

January 28, 2009

Wednesday

Title: [Reflecting on the Heart](#)

DVD title: Paying Attention to Our Heart and Taking Time to Reflect:
Asking and Contemplating Serious Questions

Dinner blessing: O Allah, at a time when so many people are out of work, and not knowing where their next paycheck will come from, or their next food will come from, You have given us a lesson in so much provision that we have to pause and ask ourselves why we deserve it and how best to use it. I ask You, Allah, to clear our minds and hearts and help us understand also the benefit of our own infrastructure, our own community, in which we can assist one another, outside our own immediate families. O Allah Swt, it is a time of great economic depression. Uplift our hearts and souls and help us to learn the lesson from which this misery comes, predominantly the greed, lack of humaneness and equity, and lack of ethics, which we are all tainted with in some way. O Allah, clean us from that darkness and shine the light of Your love upon us. We thank You also for the blessings of the safety of those who are traveling and returning home. And for those of us who may be traveling this week, we ask for Your protection. *Amin.*

Suhbat: My daughter Samah was in my office today. She put on my stethoscope. She said, "I don't hear anything." Then she turned it around and realized she had it on wrong. It was good that she could figure that out. She was busy listening to her stomach. A stethoscope is an interesting thing; it blocks out things like earplugs, and you have to listen for whatever is coming down the tube. We walk around all day with our heart going boom-boom, but we have R-75 insulation and can't hear it. The only time we can

hear it is when we are out of breath, scared to death, or in silence with a special tool to listen. Allah Swt gives us a special tool to listen with, which is our *niyyat*; the intention to turn and pay attention to our heart—the capability to pay attention to our heart.

We know it is very wise of the creators of the Arabic language to understand that you have to really turn your attention to your heart to hear it—*qalaba*. When you pay attention to your heart, your heart changes. The beat stays the same, but something transpires. “*O Changer of hearts.*” When we are listening to our heart and reflecting in the solitude of reflection, we should ask ourselves some questions like, “Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing here? What is my purpose in life? [We should ask questions] to examine the direction of our thoughts and actions, and to evaluate ourselves on what we have as evidence of what is pleasing to Allah, what is consistent, what is harmonious and resonant with what is harmonious in creation. I know that sounded repetitious and redundant, but there really is a difference.

In that privacy, we should realize that in a sense, we choose those moments—or we don’t choose them, but we could. It is said that is “*kif al bab*,” standing at the door. That’s why in *dhikr* we say, *kif/stop*. Stand at the door and ask those questions. That’s why we should set aside time in each cycle of our life, every 24 hours, for that kind of *tafakkur*. The best time for that *fikr* is a time when we are least distracted by other things, when our immediate worries are not upon us, when there is more possibility for the heart to be accessed, when we can plug our ears to everything else but the tool we have for listening to the heart. We know that is in the depths of the night, the last third of the night. We have been told by our predecessors that the real state of our worldly affairs and our religious or spiritual quality, the reality of our spiritual state depends upon the focus and soundness of our *fikr*.

It has been said that anyone who has a share of it has an abundant share of everything that is good. When we have a share of these moments of *fikr*, this reflection, we have a share of the greatest abundance there is, the source of Allah's provision to us, His *fadl*, His *nai'ma*. We remember that Rasulallah (sal) said, "**An hour's reflection is better than a year's worship.**" Imam Ali (as) said, "*There is no worship like reflection.*" It is not by any accident that the word 'reflection' in English is [used] very much like the concept of the lamp of the heart. If reflection leaves our life, then there is no light in our life. Obviously, to have any kind of reflection, you have to have light. Even English has something to offer us here.

There are so many ways to reflect upon our life, like the questions. That's one way. But Allah Swt tells us that perhaps one of the greatest ways to reflect upon our own self is to reflect upon Allah's creation. to look at the inner signs and outer signs, to look at our systems (the circulatory, reproductive, elimination systems), and the systems within those systems of cells and atoms and molecules. These comprise the forms and resonance of DNA and RNA that make us, that are making us. To quote an old Indian saying, "*Making, making one day made.*" Allah is a great agriculturalist. He spreads and broadcasts seeds, these signs, everywhere, after first dipping them into a seed agimant that allows them to grow in any soil. Whatever Allah touches, grows.

He broadcasts these '*āyāt*' everywhere, not just on the earth. All you have to do is go out and look at night. He throws them up in the air, and they become stars and planets. Sometimes He stirs them up and they become galaxies, whirling around. Sometimes He just puts his hand through them and they become holes and singularities. (That's not Star Trek, but Scientific American this month on singularities.) We don't know what it is. We sit on this planet and we don't know. We dream about wealth.

