

DVD title: The Conundrum of Applying the Teachings:
Giving up Control to Follow the Guidance

Dinner blessing: Bismillah. O Allah, there are those among us who are ill still. I hope that You will send Your *shifāt* to them. There are those of us who will be traveling this week and next week, and *insh'allah* we pray that You will give them safety and protection in their traveling and in their time away and in their returning. *Insh'allah* everyone returns with deeper *iman*, a more profound understanding of themselves, and a sense of accomplishment. O Allah, the spring is quickly coming upon us, and the frogs will be singing in February. We are hoping You will give us a bountiful harvest this year, so please assist Mustafa and his minions as they plant the seeds for the next year. We ask You for Your blessings on Carol Christie, may her way be made easy. We are grateful for those who are sent to us this week to share our limited knowledge and great enthusiasm for You. *Amin*.

Suhbat: As I was telling you the other day, it's been on my mind for a long time to begin to address the topic of the apparent conundrum about the term I used to title my book, "Applied Sufism." I think I need to write a book on what "applied" means. The reality is different than the theoretical. What is theoretical when it is applied becomes the real, the apparent. There is something in the theoretical aspect of studying Sufism, or pursuing the truth, or embracing a theological concept, or engaging with sincerity in the spiritual journey, which needs obviously to be manifest. When there is a disconnect between what the assumption or the theory is that one assumes they are adhering to, and

yet the manifestation is not showing that, there is a problem, and it presents a conundrum.

The question is: what is the reality that creates or manifests as an apparent disconnect between the theoretical and the habitual (or selected) practices? Habitual is like putting your head down 5 times a day, or making your Hizb ul Bahr, reading Qur'an or whatever it is for you or any of us, as individuals. Add to that what one has agreed to do, and what one has been guided and instructed to do as a means to apply oneself to absorb and manifest that knowledge or source of knowledge, or information and experience that one gets from Qur'an and Hadith, from prayer and meditation, etc. Accept that just doing some of these things has an effect. We do know that doing them with sincerity, constancy, regularity, with a certain type of *niyyat* has a greater effect. The assumption is if X is done, Y follows. Or if X is down, the result is one thing. If Y is done, the result is something else.

To really have a true understanding of a teaching, especially one that comes from the *'alam al amr*, the world of command; to really pursue the real as opposed to the apparent, and to really link the intention with the action; to look at the teaching as it comes from the world of command and its consequent effect on the seeker can be seen as we look at the choices that we as *sāliks*, travelers on this path or seekers, make, or the actions we do. So the admonishments, suggestions, and encouragements to practice the "teachings" or receive the guidance given by the *shuyukh* and the *shaykh* directly to us, undoubtedly, come to sincere people who perceive themselves as seekers. But somewhere, its lifespan gets into an environment that makes it wither and diminish in effect. Sometimes it seems in some adverse proportion to the number of encouragements and admonitions; and maybe in inverse proportion to the amount of teaching that is given. Perhaps [that is] because [of] the frequency and pattern or availability of the verbal teaching (I should say scheduled verbal teaching), in which the individuals adhere to the schedule because, to

some degree, it becomes a kind of symbolic affirmation of one's sincerity.

“If I show up a few times a week, obviously I'm sincere and really interested.” There are certain assumptions that go along with that, like you'd really miss it if you didn't show up. That may be true for a week or two, but think about people who aren't here any longer. They don't seem to miss it. Or [think about] the fact that you are gone for a week or so, and you forget it's Wednesday night and make a phone call [and no one seems to be around], or something like that. There is some disconnect that is inherent in the system that has to be overcome. There is something that has to be examined that keeps the plant from withering and dying. One would think this should be a perennial teaching—perennial knowledge; it's not annual. Perhaps the frequency of the pattern or the availability of the verbal teachings somehow replaces the personal desire to practice. You get into the habitual pattern of coming and listening, of showing up and it's all scheduled for you, and it becomes symbolic. Then you assign to that certain assumptions of sincerity, or it somehow replaces study, meditation, and engaging in spiritual dialogue.

