

January 14, 2009

Wednesday

Title: [Indolence and Effort on the Spiritual Path](#)

DVD title: The Energy and Effort to Be on The Spiritual Path
And the Challenge of Indolence

Dinner blessing: *Allahu Akbar.* Ya Allah, the times upon us are very challenging, and we are very grateful for all these challenges. Grateful that You brought us home safely, and, *insha'llah*, grandma arrived safely in Iran (we should know soon). We ask You, Allah, to give her health and continued health and strength on this trip. For our brothers and sisters in Palestine and other places in the world where there is oppression and misunderstandings and where there is aggression and where there is greed; and where there is fear and intolerance, we ask You, Allah Swt, to once again send an awakening call to humanity in the form of the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (sal) in all the ways people can hear and understand the essence of faith and *haqq*, *akhlaq* and *akida*. We ask You, Allah Swt, to give us opportunities to serve You better in the coming months and years, and to hone our skills and focus our intentions and work. Give health to the members of this community and peace, and help us bind together once again for Your sake, especially in these difficult times.

Sohbet: I guess it would be safe to say that just about everything on the spiritual journey requires at least one thing; whether it's reading Qur'an, doing prayer, sitting in meditation, working *fi sabīlillah*, studying, or making Hajj. And the lack of that element is probably one of the greatest hindrances to any kind of progress. When I say progress tonight, I mean confidence, awareness, security, knowledge, comfort, assurance that this path, Islam, that faith in Allah, faith in the Prophet (sal) are set in us; that we are

Muslims; that we are committed; and that we are confident in our role here and in the hereafter. That quality which can be a deterrent to this kind of progress and character strength and sense of gratitude, ease, peacefulness and be a foundation for such things as compassion, mercy, justice, tolerance, and perseverance is indolence, laziness.

Think about how much energy it takes, how aware and willing we are to put forth energy to do certain things, like our job every day. [Think about the energy it takes] to drive 50 miles in each direction to go to work, to do community service work to keep the community operating, to prepare to teach, to stay up all night to feed a baby, or to stay up all night and feed someone who is sick and dying, or to even have a good hearty argument with someone. Think about how much energy we are willing to put into that. How much energy does it take to run your school every day, and deal with the parents, children and problems, to run our non-profit organization, to do your job, and travel the distance that is required to travel? It takes a lot of energy. What's my question?

Why do we expect that this spiritual journey, which is unending and the most important task we have ultimately in our life, which will certainly be measured in our life, hopefully long before we get to the grave, takes no effort and no energy? Why are we not willing to put forth the same amount of energy? Is it because there is no paycheck that comes along with it? There is even recognition and respect that comes along with it. There's trust that comes along with into—not just trust by Allah, but trust by your friends and contemporaries. Why do we put it off until the end? How much energy have you put into school. Even a lazy person has to put out a tremendous amount of energy every day just to earn a living—mental energy, emotional energy, physical energy.

There are people who work very selfishly; who work only to earn a living, only to fulfill their own desires. I'm not talking about the people who do that because they have nothing

else [they can] do; that's the maximum they can do just to walk 4 miles in each direction to get water or till the fields with their hands and barely have enough to sustain themselves. I'm not talking about that person. Even among those people, there are some who will take their last handful of rice and give it to a stranger. We know these stories; but I'm leaving them out for a minute. I'm talking about the people who are too indolent, too lazy to perform selfless acts, too tired, too lazy, too self-absorbed, too distracted to even seek the favor of Allah Swt, to even be able to say, "*Shukran Allah.*" I tell my children, "If you get up in the morning and say, '*Alhamdulillah*, it is morning,' that might remind you to pray first thing." Maybe. Sometimes, call to prayer on the computer plays, and you blow right past it. And it's going, "Allahu Akbar...." Click, okay, turn it off.

Is it that we are yearning for those other things? Do you yearn to go to the school every day and deal with the issues of the children and the parents? Do you yearn to go to work every day and write programs? Can we say that we forget Allah, and we don't seek the favor of Allah Swt because we don't have a yearning for Allah? Maybe. We could say, "I don't really have a yearning to do the work I am doing, but I do it because I have to put food on the table." Maybe there is an answer in there. We don't have to yearn. Is it that to do these things at all, let alone well, we have to yearn for Allah; but to earn a living we don't have to yearn for that? Allah tells us through Prophet Mohammed (sal), "***Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet them.***" I know you are well trained to put that into the systems approach: throw the stone in the pond, and the pond responds.

