

January 24, 2009

Saturday

Title: Purifying Intentions

DVD title: Turning to Allah for a Pure Intention:
The Kind of Intention that Allows Spiritual Progress

Dinner blessing: O Allah (Swt), when we think about how much You provide us every minute of the day, it is an overwhelming thought that You allow us at some points in each day to see that by a meal such as this or a special occasion, but every breath we take, every morsel of food that we take into our mouth, the sunlight that sustains us, are all Your *rizq*. We are grateful that we have the ability to stop, periodically, and take the time to thank You, for the foundation of our Tariqah, and the foundation of our Orders lies in *shukran*, in gratitude of Your mercy—and we are grateful. Safety in the journeys of those, *subh'anallah*, is necessary for those who are traveling home, tomorrow and next week, and health and well-being to all of them. We ask for special blessings on the soul of Carol Christie, again, whose memory lives on with us. *Amin.*

Subbat: *Bismillah ar-Rahman ir Raheem.* In the name of Allah (Swt) Who is the beginner of all things and the retainer of all things past, Who has the power of peace and blessings in His hands through the Prophet Mohammed (sal), who came with the best of intentions and the best of actions.

We obviously all know what an intention is. It was my intention not to eat too much tonight. That is one kind of intention. Then there is the kind of intention that we do when we sit in *muraqabah*. You say something and you try and understand what it is you said and put your attention where you are told to put your attention and hope that something happens in a way that might be beneficial to your spiritual growth, *insh'allah*.

We also have to understand that there is dimension to *niyyat*. There are many levels to intention, as there are in every day life. The intention of going to get something is different to the intention to persevere when you are in pain or the intention to forgive an enemy. We can understand that, but I think that in fact we forget it. We accept what happens naturally in the realm of *niyyat/intention*, but we don't intentionally understand intention. So we have to ask ourselves what kind of intention is it that helps us to make progress. What kind of intention is it that helps create humility and patience, perseverance and compassion? What is the quality of intention that manifests as real spiritual inner progress and outer balance? We might call that pure intention.

The source of a pure good intention is what I believe Prophet Mohammed (sal) was referring to when he made a number of comments on intention. "*Actions follow intention*," for example is one of the things he said. We can simply say that if you make a good intention, good actions will follow, but there are qualities of *niyyat*. We have to remember that the source of all pure and good intentions has to be pure. Source of pure water cannot be polluted water; therefore, from a Sufic point of view, the ultimate source of pure intention is Allah. Allah (Swt) is the source of pure intention, not our mind, not our hopes, not even our hearts. Allah (Swt) creates what is pure and what purifies. We can take polluted water and put it through a purification system and the water becomes pure, meaning free of bacteria. The technology, the wisdom to do that also comes from Allah (Swt).

The intention to purify the water comes from experience, from illness, from sickness, from understanding what polluted water can do. Do we understand what polluted water can do? Do we understand what polluted thoughts can do? Do we understand what a pollution like greed can do, or a pollution like arrogance, or a pollution like power or any of these things? We have to put it through a purifying system, and the system and the

knowledge to purify something also has to come from something pure, from Allah. Now, for the sake of those who are not here and who watch or read this, when I say it comes from Allah, I do not mean that it comes from a being. It totally comes from a resonant, completely harmonious, fully measured, absolutely clear source or system or reality which we call Allah. Compassion comes from pure compassion. Love comes from pure love, etc. because Allah is the One Who is pure, the One Who is free of imperfection. Because Allah, therefore, is the source of all purity, it is within the capability of Allah (Swt) to purify anyone and anything regardless of what their state is, regardless of what their history is, regardless of what their past is.

Is that not contradictory? No. Because such a person can have a very pure intention by turning to Allah. Where they cannot have the pure intention from their own self, they can have the pure intention by coming near to Allah, by submitting, surrendering, obeying the system, if you will, of which they are a part. [They can have the pure intention] by engaging in reflection, engaging in *tafakkur*, engaging in *muraqabah*, submitting oneself patiently, especially under test and trial, especially when it is difficult. That pure intention is acceptable to Allah. It means it resonates, and therefore able to capture the response. We have to look at the purity of our own intentions and be aware that nothing is hidden from Allah. The Prophet Mohamed (sal) was reported to have said, “***The intention determines the value of a person’s actions, and he will attain to what he intends. If someone travels to another place with the intention to please Allah and His messenger, then his journey is for the purpose for which he travels.***” You know this hadith. “***Seeking the attainment for some worldly matter or for the sake of marrying a woman, then as such his journey will be reckoned for that particular object or intention.***”

Here we are in *dunya* and of all the things that we can own, of all the things that we can

possess or grasp in *dunya*, the most important thing to learn, the most important possession to have is pure intention. Even though this is apparently invisible and immaterial in *dunya*, it is through the degree of the purity of our intention that our actions will manifest the values and the qualities that eventually will give us security and submission and trust in Allah and bring us the awareness of the Divine presence. It will eventually give us meaning and a spiritual reality to everything that we are doing or not doing.