It replaces all the things it is supposed to stimulate. “It,” the showing up and the habitual pattern, replaces what the fruit of that actually should be. Instead of the fruit, the symbol becomes the reality. And progress isn't made, or very little progress, or less progress, to such a degree that I believe (based on what I observe) it actually replaces the personal desire to practice in some people, perhaps because the practice itself begins to represent Islam. It becomes Islam. It's *not* Islam. The practice itself becomes Sufism, instead of the means to Sufism, instead of the means for understanding Islam. Islam becomes a thing; Sufism becomes a thing, and then one chooses to what degree they will engage with it, even after doing highly personal things like *bai'at*, even after giving one's word. It falls into the category of other *dunya* habits. It falls into the category of things of the *khalq* (creation) as opposed to things of the *'amr* (command).

I challenge you to figure out what the conundrum is. Certainly, to some degree submission, or giving up some control is at the core of the reluctance or hesitation to fulfill one's practices or even one's word to do that, even one's *bai'at*, or to follow the guidance of the *shaykh*. It's not my intention to enter into a psychological paradigm, although Tasawwuf encompasses and embraces certain psychological realities. It's hard to talk about on a personal level certain aspects of Sufism without sounding like psychology. But of course, psychology comes a lot later, suffice it to say. This can happen if for no other reason than change and self-reflection, which is at core of Sufic teaching, is also at the core of the fear of a human being's sense of loss of self. Change and self-reflection are at the foundation of almost any spiritual practice and philosophy—that means: willing to reflect. Having said *that*, let me enter into a brief examination of the subject of control.

Ultimately, obedience and surrender, or giving up control, has a great deal to do, if you trace it back, with the fear of death, the implication of losing one's own self. Instead of choosing to lose one's self through a process of practice, one delays and delays that process until it becomes the inevitable reality that is facing you, and it's called death. And you have to submit to that and obey the will of a higher power, something that is not in your control. Arriving there unprepared and fearful, as most of us do, if we could just understand, we could attenuate that fear by arriving there much sooner before it is death we are talking about. It's about giving up control of the self, learning what obedience is, learning to relate to a higher power, learning how to understand another dimension of one's own self. We live in this delusion that we are controlling everything. We are putting off the thought of death, and when it comes to us or our family, we face it for a while and grieve over that person. As painful as that is, it is much easier to grieve over someone else than it is to contemplate one's own death.

Lest you run away mentally from this subject, because I'm talking about it too fast, (because you will run away... right?) and I have you contained in the world of mowt/death right now, let me give another analogy, so you will feel more comfortable not contemplating the contemplation of death. This idea of giving up control is an absurdity. Hundreds of times a day we give up control. How many of you drove today in town among absolute strangers? They could be sleeping at the wheel or just distracted, and could kill you in a second. You have no control over any of that, no matter how good a driver you are. You give up control of your life every day you drive, though you do your best. How many of you rode in an elevator recently, or went to a doctor? How many of you ate food you didn't grow and you trust the food is ok? You have no control over that. How many of you wash your food really well? How much control [do we give up] hundreds of times a day? We, with abandonment, when someone tells us something, believe them. "Put your money here. "Oh, okay." We trust them. Why? Because they are in the business of taking your money. We put an awful lot of absolute trust and control in things. We give over control to the taxi driver, or to the bus driver. One time I was [in a plane] over Amsterdam, and it was 99.9% locked in [by fog] and they landed totally by instrument. And you trust the computer. We give control over all the time, all the time, all the time.

You drop your children off at another parent's home, and you give up control. How many lives have you had in your hands as a nurse? Thousands? How many of you have gone to the pharmacy to pick up some medicine? Not only are you trusting that the druggist gave you the right medicine, worse than that, you are trusting that the pharmaceutical company has tested the medicine, which you know hasn't really happened. But maybe you'll be all right. So, there are the druggists, the food suppliers, the manufacturers, our friends who give us advice, our information sources like the news.