In another Hadith Quds, Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, "***If My slave draws a handspan near to Me, then I draw an armspan near to him.***" And again, "***I am the companion of he who remembers Me.***" And "***Remember Me and I'll remember you.***" "***Wherever My slave seeks Me, he will find Me.***" And "***Wheresoever you look, there is the face of Allah.***" How do we look at that? As a truth? As a blessing? Do we really look at it as a

favor/*fadl* of Allah Swt? Well, it's the truth. It's in the Qur'an; it's true. Do we really look at it as a favor that is bestowed upon me, or am I just part of the collective recipient? I'm the ocean, and a drop is in the ocean. What does a drop mean to the ocean? [Shaykh al-Alawi](#), the great Moroccan Sufi of the Shadhili line said, *"Sufficient ignorance be it from you, O disciple, that you seek that which has no inherent existence, ignoring He who must surely exist. If you knew what was in front of you, you would abandon this heedlessness, for the real is closer to you than your own self."*

In Qur'an, Allah says, **"If My slave asks you of Me, surely I am near to him. And I answer the call of the supplicant when he calls Me."** Shaykh al-Alawi goes on to say, *"It is absolute ignominy for the disciple to be characterized with indolence in the matter of seeking Allah. He is like the procrastinator who every day says, 'Tomorrow I will get to it,' until he spends his whole life in idleness."* Then he quotes a poem, a very interesting poem. It's even interesting in translation. *"They are happy to hope, afflicted by fortune. They claim to have plunged into the sea of love, yet they have not been wedded. They have not yet moved from their places nor even set off, yet they are exhausted. When they chose blindness over guidance out of pure envy, they lost the way."* We've been told, and I think it is pretty obvious, that Allah yearns for us more than we yearn for Allah.

Abdul Qadir Jilani said, *"Allah said to me, 'What a fine seeker am I, and what a fine object is mankind. If mankind knew the rank he holds in My sight, he would say with every breath, 'To whom belongs sovereignty on this day?'"* How is it that even Allah Swt can hold us in such high regard, when we are so indolent? Is it simply the pride of someone who created something, like the potter who won't break the pots they make because they are so proud of them? Or [is it like] the painter who thinks every painting they created is the greatest thing in the world? [Is it like] a person who worships

themselves? Is Allah Swt worshiping Himself in us, and therefore won't destroy us or abandon us, because he would be abandoning His own self? How's that for anthropomorphizing Allah! That makes Allah Swt narcissistic. Is that even possible? Why would Allah Swt hold us in such high rank? Is it like a parent who has endless hope for their child, and no matter what the child does, they have hope that they will change? Or is it that Allah Swt perhaps has imbued this form called humanity, and this creation called the world, with His characteristics and qualities.

It is only described in this way, but in reality Allah Swt lives in this dimension through these qualities. And therefore, it's strictly a metaphor that we are held in such high regard. The reality is we are the means, the mechanism, and the potential expression of those Divine qualities and attributes; and each one is noble in and of itself. To whatever degree we express those qualities, that is the degree there is nobility of the Creator in the creation. But that's awfully complicated. A more paternalistic point of view would be easier to grasp, but doesn't make any sense. But human beings are very good at grasping things that don't make any sense, and giving excuses for things that reflect indolence.

On one hand, what Shaykh al-Alawi is saying is that the one thing that prevents us from arriving at that awareness of the Divine presence and having that contentment and that ease, that strength and those wonderful adjectives I used earlier is laziness, indolence. Compared to the people who are so indolent, lazy, and self-absorbed they don't do any good works at all, we are of a high rank. Every one in this room has a high rank. Let's go home—*khalas*. Those people just may say, "If they are religious, this is the hand that was dealt to me. This is my fate," thinking Allah has made them this way instead of their own distractions, laziness, and desires. Underneath it all, we realize that such people or that aspect of our own self is such, that if we would see some worldly benefit in remembering Allah, in serving others, in putting the same energy into our spiritual life as we do into

our relationships, in our work, in driving back and forth, our distractions, then we would probably strive very hard to reach that state.

If we believe Allah Swt has given us this *rizq*, this provision; that Allah has given us all that we have, then do we really believe that the means to get it is something we should seek, since it seems to be given any how? When it comes to seeking Allah, it doesn't seem that most of us seek the means to do that. Most of us don't even do the good works to draw even near to Allah, nor make the effort and have the perseverance to gain His *fadh*l and *nai'mat*. So most people act as if they are completely safe, completely secure, even while they are acting very unhappy, complaining, moody and whatever they may be. They have the luxury to be moody and complaining, because underneath it all they feel safe and secure. Yet, Allah Swt says in Qur'an, **"No one feels safe in Allah's design save those who are lost."**

If you tell them to fear Allah, they will say, "Allah is merciful. It's true." But isn't He also all providing? Why don't we seek the means Allah has in the storehouse for us? (Knock, knock) "Yes, here's a letter for you. It says, 'In the storehouse is all this stuff for you. Please come claim it before July 21 at midnight; otherwise, it will be given to someone else.'" "Tomorrow, I'll go. Oh, how much is there? A lot! I'll have to get a truck. That will cost money. Well, we have everything we need..." Then we do things that are not good; we say things that are not nice. We regret things we say and do; we have motivations that are not pure. Yet we don't seek the means to obtain Allah's forgiveness, either. Behaving the way many of us do in this case, our companions are not exactly paradisaical, yet we don't fear hell. We think hell is a strange, far-fetched idea. It's a metaphor, don't worry about it. It means a little unhappiness. It means you won't get everything you want. Who believes in hell? You get into an argument and tell a person to go to hell; then you believe in it. Or some of us who grew up in another

generation say, “What the hell are you talking about?” [Using hell is] bad language.