How can we know how pure intentions are? If the believer understands, if the *mu'min* understands that a pure action is an action that is free of any selfish motivation, and it is undertaken in order to, as we say, for the good pleasure of Allah, meaning to be in harmony with Allah (Swt), well, how hard is that? It sounds easy. In truth, it is very difficult and very, very slippery. For example, I could be talking about the subject of pure intention, and I could actually be deluded enough to think that I would be imparting some kind of knowledge to you on the subject, but really all I want is your intention and your praise so that when we pass the hat, I get some money. (We always forget to pass the hat.) A person could do this just to get some attention. By Allah, then that person would be judge to have no pure intention because there is no real sincerity; therefore, there is no reward, there is no response, or the response is not a reward.

When we do what appears to be good, but not purely, not for the right reason, then it is *shirk*. We are making partners with Allah (Swt) in that we are trying to get the approval of the created but not of the Creator. Allah reminds us in Qur'an: "**Remember Me and I will remember you.**" The most important thing to Allah is what is pure in our heart. Allah resides in our heart, sincerely. In our deepest sincerity, Allah resides in our heart.

If we are putting the creation above the Creator, then there cannot be a pure intention;

therefore, there cannot be a pure response. It is true, also, that we build up antibodies. We can drink some degree of polluted water and bacteria, and whereas someone else might die from it, we can live with it; nonetheless, those little colonies living within ourselves are not our friends. They are just waiting, just waiting for us to do a few more stupid things, then they can eat themselves to death, which is, of course, the irony of *dunya*. The disease that kills you, kills itself. You remember the analogy to this is like the black scorpion on a black rock in the middle of the night. You cannot see it, but it is there.

A pure intention allows us to understand what is meant in the Hadith Qudsi, “**Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.**” In other words, Allah can be found, can be recognized in everything that has been created in this world. If you perform the act of looking with pure intention, you will find that Divine presence in whatever you are looking at. What is Allah is clear. What is not Allah is not there. But again, it is the question of “How?” We can look behind our intentions and see what is really in our hearts, if we have the courage to do that. But how can we really know our heart? Sometimes it is very difficult to connect with our own real feelings, our true feelings, our true nature because this veil of *nafs ammāra* has so covered us. We become so habituated to patterns of behavior—and I mean patterns of behavior, some of which are good and some of which are not good. [They are] not to be decided by anyone but yourself, or maybe in consultation with your Shaykh. But some patterns are very, very good and they sustain you in ways that you cannot explain to anyone, and some patterns are not.

A person who is connected with their *fīṭra*, aware of their essentially good nature will be very careful in changing their patterns. It means we have to lift the veil over our eyes, over our self, so that we are not just following our whims and desires. Sometimes, even the act of trying to lift the veil is so difficult, it causes so much confusion, that we default back to other patterns and false ideas, to the extent that we accept what is false as true.

And we see what is true, because it is a struggle and difficult and very personal to be false. So we have to become much more self aware. You cannot become tremendously self-aware if you are spending a lot of time being aware of everybody else and their faults or their shortcomings or even their affects on you. Some things you cannot avoid. Some things are by agreement. Partners in business have to interact. Students have to interact with their teachers, and *murīds* with their *shaykhs*. Families have interactions: husbands and wives and children. These are all necessary interactions.

Interactions are necessary but how we interact, the quality of our interaction is the result of the quality of our intention. The assumption that any interaction is valid, just because of the relationship, of course, is fallacious. That is why you have employers who are told that they cannot abuse their employees. It used to be that employees were like a slave. It is not role that determines interaction or even our right to interact, it is the quality of our intention. If the quality of our intention is attuned to Allah (Swt), as human beings we are going to respond to the response, but we are going to remember that it is for the pleasure of Allah (Swt), it is to be in tune with Allah (Swt), with the Divine truth that we are acting, we are intending. [It is] not to be determined by the person that our comments or our actions or our relationship is directed to. Well, that is difficult, because as human beings, we like to test these things out.