There was a beggar, sitting on the street. He found a box in the trash, and sat on it. He would ask for baksheesh, alms. One day a darvish, a faqīr, shaykh comes by. He says to the beggar, “Every day I see you here begging for a few dirhams. What’s in the box you are sitting on?” The beggar said, “I don’t know. I never opened it. It’s just a box I sit on.” The shaykh said, “Why don’t you open it up? Aren’t you curious?” The beggar said, “I didn’t even know I could open it. I just sleep here and eat here. I don’t go anywhere.” He opens it up, and finds 10 gold dinars.

That’s our story. We are out begging all the time for *dirham* when we have gold *dinars* in our hearts. Allah Swt doesn’t just throw these signs in the earth and heavens, but He puts them in our own consciousness as thoughts. Those questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What am I to do here? What is the purpose of my creation? Those are also signs upon which to contemplate. Everything He gives attributes to, of power, majesty, beauty, and love and judgment. All things have attributes. Allah tells us this. **“In this earth are signs for those who have knowledge and *yaqin/certainty*, and in yourselves. Can you not see it?”** (51:20-21) That is the indication that we are to look into our hearts, reflect upon ourselves and the things around us, reflect upon the favors and bounties of Allah, and to remember them so that we might have success/*fallah*.

Allah tells us (in *Sūratu-n-Nahl*) if you try to calculate the favors of Allah, you couldn’t do it. There is no way. We understand that. You can’t count the stars. Sometimes we cannot even count the people in the room to see if we have enough people to recite the Qur’an. All these intelligent people with master’s degrees and PH.ds cannot count the people in the room. Someone breathes or moves, so we have to count all over again. How are we supposed to count the blessing of Allah if we cannot even count the people in the room? If you are obsessive compulsive, like I am; you count everything. If I sit here

long enough, I will count how many of those metal slats are in the blinds. If I blink, I'll lose my place and have to start all over again.

We can look and see the enormity of all this. We can look into our hearts and ask ourselves these serious questions. In doing that, we remember the *fadh* of Allah. Allah tells us in Sūratu-l-Arāf, “**Remember the favors of Allah so that you may succeed.**” (7:69) If you don't remember the favors, you are not going to succeed. If I say to you what my Shaykh said to me (and we all guilty), “If you want to make progress, do the practices!” The practices are turning to the heart, reflecting on the heart, making *tafakkur*, making *muraqabah*, remembering the blessings of Allah. Then you look at the different orders, especially the Naqshbandi and Shadhili Orders, they add gratitude/*shukr*—gratitude, gratitude, gratitude. Can you be grateful for this and be really angry about that? Obviously, you can. But it's a real shame when we do that, and all of us are guilty to some degree.

We have to bring our gratitude into things that are frustrating, into the things that need adjustment. [We have to bring] gratitude in the realm of planning and critiquing (and all these other things) so that the spirit is right, the intention is right, and then we will have success. All the good things we possess are from Allah Swt, He tells us in Sūratu-l-Nahl. That's going in one direction, and then there is the other direction, which takes us back to a topic I should talk about from the realm of Shaykh Tustari's teachings, which is the topic of *murīd* and *murad*. The other side of it is to reflect on Allah's awareness of us. Reflect on the fact that Allah is knowing us and seeing us, *ihsan*.

Allah says, “**We have created man and we know what his soul whispers to him. We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.**” (50:16) And, “**Have you not seen that Allah knows what is in the heavens and the earth? No three persons can converse but he is**

not the fourth.” (58:7) This is, “[I] pay attention to my heart; my heart turns toward the Divine presence.” What is it saying? Allah is present. Allah is the other person in the room. What does it mean? Do I have to give you those examples again? Allah is the water the fish swim in, the air that allows us to breathe. *That* kind of reflection in the heart encourages it, if we do it. If we don’t do it, it’s all theoretical. Everything is noted; everything makes its impression—all goodness, all *fitna*, all obedience, all disobedience, however you want to call it. If that wasn’t so, we wouldn’t feel any remorse, any regret. We wouldn’t feel any sense of repentance about anything, if we didn’t sense that. *That* presence of Allah in our life is also called a conscience. Our conscience is the proof of something other than our *nafs* that is present. Yes, of course we can make a case for talking about it in terms of ethics and morality, and we can claim that there is social phenomena in all that. But there are also observable realities, part of the *alam*, of the symbols and signs. Even the most animistic, uneducated, ignorant people have a sense of morality, even though their culture may be totally different.