Allah says, **“Whoever comes forth with a bad deed will only be requited with a deed like it. Show yourself some mercy, for you cannot hope to achieve what you are attempting.”** Then on this subject, Shaykh al-Alawi says,

O you who work for hell, your body is soft. So test yourself with the midday heat, or try a hornet’s sting. Then add the venomous bite of a terrible snake. If you can’t bear it, alas. Why seek to anger the Lord of all being? Day by day you reveal your folly by wearing the robes of piety and honor. Your boldness exceeds that of all mankind by the ignorance and ill intent of your soul. You say, “As for sin, my Lord doth forgive it.” You speak true, but He forgives those whom He wills. Just as your Lord forgives, He also provides. Why not see these two equally?

You hope for clemency without repentance, and you plan and scheme to attain your provisions. Yet He charged Himself to provide for His slaves, and did not guarantee paradise for all men. Why then do you chase what is provided for you, and abandon what you have been charged to perform? In every matter, your thoughts of Him waver between good and ill, as your caprice dictates.

In a strange way, if we hope too much, then we remain distant from Allah Swt because we don’t have the energy to go seek the means. We don’t seek the active relationship. Allah is compassionate; Allah is the provider; Allah is giving me hope. This is the flip side of *tadbīr*—planning not to plan. If we really love the gift of our life and the provisions that come to us, then it seems we should seek the nearness, seek the means

toward Allah. It really is strange that people, or any of us, could be happy separate and veiled from that Divine presence. We also see in someone who is given a lot of responsibility, as we see coming to [our next president], that they might realize the enormity of that responsibility, that they might be humbled by that. [We] realize that though that may be worldly responsibilities, every day Allah Swt gives us tremendous responsibility over our actions, our thoughts, our words, our worship, our words, our service to Him, to humanity—tremendous responsibility. [It is] only the kind that would be given to someone held in very high regard, and then perhaps we would work very diligently at what Allah has placed before us and try to do the very best we can. That’s what we expect of our leaders. If one comes along and says they are really going to do it, they are viewed with enthusiastic skepticism, or skeptical enthusiasm, “Yes, I believe you, but you see that virus that is about to descend upon you and turn you into the same kind of mindless, ego-centered person like everyone else?”

We feel hope in that. The unique thing about the gentleman I’m talking about is that somehow, intuitively, he knows you put that hope along with a challenge to join in. Don’t just sit back and watch what I’m going to do: make suggestions; join in; be a part of the process, a part of the team. That’s the secret. That’s a secret, anyway. That’s what Allah is saying. Here you are; but seek the means to fulfill that responsibility. You are all in the game; make your suggestions. Be a part of it—anything you can do to keep yourself a part of it. If you buy in, then you have more patience. You’ll seek the means to make things happen on your level. When the opportunity comes to you, you’ll do something locally, or perform community service, or encourage someone, you will do it, because you’ll own it. Don’t we own our lives in that sense?

Yet we have come so far away from this understanding and made such poor choices. We reduced the value of our own goals. If you achieve something that is a low level, but

that's your goal, you feel good. A person who does that, almost every action they take has some kind of sin attached to it, if nothing else, the sin of indolence. We have to ask Allah Swt and work hard at our spiritual life just as we do in everything else. And ask Allah to give life to our heart as well as to our minds, and to inspire us to seek that nearness, and to understand that all inspiration, all light, all provision and opportunity come from Allah. What we want is none other than that awareness of Allah Swt. Give up the excuse of mañana/tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, it's now today, and we should work hard at it. Plan for tomorrow, work hard today as if it's our last day. The core of that is remembrance of Allah Swt. In a Hadith the Prophet (sal) said,

A man came to the Prophet (sal), and said, "O Prophet of Allah! The laws of Islam have become too many. Give us a means of access to which we can cling, which is comprehensive, other than these laws." He said, "Let not your tongue cease to be moist with the remembrance of Allah. Mighty is He and majestic.

Remembering has to be linked to action; otherwise, it becomes an excuse for inaction. That's all, *insh'allah*. That's enough. *Asalāmu aleikum*.