We can see our patterns very clearly in what we don't change. Then, if you introduce *muraqabah*, and you introduce Qur'an, and you introduce Hadith, and you introduce all the teachings of the *shuyukh*, and you really introduce them, you see how your patterns change for the good, or you see how you tolerate someone else or something else, some other situation, that you cannot change or shouldn't change, or have no right to change. If we want to know our state, *our* state, not somebody else's state, and purify our *niyyat*, then we have to reflect on what is happening around us because what is happening around

us is a mirror. The outer world can be a mirror of our actions. You can say, “I don’t understand this and I don’t understand that,” and we all do that. But take a second and think, “That is a mirror.” You can question the other person’s intention. “That person does not like me; therefore, they will never say anything nice to me. They are going to try and undermine me.” Okay. There are people like that and you can come to that conclusion. But you have to ask the question, “Why?”

Remember what it means when you are looking into a mirror, which can be a very difficult thing and uncomfortable at times, especially if it is a full length mirror and you have just gotten out of the shower and you are grossly overweight or whatever, then it gets unpleasant. Or you are very, very thin and you look like you are about to blow away. Or you look into the mirror which you, of course, never do when you are very upset. It would be a great experiment, if everybody carried around a hand mirror and as soon as anyone got upset with them, they just held it up in front of their face. We would have so many seven years of bad luck around here with all the broken mirrors. It can be very difficult because most of us are very comfortable with the way things are even we are comfortable with our discomfort. We embrace our discomfort sometimes, because it is so familiar. We embrace being able to complain. We embrace being able to criticize. We embrace being able to critique in negative ways. We embrace, even sometimes, our anger, because it is familiar to us. It defines us.

So it is important to have very sincere and wise companions. It is important to be in *suhbat* [with] people who really are trustworthy and can give good advice and can provide a true reflection of what is happening; and not to be a laconic individual or a withdrawn individual who avoids that kind of friendship or that kind of fellowship or that kind of studentship because they do not want to hear, because they do not want to see that kind of reflection. It is wonderful to be given a reflection of our state and it can even get

to the point where you realize that your intention is not pure and you want to change it; but it is very, very difficult and you feel you cannot change. So you say, “That’s the way I am; I cannot change.” There are certain things we shouldn’t change, probably, and there are certain things we should change. Again, that’s why it’s important to have good advice from those who have gone through that and already attained a level of quiescence and purity.

Having said that, even good people are not necessarily good teachers, good guides. Sometimes they cannot articulate what they have learned or know. You cannot assume that just because a person is a good person that they have the ability to impart some really effective spiritual *tarbiya* (education), or that they can impart it in a way that we can understand it and implement it. It is not easy. In addition, we have to be present. We have to be attentive to what is happening to us; therefore, we have to be present with Allah. This is even more difficult, unless we have a means, which of course we do. Our means is called our *muraqabah*, our practices. We have our community. We have people who are committed. However difficult it is, it is much easier to travel even the most difficult path with one who is authorized or those who have traversed the path.

When we reflect on our own state, it is good to do that in good company. It is important that we make a true effort, because only a sincere effort will get sincere results. One way to know if there is real dimension or *ikhlas* in our *niyyat* is if we act, and we see that the action that we are taking is difficult for us, if it’s hard on us, hard for us to change, hard to remember, hard to apologize, hard to redirect our attention, hard for us to be patient and persevere. Then we realize there is nothing as hard on the *nafs*, as the *nafs* trying to be purified. There is nothing as hard on the *nafs* as what is true. You can’t just default to saying to someone else, “See? That’s hard on your *nafs*; therefore it is true,” if you are not looking at your own self. There are other indications of the quality of your intention

and the purity of one's *niyyat*. If we don't care what we consume; if we don't care about the purity of the food we eat, or of the water we drink, if we don't care about the purity of the air, or how we deal with our physical state, if we readily turn ourselves over to those people who don't care, that's another way. If we don't care where the money comes from that we earn—Allah says money that comes from ill-gotten gains can't be used for pure things. This is *fiqh*.

For the person who is a believer, a real believer, there are even more ways of checking and understanding how pure our *niyyat* is. That is to the degree we are really immersed in the constant service and remembrance of Allah Swt, both in quiet and secret, and openly. [It is] not just taking ten minutes to pray 5 times a day, or sitting down and forcing yourself to do your practices, or feeling like you are fine just because you open up the Qur'an just before you go to bed, or saying, "I'm busy, working very hard. I have to go to school, teach school, I have a job," or "I'm working for a spiritual organization: I'm working for Legacy International, or World Community, or CAIR." It's not enough. Time has to be put aside for *muraqabah*—*has to be*—*has to be*! Time has to be put aside for studying the teachings of Prophet Mohammed, reading Qur'an. Time *has to be* put aside for studying the teachings of our *shuyukh* and one's Shaykh. It *has to be*, because those things come from people and sources that are in constant or near-constant remembrance.

