

January 21, 2009

Wednesday

Title: [How Does Transmission Happen?](#)

DVD title: Planting in the Soul the Seed of Spirituality:
Receiving Transmissions from an Authorized Guide

Dinner blessing: O Allah, You told us to remember You and You remember us. We ask You to make us open our eyes and our ears and our hearts so that it is easy to remember You. Give us ease in remembering You, Allah Swt. Let the things that appear to be good, and the things that appear to be bad; the things that are difficult and the things that are easy, let them all be means for remembering You, especially at this time, Allah, when we are surrounded by the beautiful young life of new children and the passing of older children of Yours. We ask You, Allah, to give us strength and vision, give us energy and give us the health to serve You better. .

Sohbet: Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. One of my relatively new students asked me a question the other day. The question he asked was about the transmission, what is happening and why. You remember in the Holy Qur'an Allah says that Allah draws to Himself everyone who is willing, and guides to Himself everyone who turns toward Him, which is interesting science. If you have *irāda*/will, then Allah draws you toward Him, which leads you to believe that any resistance (intentional or not) keeps Allah from drawing you to Him. And He guides to Himself anyone who turns to Him.

One of the requirements to move toward Allah, which really means to be aware of the Divine presence, is to plant in the soul of the individual what we might call the seed, *hibb*,

of spirituality, of a desire for spiritual life. We know from the root of the word that you have also *hubb*, love, *muhabbat*. The seed of spiritual yearning is love. But as we know, sowing a seed is not sufficient. You need certain elements. You need fertile soil (the yearning) and you need water and fertilizer, and all the rest of the metaphor. In the case of understanding transmission, that element is the *murshīd* or *shaykh* who has *ijāzah*/ authorization to teach the guidelines of the Order, to teach the meaning of Tasawwuf, and also to transmit to the person certain things, depending on the Order and how it is structured. Certainly there are a number of aspects of transmission that run through all the Orders.

For example, a person needs to understand the parameters of their duties and obligations, *farā'id*. Certainly a person has to have some knowledge of Allah Swt. Also, in most cases, the *shaykh* or the appointed teacher with *idhn* has to tell the person certain methods of refining their *ruh*, certain elements of *tarbiyya* (spiritual education). The person has to be authorized by their *shaykh* to do this. According to Islam, a person who is a teacher or guide of the souls of individuals (*murābi*) [is one] one who is authorized to lead others, to orient other individuals who have the will and who commit themselves to *atazkiya*, (the purification of their *nafs* and soul from the weaknesses and errors of life and circumstances); a person who can give us the tools to polish, to embellish our qualities and arrive at certain *maqam* (a station of spiritual advancement or excellence); a person who has the *idhn*, the authorization necessary for transmitting this *tarbiyya*.

It has always been, in the history of humanity, to have teachers of various sciences who receive the training and *ijāzah* from those they studied with, in both the exoteric and esoteric sense. According to the *shuyukh*, such people have to have a certain kind of aptitude for this kind of guidance. It is referred to as *irshad*, a certain type of knowledge or *akhlaq*, spiritual quality. It means they have a capacity to guide; but moreover, it's a

kind of authorization that comes because they are able to receive the *bāraka* and understand intuitively the spiritual guidance and practices that awaken and bear fruit in the hearts of those who also aspire as they do. The people who have those specific qualities, just like all of us have specific qualities and capabilities others don't have, those are the people who receive the *ijāzah* to teach others, to guide people to the *dhikrullah*, and to receive the *dīn*. These are people who most of the time see the clear signs of that Divine presence. They can say, "Look there, look here," or "What you are seeing is not really present. What you are describing is other than what is really present." There are certain essential elements of transmission that have to be clear.