Listen to how biased the news is against the Palestinians. Nobody loves Hamas, but how biased the news is. Listen to the revisionist history of the almost former President. You trust, though, that they will tell you the truth. We trust them: “Well, he’s a doctor.” “Well, it’s our government; they wouldn’t lie to us.” You are giving up control all the time. Don’t just think about trust; think about control.

[To any of that, there is] no resistance. Who do we resist? We resist the *shaykh*. We resist the *shuyukh*. We resist the teaching, which we’re going to put under an electron microscope and see if there is anything that is slightly off, that is maybe not quite exactly right. “I’m not going to give up control of myself to that!” We will put our body through hell, our mind through hell, and our life in danger. Maybe the positive part is we really, really value our soul and we don’t want it to get screwed up—you can tell yourself that. I don’t know how many of you go to bed at night, really worrying that your soul got affected today: “Has my soul been tainted today?” We hold the teaching to a standard higher than we don’t even hold our own life. That’s ridiculous. I may not be the best *shaykh* in the world. There may be 100,000 better than me. But hear what I’m saying. Forget it’s me we’re talking about. This is really good advice. Why don’t we give up control?

Why do we give up control to all these other things, and we don’t trust and give up control just for an hour or two a day? We put the teachings under such scrutiny, or we don’t. I started with how we do things out of habitual pattern, and the habit becomes the teaching instead of the essence or meaning of the teaching. I gave you both sides of it. Don’t forget where I started. I started with the meaningless actions of meaningful things. We are resistant to trusting our spiritual guide, to trusting even the Qur’an which we take as suggestions, as opposed to absolute truth and guidance. “Absolute truth and guidance? How can I accept that something in a book that is 1400 years old is absolute truth?” How

can you accept what the druggist is telling you is the truth? No problem. It is only my body I am risking. It is only my life I am risking. “It ain’t my soul, brother.”

So we take what is the Hadith as a suggestion. We take what is in the Qur’an as a suggestion, but we should strive to surrender to that. We should strive to trust that. We should strive to obey, but we hesitate to fully embrace things. Obey. Obey. Obey. How dare you say, “Obey.” Says a wife to her husband, “You mean I am your wife and you are my husband and I should obey you?”—or vice versa, in our society. “Step to the rear.” I obey. “Mind the gap” I obey. “Take this pill three times a day.” I obey. “Here, drink this water.” I obey. But use the word obey, when it comes to human relationships? Forget it; that is an anethma. They are not. Think about that.

“I am not going to give up control over my life and my choices. I have my rights to do things my way and I am going to do everything MY way!” “But I am still going to climb into a taxi cab, still going on the elevator, still get food from places where I don’t know where it was really grown. I will still do all this stuff, but I am going to live my life my way.” It is absurd. Truly our life is in the hands of others when we drive or do any of those other things I have been telling you about. But to put our spiritual life, our eternal happiness in the hands of Allah (SwT), and the Prophet Mohammed (sal) and his representatives, his *khalifas* is the most difficult thing in the world, it seems. We don’t even feel the same necessity to venture into the journey from the heart to eternity like we feel the necessity to get into the car and go to the store or visit the doctor or take the advice of some lawyer over something. The necessity to get that advice, the necessity to get that opinion is more important than to take the advice of the Prophet Mohammed and his appointed messengers and teachers, the *shuyukh*.

So giving control of one’s spiritual life, must be sensed from somewhere other than this

place of habitual patterns and desires. It has to be from someplace of rational thinking, rationality where you really say, “Wait a minute! I am giving up control all the time. What is itwhy am I hesitating in this, which is ephemeral? If I get into a car, I could get into an accident and my body could be destroyed. If I obey the teaching, what is going to happen to me? I am not even going to get constipation from that.” So we have to sense it from somewhere else. Perhaps it is the *ruh*. [We have to] sense it from the soul as being something so much more relevant to everlasting happiness and contentment and freedom and life than other things of the *dunya*. We are extremely reluctant to give up control of our inner life, despite the onerous fact that only in so doing can we arrive at the inner destination, that real clarity. In some strange way, we live as some sort of partial believer and some type of absolute disbelief, a believer living in almost total disbelief, or at least conditioned belief, attenuated belief.