The *dhikr*/remembrance is not a thing. It is not a practice that just spiritual people do. It's not something you can decide that you want to do or don't want to do. "Of course you can, Shaykh. People do that all the time." Yes – you "can" decide, but you might as well decide that you are committing some kind of spiritual suicide. You are just putting off not having the capabilities, the companionship, the friendships, or the relationship or the skills or the knowledge that you will need when times get difficult. And assuredly,

times will get difficult. You never know when. If you can't do it for even that little selfish reason, then you should know that you are deluding yourself to think that whatever it is you do in your life, whatever job you have, service you perform, sacrifices you make for your job, service, or family; you are deluding yourself to think that you have even 20% of the tools to deal with it in the best way it can be dealt with if you don't do the things I just said. If you don't do the practices; if you don't study the teachings; if you don't listen again and again to the discourses—even this one, if you don't pick up the Qur'an and read it and contemplate it, if you don't read a *hadith* or two, if you don't sit in *muraqabah*, then you are just deluding yourself and you won't have the tools to do the job you do well. You might do it better than anyone else who does not have those tools, because you have some of the tools; therefore, you will have to satisfy yourself with the praise of imbeciles, or even the praise of intelligent people who have no faith. People of faith will note where you are lacking, that's for sure.

The *dhikr* has many profound qualities to it. Why? Because it comes from Allah. That's where I started. It comes from a cosmic truth, a cosmic reality. When you are making *dhikr*, there is no ego in that. It is pure. It's like a water purifier. Whatever is coming into your mind that is passing through the *dhikr* becomes purified. When we practice *dhikrullah*—and I don't mean just saying “*la illaha illa 'lah*.” I mean, “*wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah*”—and all the myriad of ways in which we recognize the Divine presence, the light of Allah Swt enters into our heart, and we see with that light. When we do, we can love deeper. Our compassion expands. We are more merciful. We are more patient. We are more tolerant. That naturally comes with seeing through the light of Allah, and with experiencing of that Divine presence, and with the *dhawq*, the taste of that Divine presence. Nothing else tastes quite as good. We move toward what is tasty and good.

Even in this realm of making *dhikr* there is distraction. We have to try to keep the pure intention. We cannot possibly see the face of Allah Swt without desiring to see it, without turning toward it. It's our responsibility to remember Allah, to seek out this Divine presence, to do the things that make it easier for us to be aware of that presence and that beauty. If you don't have too much on your mind, and you are still in the discovery stage, then *alhamdulillah*, you'll look up in the winter sky and see the stars; otherwise, you'll be just walking and not seeing anything. My daughter said, "Look up, look up at the stars. Look at the winter sky." *Alhamdulillah*. We can take the reminder even of a child to be *dhikr* of Allah, an instruction of Allah. You could say, "I know what the sky looks like. I've seen it for 60 some years. Yeah, it's beautiful." But it's Allah [who is speaking to you.]

There have to be indications that the *dhikr* we are doing is right, too. It should be done purely. If it refines our behavior, and makes us more humble, and refines our character; if our spiritual intentions become stronger, if our spiritual curiosity becomes more awakened, that's a sign that the *latā'if* are invoking what you have intended them to invoke. Those invocations have penetrated the heart, and the love and compassion and mercy are growing in the heart. If we are making *dhikr* correctly, we see the boundaries of life more clearly. We don't cross certain boundaries. We see the boundaries of the Tariqah. We know that if we cross those boundaries, and don't do what we were asked to do, that we contracted or committed to do, we gave our word to do, or if we do the opposite and fall into distraction and wrong actions, then we lose the spiritual wealth that we've gained.

We entrust our physical wealth to strangers in investment companies, but we are reticent to trust our spiritual wealth even with our *shaykh*, let alone with ourselves. With the spiritual *maqam*, the different stations or *hal* and experiences that come from this sincere

invocation and supplication, *muraqabah*, prayer, and meditation, one grows in awareness that there are real limits to intellectual comprehension and understanding. In order to take intellectual knowledge to its real potential, one needs the heart quality. Whatever we follow—the path or the person—we have to follow with the intention of purifying our *nafs*, our self. We live in a world, in a time of history, where people don't like to follow anyone or anything. The idea of *suhbat* for the purpose of purifying one's own self is certainly out of the ordinary. People get false guidance and insincere guidance. The ones who are seeking the truth are the ones who will do the practices and make the effort that will allow you to separate easily the untruth from the truth, the real from the unreal, and not separate things just because someone told you how to do it. You can be told, but you have to do it yourself.