This whole topic of transmission expands into further discussion of the roles of the community of people: the *ummah* or the *jamat*, when people gather. But first thing is we have to realize that the common notion that in our time there are no more qualified guides or spiritual teachers is not true. It is true that we are in some kind of a state of spiritual degeneration: distractions/*gafla*, and *bida* people notice or don't notice, the real internal *bida*. Even though we are in a state where a lot of that seems to exist in this period of history, the conditions of life and the times we live in; nonetheless, a person who has real love in their heart, real desire, a real ardent wish for knowledge/*marifah*, that wish cannot remain un-responded to. Just the fact that we exist is a response of Allah. At no point in the history of human beings can there be an absence of spiritual guidance or authorized teachers. If that were so, then we would say that actions don't follow intentions, and we would be contradicting a very major teaching. The *hidaya*/guidance that comes from the mercy of Allah would also be lacking. You would be saying that there's no mercy, that a person's yearning would go unanswered and that Allah was not merciful and compassionate.

A famous teacher, Imam Qureyshi said, "*As long as Islam lasts, there will be no time in*

history when there are not guides.” And other teachers quoted *hadith* of Prophet Mohammed (sal) on the same subject. One of the *hadith* reported by Muslim, according to Ibn Abu Wakas, who was a Companion of the Prophet Mohammed (sal), said that the **“People of Maghreb will not cease to know the truth until the hour comes.”** I think it is very important for us to understand what this Maghreb means. It doesn’t mean Morocco. It means the people of the West. That includes us. Saad Ibn Malik reported that the Prophet (sal) said, **“The people of the West (in this case he said gherb) will not cease to know the truth until the Day of Resurrection.”** It’s not just the feeling that it is important that the teachings have come to the west. In fact, it’s not even just an accident that we call ourselves “the West.” Why do we? Because we are west of what? Couldn’t we call ourselves the Center? From our arrogance, we could. And we are sort of east of other places, too. Why do we call ourselves the West. Unknowingly, people here call themselves Westerners. It’s not because they wear guns and hats and ride on horses. They don’t know it is the influence of Al Qur’an, of Allah Swt. Who knows? Maybe in the next eight years we might even call ourselves Maghrebis.

According to another tradition of the Prophet (sal), also from Saad Ibn Malik, **“A group of my community will not cease to be in the truth in the Maghreb until the hour comes.”** There will always be people who are in the *haqq* of Allah, who have *marifah*, until the Day of Resurrection in the Maghreb, in the West. This in no way means that everybody who lives in the West is enlightened, or everyone who calls them self a Sufi is a Sufi, or everyone who has given *bai’at* is practicing. It is simply saying that the truth exists in the West. This is also an underlying attestation to the fact that at any time in history, there is always a teaching and there are always teachers. If that is true, and if the Tariqah cannot fail to manifest itself to those people who have real inner yearning (not to just someone who sits down with the *shaykh* and asks for a transmission) and real desire for this inner journey; there will always be guidance for such a person.

In the West we see people who have a lot of spiritual or religious qualifications, scholars and *imams*, who have come from the East to the West. That doesn't mean that everyone with a high degree of spiritual knowledge has the ability to guide. Even people with a high degree of spiritual sensitivity might not be able to guide. You might remember a series of talks I gave a few years ago on teaching *shaykhs* versus *bāraka shaykhs*. That is why it has been shown again and again over the centuries that a person who has received *ijāzah* from a living teacher can guide. It is actually by virtue of this, that what we call this transmission—the science of spiritual education, which is an education of the *ruh* and of the heart and soul—can be learned. It can't be learned from just writing.

It's also on the authority of the chain of spiritual guides/*silsila* that goes back to Prophet Mohammed that this teaching and capability is perpetuated in an unbroken line. That is why an unbroken line is important, to the extent that it is said that whoever has *not* received their *ijāzah* or *idhn* from a living *shaykh* has no right to either the title of *shaykh*, nor do they have the capability to transmit. Like a seed thrown on stone, which is the metaphor the Prophet Isa uses in the Injīl, a seed thrown on rock cannot grow. This process of spiritual selection and election that is referred to in Sufism has a certain power in it. Shaykh Ibn Abbas al Mursi, a great Shadhili teacher, said

No teacher reveals himself to his students if he has not been determined by his own aspirations and inspirations, and if he has not received the idhn from Allah and Prophet Mohammed (sal). It is by this bāraka of this authorization and the implicit power of sirr, the secret power, that our cause is sustained and the state of his disciples is protected.