I was watching a preview of a coming program about men who are living with tribal people in the jungles of Peru. These two men go to this tribe, and live with them, and they have to go through all these tests. The [tribal] people are like headhunters, still living in the Amazon. They don’t like intruders. They first threatened to kill them, asking, “Why are you carrying a bird’s nest on a stick? What does that mean?” It was a microphone on a boom. It really threatened them. They put the men through all kinds of tests. They made them sit down and they gave them a bowl of monkey hands. The men ate the monkey hands. The tribal people all became silent, and then started laughing, because nobody ever eats monkey hands. It’s the kind of practical joke a kid in high school would pull. It’s a sense of proving your worth in your reality. The chief of the tribe sat them down and said, “You are two men. You can’t live without having relations every day.” (Note, “every day.”) The chief offers them his two nieces. I don’t know the

outcome; this was only a preview. Then he says to them, “And if I catch you doing anything with each other, I’m going to take hot chilies” and put them in a place I won’t describe.

Now, they never read Qur’an. They never read the Bible. There is this universal perception, sense of right and wrong, morality and ethic that exists. Allah is present for the preservation of His creation and society. We understand where that is coming from; you can’t preserve the society otherwise. Allah Swt is near to us and we are told in Qur’an that Allah knows what is in the heavens and the earth. He is present in that conversation. We have to also reflect upon this natural inclination that we have, our conscience. Some people spend an awful lot of time dealing with their conscience by trying to excuse themselves. But where did we start? We started in the quiet solitude of the night, when no one is around but me and my heart, or, as the old song says, “me and my shadow,” when nobody is hearing, nobody is watching, nobody is seeing but us.

Then Allah Swt encourages us to know not only that “He sees” or that our whole reality is present, part of that Divine presence. There is this encouragement to change, and that’s the dark of the night. That’s when we are alone, maybe part of an 8 hour period when you are inactive. Then Allah Swt gives us these five times during the day to reflect, to stop, to pause. In that time, we are also asked to reflect upon our own shortcomings, too, by reciting Qur’an and thinking about what we are reciting. Reciting passages of Qur’an will help us in our day to day life, or to help us overall, even just the 4-6 short *sūrah*s that I spend 90 percent of my time reciting. If you can understand those short *sūrah*s, you can understand nearly everything. They are reflected again and again in the Qur’an and other places.

Then, of course, it is easy for some of us as we get older to reflect on the transience of

this world. We also need to compare what we know about the universe. Allah Swt places in the universe to our sight, our science, and our capability of barely grasping a sense of eternity. Because of that, we can also contemplate the possibilities of the *akhirah*. If I say, “It’s possible to get in a space ship and travel at the speed of light and never come to the end of the universe,” we will accept that now. That’s a framework for eternity from a *dunya* point of view. But it wouldn’t have been accepted a hundred years ago. Some people wouldn’t accept it 50 years ago, and certainly not 1430 years ago, (except by the people who arrived here in space ships). We even have a basis for contemplating eternity in *dunya*. So we can contemplate the transiency of human life and the possibility of the *akhirah*.

Allah says, **“You may prefer the life of this world when the hereafter is better and more abiding.”** (87:16-17) Suratu-l-‘Alā. **“The life of this world is but distraction and play, while the final abode is indeed the real life, if they only but knew.”** (29:64) Suratu-l-Ankabūt. [We can] contemplate the heart and the capabilities of our heart, how this one organ does so much work and doesn’t take a pause or a rest, doesn’t take a day off; does[n’t do anything but work]. We can contemplate the darkness of the universe by looking up at the sky at night, and also reflect on death and regret, repentance and remorse, some of which occurs at times we wish it wouldn’t, when it’s too late. **“The death you all flee from will indeed come to meet you, and you will be returned to the knower of the unseen and the seen. And He will inform you of that which you have been doing.”** (62:8) (I recite that before the *sema* usually.)

Then He tells us in Suratu-l-Mu’min, **“When death comes, we say, ‘My Lord, send me back so that I might do good in that which I have left.’ Know it is but a word.”** (23:99-100) There is a great benefit to this kind of reflection. It contains our hopes, puts them in a framework. It improves our demeanor, our *adab*. And because our hopes are

focused and our demeanor is improved, and our actions are purified, and our words are selected more carefully, and our actions and character are more refined, and our values are brought to the forefront as a result of all that, we gather provisions for the hereafter. Allah provides something for us in the hereafter. We arrive, and a bank book is handed to us (digitally, of course). We say, “Wa’alahi, I didn’t know I have a safe deposit box or bank account.” “Oh, yes, you have this much in your bank account.”