The people of Allah, the people of *dhikr* and *suhbat*, the people of faith and belief are people who are remembering Allah and allowing what is difficult or even bad to be a reminder—not just what is good and easy. It has been said that the only difference between the ones who are alive and the ones who have passed is that the ones who are alive are making *dhikr* of Allah. And only the good person in their grave is remembering Allah. The Prophet (sal) had a *hadith* on this. He said, "***The example of one who remembers Allah and someone who does not is like the example between the living and the dead.***" We want to be of the living, don't we?

There is more to say on this subject, maybe I'll finish it another time. Try to understand and commit yourself to the good intentions. If we spend enough time thinking about our own frailties and need to change, we won't have much time to criticize anyone else, I assure you—or anything else. The best way to help your own self is to help others to do that. To help others to do that is to be a good example yourself, and be supportive of other human beings. Don't evaluate yourself on the basis of how much influence you can

have on someone else, unless it is good influence in the sense of being asked and reminding them of Allah. But evaluate yourself on what influence you have on yourself. Then you will see all the good influence you have on others. Not only will praise come to you that you will be grateful for (but it won't mean much)—but also what will come to you is a better understanding of how much you can contribute to the lives of others by the way you contribute to your own life, *insh'allah*. *Asalaamu aleikum.*

QUESTION

Student: There's something that's been on my mind for many years. Lahiri Mahasaya said to Yogananda, and I am paraphrasing, "*If I should fall from the path, please catch me and protect me.*"

Shaykh: We'll update it a little. Sidna Umar stood in front of the people and said, "If you see me straying from the *siratal mustaqim*, set me straight," as Abu Bakr had said before him. Someone said, "Even at the point of a sword?" He said, "Yes, even at the point of the sword." So think about them, they came before Lahiri Mahasaya.

Student: What scares me is, if they are concerned about falling off the path...

Shaykh: that's such an excuse. That's such a cop out. "Oh, if they're going to fall from the path, what hope do I have?"

Student: It seems like an intention.

Shaykh: What's the intention?

Student: I'm not sure.

Shaykh: did you get distracted at all today? Are you sure? How do you know? (I caught myself.) When you were distracted, were you catching yourself? One could say that Sidna Umar and Abu Bakr were so sure they were not going to wander from the *siratal mustaqim* that they could just say that and make people feel good, act humble, and get three humble credits for it. Or, you could say that they were at a place in their spiritual

development where they realized that anything coming from anyone had to be considered, because everything is a reflection of Allah's Divine presence. They are talking to the *sahabah*, not the *kafirs*. They are not talking to someone who has a degree in Islamic Studies from Al Azhar, who says, "If you see me not following the *fiqh* exactly, set me straight." They are not talking to those people. They are talking to the Sahabah in *suhbat*. Just like Lahiri Mahasaya is talking to Yogananda. He sees a spiritual quality in him, a purity without ego, and without fear of being misled. [He is] a person who has clear spiritual capability.

It's in the *suhbat* that you can do this, if your ego isn't so strong, and if you haven't pushed people away by your attitude, saying, "Here I am in this *suhbat*, this *jamat*, but don't come near me. Don't touch me, no lips, brother. I'm here. Don't trespass on me." If you are so in *suhbat* you realize that everything is coming from Allah. Your intention is, "If I am deviating from anything, show it to me."

This whole thing about the point of the sword with Sidna Umar is sort of an important point. That's because among the Sahabah, there were people who knew he had a very bad temper at times, and was impulsive at times. The Prophet (sal) had to stop him from doing things. When someone says, "Even at the point of a sword?" they are making an assumption about who Sidna Umar (as) is. And Sidna Umar says, "Yes, even at the point of a sword." Even if that's who you think I am. When Abu Bakr said it, nobody said anything. But when Umar said it, something is said.

It tells you that people are of different characters, and you will be looked at according to what people think your character is, and they are going to respond to you according to that. You have to be able to rise above that and see. The assumption there is someone would have seen something that is real; and he was assuming that he, himself, would be

in error, not someone else. The person pointing out something is pointing out something real, and he is contemplating his own reaction to that. *Asalaamu aleikum.*