The protection that comes from me comes from the *idhn* that my Shaykh got from

Mohammed Sayed Khan (ra). The protection that comes from you is from the *idhn* and *ijāzah* that I received from Hazrat. It comes from what comes before me, and before him, and before him. There is an element of the *rahmat* of Allah Swt in this kind of authorization that the teacher receives, the trust of the Divine secret. It is by that power that the guide acquires the capability and capacity to create and leave spiritual progeny. The efficacy of this process, even the efficient method and richness of this process of utilizing the *bāraka* of this Divine secret is what transforms people by virtue of the *idhn* and the *ijāzah*.

What it does is what happens to a seed when water touches it, or when it is in the dirt and it becomes renewed and propagates. The fruit of which is the light in the hearts of the people, which is the light of Nebi Mohammed. It can only grow when the *murīd*, himself or herself, receives what they have committed themselves to receive through the *bai'at*. The *bai'at* is the official entry into the way, but there are informal *bai'at* also. This authorization has an effect on us when we follow what the indications are of our guide, and when we submit ourselves to the teaching. When we allow ourselves to realize that we are submitting ourselves to the Prophet, and in fact when we as *murīds* trust what has been given by the guide, and participate in that process of authorization by accepting it, then we receive an *idhn* also. Our *idhn* is to make *dhikrullah*. Our *idhn* is to invoke Allah Swt. And our *idhn* to invoke Allah Swt is usually a combination of various practices and forms that have come down through those teachings.

In this way, we benefit from the presence of the guide, the history of the guide, and the Divine presence. That's why the *murīd* who asks the advice and permission of his guide—not for everything, but for major decisions and commitments that we all have to make in our lives—will see all of the states that are necessary, all of the movements and actions, all of the elements manifest in their life. So that whatever we are trying to decide

demands of us an affirmation of our faith, trust, obedience, and submission, an affirmation of our Islam and our commitments. It's not that we are asking someone to make a decision for us and we are following it. We are asking someone for permission to experience the states and challenges that come when that door is open. (I know I haven't quite gotten to transmission yet.) We benefit from that process, from that Divine presence, from that influence. When we ask the advice, we are completing a connection. We are attaching ourselves to a whole line of knowledge, experience, and capabilities—more than that, to blessings/*bāraka*.

The light, Nuri Mohammed, that comes from that is a light that pierces every veil. Because it pierces the veil, there is no way that anything can be hidden, invisible to that light; therefore, that light will shine on our obedience and disobedience, our good qualities and bad qualities, our efforts and negligence, our enthusiasm and indolence. It will reveal everything to us. That's why it takes courage to be on this path. It is not necessarily revealed in public, or to any other person. But it is revealed to us, and we see it. If we move toward that light, then our journey is progressive. If we run from it, but we keep the habit of the path, again and again it will be shown to us.

The teachings of Ibn Ajīb say that one of the veils or shadows that Allah has placed over the hearts of his servants is individual will, our own personal will. It's will that is at the root of our desires and our freedom, or what those desires are for. [It will determine] whether we will assert our intention and will in our desire to control our environment, our life, and our physical worldly existence, or turn our soul toward the Divine presence and to assert the intention to submit and surrender. When we turn toward our *murshīd* and we turn toward our *silsila*, and we turn toward the essential teachings, it allows us to separate ourselves slowly, to even break the attachment from our own individual will power that guides us away from Allah, or the things that we can control, to exert another kind of free

will, which is the will to return to the source, the trust. That is the will to lift the veil of illusion that tells us, “I’m totally free to do whatever I want to do, to choose as I please, to act as I want, it doesn’t matter.”

When we submit to this process, then we are faced with the harsh reality – or maybe it’s the grateful reality -- that we can’t control everything, that our desires from this world are very limiting to us. Outside of what Allah desires for this world, that is. Allah desires for people to have love and compassion, and patience and tolerance; that they would find goodness between people in different communities. There is clear guidance in Qur’an and Hadith about what the will of Allah is.