Then we should also reflect upon our companions. Who is it we are surrounding ourselves with? It is described in Qur’an as friends or enemies. **“Is one who is a believer like one who is corrupt? They are not equal. As for the one who gave and believed in goodness, We shall ease him into ease.”** (32:18-19) Ease him into ease, not to be a *munafiq*, men and women who enjoin evil and forbid good. Allah curses them and theirs is torment. Believing men and women are made friends, helping friends to each other. They enjoin good and forbid evil, and invoke the good pleasure of Allah Swt. That, He tells us, is the supreme gain. By creating harmony, you support the system that was created in harmony. By measuring the things that you do, we reflect a system that is well measured. By creating criteria for good or success, we reflect the criteria for success that Allah put in the whole system. And we have a lot of work to do: on ourselves, in the community. But we cannot do the work for the community unless we do it in ourselves, each one of us independently.

But know that we are inclined to what is righteous and good. We are inclined, *alhamdulillah*, toward service. We are inclined toward reflection. And we have a heart that is translucent at least, and luminous, like a lamp—clear. At least that’s the kind of heart we should want to have. We don’t want to have a heart that has both faith and hypocrisy, or a heart that is turned upside down and only wants the things of this world. We don’t want to have a heart that is the heart of a *munafiq*: sealed, closed and can’t be

opened. We want one that is clear and luminous. The way that comes about is when we take the time and reflect. If you went online and Googled “hearts for sale,” which of those four kinds of hearts would you buy? Of course you would choose the one that is luminous, radiant. But to buy that one, you have to go into debt. That’s the most expensive one. Would you go into debt for it? Probably.

We have to look into the box we have been sitting on. We have to really appreciate what we have, unfortunately or fortunately, sometimes I’m not sure. The classic example is that you don’t appreciate the teeth that you pay no attention to (except when you brush them) until you have a toothache. Then it totally consumes you. We realize that we have to recognize things by their opposites. Rasulallah (sal) said that **“You will recognize a thing by its opposite.”** Perhaps, the fact there is some darkness in our hearts and negativity in our minds, and [there are] things to be repentant about, and things we wish we didn’t resonate with, [perhaps these] are ways to know better. But we have to be careful. There was a time in Medina when the Muslims were very successful, and things were going very well for them. **“Some of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon them) and the Ansars were sitting together, and Rasulallah said to them, ‘I fear for you. I fear that nifaq (hypocrisy) will enter into your hearts.’ And they said, ‘Ya Rasulallah, now? We pray, we fast, we do everything. And you still fear for us?’ And the Prophet (sal) said, ‘Remember, nifaq can enter the heart just like a black ant on a black rock on a black night.’”**

If we want to understand the traits of *nifaq*, we have to study Suratu-l-Munafiqūn. It is suggested that you study this on Fridays. I’ll tell you what’s in that *sūrah*, and then I’ll end. People recite it to overcome illnesses and pain and give them freedom from *shirk* and hypocrisy. The ten traits of a *munafiq*: they hide from their oaths (the *shahadah*). They turn away from Allah’s instructions. They will believe, then disbelieve, depending on

what's more convenient. They are always worried about what other people will say about them and their own image. They like the sound of their own rules, and they insure they are implemented. They think that everyone is against them. They are arrogant and opinionated, and don't think they ever have to ask for forgiveness from individuals or even from Allah. They look for ways to divide the believers, the community. They look down upon or elevate themselves to the level of the *mu'minūn*, the real believers. And the only time they ever accept and realize their errors is at the time of their death.

Bismillah ar Rahman ar Rahim.

When the hypocrites come to you, they say, “We bear witness that you are surely Allah’s apostle,” when Allah knows that you are surely Allah’s apostle, and the hypocrites surely lie. They make their oaths a shelter, and then turn away. Surely evil is what they do. (63:1)

I think that in the dark of the night maybe you could set your alarm, or when you get up to go to the bathroom or whatever the reason you get up—leave the room cold so you have to get up and get another blanket—you can contemplate these things, *insh'allah*. It's a very basic message, I understand. I'll end with Suratu-l-Hajj.

And among them is he who serves Allah, standing on the verge. So that if a good befalls him, he is satisfied with it, but if a trial afflicts him, he turns back. He loses this world as well as the hereafter. That is a manifest loss. (22:11)

When you see them, their persons will please you, and if they speak, you will listen to their speech as if they were big pieces of wood, clad with garments. They think every cry to be against them. They are the

enemy, therefore, beware of them. May Allah destroy the one they are turned toward. (63:4)

That's people, but it's also part of our own self. That's the real reason we should be forgiving of each other, too. Allah assigns troublemakers every once in awhile so we can learn forgiveness. We won't mention who that is. *Asalaam aleikum!*