If we look at the teachings of Ibn ‘Ata’laAlskandari in the ‘Isqāti-t-Tadbīr, we find them replete with these admonitions of planning not to plan. That is the whole point. Or we look at some of the aphorisms in the Hikam to draw our attention, even through our sins and even through our wrong actions, to what is ultimately the will of Allah, to bring us towards Allah. Finding comfort in the knowledge of the compassion and the divine presence of Allah (Swt), one can begin to relax their hold on their self, their ego.

If you really want to believe, if you really want to obey, if you really want to be in control and aware of the choices that you are making, then pursue faith and pursue belief, like you trust in it. Trust in the practices like you trust in the elevator, or the food supplier—at least that much. You will find that you will relax your hold on your *nafs ammāra*. You are reaching for something far more transcendent, far more transcendental. You are reaching not with one hand, but with two hands, and you find your hands are filled with the *tajalli*, the irradiated light of Allah.

Ultimately we fear total loss of self. So we spend all this time convincing ourselves that we are in control of our self. We conveniently don't look at the thousands of things that we are not in control of, because that will screw up our hide and seek game. We live in this delusion that we are going to live forever. Every once in a while that is interrupted by someone getting sick and dying around us. But we quickly go back into that delusion. We have the words, and we talk about transformation and we talk about awareness and we talk about, as so many people do, enlightenment, or we talk about *sakina*/tranquility, and we talk about wisdom/*hikma*, and we talk about the good life. That is why we are trying to hold onto that control.

But if we applied the teachings, that are the means of the real transformation, the means for really understanding obedience and submission, the means of respecting the guidance that we are getting—you have to employ your knowledge, however. You have to employ whatever wisdom that you have. You have to aggregate your sincerity with your yearning because you cannot let it wither between the theoretical or the philosophical or the admonitions that you treat as philosophical that you find in the Qur'an or Hadith. You cannot let it wither because you have to think of it as real and bring it into your life.

I know that I am saying “you” and “your” a lot tonight. I want you to know that I am doing this on purpose.

You have to learn to utilize the wisdom of the guides of Allah (Swt). That is important. *'Istamal*, applied, application—it comes from ‘ayn, mim, lam: *amal*, [which means] to act, to operate, to be active in accordance with or on the basis of something, to strive. This is the core of life's purpose, to strive/*jihad*. *'Istamal*. *Amal* means work, active. So why let oneself be a hypocrite, even an unconscious hypocrite, even a somewhat hypocrite or a non-intentional hypocrite? Why? At least apply the same trust to the

teaching that you apply to all those examples I gave you. At least give up control to the same degree, become obedient to the same degree to the guidance and the teacher and to the teaching that you are to the absolute stranger who may very well have your life in his hands or her hands. Is that really asking so much?

You contemplate where the conundrum is. You contemplate where the disconnect is. You contemplate where and why you don't contemplate this. You make a choice of a career if you are young, and you head in that direction, as if there is not going to be anything interrupting that. You have no idea what you are giving up, perhaps. What Allah (Swt) has given us that we trade off in forgetfulness. What capacity He has given us to surrender. Let us look at it from the positive point of view. Look at your capacity to obey and to surrender. Look how easy it is to obey and surrender that you will even obey and surrender to absolute strangers. Why not obey and surrender to the thing that Allah has created you to do that? Is this not the teaching of the Hikam? Sometimes He gives you things that are difficult and negative in order to bring you closer to Him? *Insh'Allah*, this is my Hikam to you. *Asalām aleikum*.

Edit all of this out? 43:00 Think of all the people who are not here. How it works out. Never ceases to amaze me. Somebody may not be here because they are sick and they may not be here because they had to be somewhere else. I guess I should have said you shouldn't be paranoid and not get into a taxi cab. You should be aware. Believe it or not this is not a discourse about taxi cabs. Airplanes.. (Makes noise like an airplane.)