To realize that through the agency of some level of submission and trust in our guides (and we all know how qualified that is), we at least get a taste of what it means to submit to the will of Allah, the *tadbīr* of Allah. That comes not from reading books or discussions or even necessarily a *dars*, unless the *dars* is by one’s *shaykh* and the *bāraka* is there. When my Shaykh spoke to me, it wasn’t so much the words that he spoke but that he spoke to me that implanted things in me, as you know, those of you who knew him. Rather, this knowledge comes from the *dhawq*, the taste, the inner awareness. That’s why as *murīds* we all have to think that everything that appears to us in our guide is somehow what we need to see and deal with in order to find more and more refined ways of trust and submission to Allah. In a sense, and you know I don’t like this kind of analogy, Allah has placed between Himself (that Divine presence that is always present) and us this person, so much like ourselves, and yet has a different kind of authorization.

Since human beings have this tendency to create Allah in their own image, it removes for the sincere seeker the ability to structure God or Truth according to what you want. So the benefit that comes from that struggle, though it can be very difficult and

challenging and painful for both parties, is when Divine authorization comes. Allah Swt gives us also the *idhn* to be servants. It's a great favor of Allah Swt to put us on the Tariqah, and to meet the *shuyukh*, and to receive from them the authorization to practice, and in the remembrance of Allah receive the *idhn* to have the veils lifted. In one of the aphorisms of Ibn At'ala Askandari, he said, "*Exalted is he who does not manifest His (Allah's) saints but to manifest Himself, and who only leads to Him those whom He wants to lead to Him.*" The *idhn* given by our teachers contains the *bāraka* so that the person who receives the *idhn* from the teacher (the *idhn* to practice) ... every time you sit for a transmission, you are getting an *idhn*. Every time you receive that *idhn*, even if what you are practicing is a transmission from the *'ālam al khalq*, it's still coming from an inner command.

There are many kinds of *idhn*. There is a more universal *idhn* the *shaykh* has authorized to guide whoever asks him for some kind of universal practice: "O Shaykh, can you give me something to do to get rid of the jinn?" Or, "Shaykh Rashid, I heard you speak. Can you give me a *du'ā'*?" I don't know the person, but I give them a *du'ā'*. It's a universal teaching. Then there are the specific teachings that are given to certain individuals who have those qualifications. Then there is an absolute and conditional teaching; the absolute teaching that can lead a person absolutely to the end of the journey, to that *insan i kamil*. Or there is the conditional one that can lead the *murīd* to certain levels of conditional spiritual degrees, which depend on their willingness to come forward, to have the will to come forward and ask, to make that submission, give that *bai'at*, and to show. So the *shaykh* says, "I see you have achieved this; now I give you that." The contract has been made to receive. You don't have to make the contract over and over again. The contract in perpetuity has been written.

Then there are the examples like Chiragadelhi who went to his grave with the secrets,

because there was no one to give all the teachings to. If you go to his tomb, you sit there and ask for his secrets. Or there is the example of transmitting the totality of the knowledge of the 99 Names of Allah to someone, or certain aspects of those names. As you get in the circles, you get certain names to contemplate. It's very important to understand that this transmission comes through the *shaykh*. It is not the will power of the *shaykh* that comes in to play, but rather the *murshīd* receives the *idhn* in the moment, again from Allah, and communicates it to the *murīd* in that moment. The *shaykh* is not willing it, but transmitting it. Every authentic Sufic practice goes *idhn* to *idhn* to *idhn* back to the Prophet Mohammed (sal), through the chain of initiation, under the umbrella of the *bai'at*, and only with the *ijāzah* of the former *shaykh*.

Traditionally and still today, and what is missing in a great deal of Sufic expressions in the world today, is the necessity for a community of seekers. In the spiritual community, certain capacities are developed and functions are enabled that allow both the individuals and the collective group to make tremendous progress. That's what we will talk about tomorrow, the Tariqah itself—not the individual relationship to the *shaykh* and teaching, but the collective group of individuals and the *shaykh*, and why that is important.