

March 4, 2009

Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Idols We Worship](#)

DVD title: Signs of A Society Freeing Itself from The Bonds of Allah
Travel in the Land of Our Self to Face the Idols we Worship

Dinner blessing: Ya Allah, Ya Rabb, in Your holy name, all Your attributes and all Your names. You always attest to Your presence and give us an opportunity to be humble, to be serviceful, to be compassionate and merciful, to love, to find peace and justice, and to seek knowledge. O Allah, how can we be so empty minded and forgetful in light of the blessings You give us? Help us to remember that Divine presence. Help us to feel fulfilled by Your love, Your knowledge, and Your presence. Help us Allah Swt to be conscious of that: all the provisions you provide for us, the health You give us, and the opportunity You give us to find knowledge. Give Your protection to those who are traveling and those who are ill. Make us worthy of Your blessings. *Amin.*

Suhbat: (Du'ās). *Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem.* Certainly one of the characteristics of the times in which we live is all the talk about spirituality and God as a kind of irreverent reverence, human-centeredness that embraces hypocrisy and human power and idolatry. The Qur'an says, **“Those who have no belief set up rivals to their Lord.” (6:1)** It's sort of an oxymoron because if you don't believe, why would you set up rivals to your Lord, because you don't believe in the Lord in the first place. I think it refers to a kind of false piety. I think we can say that all false piety is just intentional hypocrisy. Perhaps, it's a sign of a complacent human being in a complacent society, or maybe it's a sign of ignorance. There are certainly lots of people who honestly believe they believe, and act

out of virtually no belief, no foundation in values, not even enough of a foundation of values to have a sense of real humility and guilt.

When we look at the political and social and economic situations we find ourselves in at this period of history, when we listen to the pomposity of people who speak their obvious hypocrisy and politicization of democratic values, it's hardly any different than the politicization of Islam. [It reaches] even to the level where we create ideological imperatives that allow us to slaughter tens if not hundreds of thousands of people in the name of democracy, which is not any different from slaying thousands of people in the name of Islam. We live at a time when people have removed the necessity for God (I'll say God in this case, because it can be Christians as well as Muslims), and do that in the name of God. When a group of individuals, or a subset of society, does that, we sever our relationship with any comprehensive, unified sense of reality. We make this whole *dunya*, with all its manifest faces, idols that are in competition with Allah.

The only way you can say there is competition with Allah and the disbelievers is when you add to the equation that disbelievers claim they are believers—to answer my original question, where I started. With this aggregation of many idols, each has their moment of dominance and time for worship. On Wednesday, we worship this idol. On Thursday, we worship that idol. On Friday, we worship the idol that looks like Allah. On Sunday, we worship the idol that looks like Jesus. During the week, we worship the idol that looks like Merrill Lynch. Bring into that idolatry a group of believers who find themselves in power or the dominant believers for a period of time. Then they are displaced by some other group, some other idol.

This lack of focus on Allah, on our own personal relationship with Allah; this lack of humility, lack of piety, lack of *taqwa*/fear or *khawf* gives rise to constant distractions and constant positioning for power and advantage, and political - geographic-social-economic hegemony. [It is] fed by endless desires, and endless excuses, justified perhaps by certain obvious rules of the universe, like constant change, or the dominance of human beings over the planet. Men have become gods and therefore have sway over elements of creation—the seas, the resources, the minerals, the air itself, the atomic particles—even to the point where such arrogance, where any idea in our mind in any given moment in time when we are dominant, allows us to bend the laws of man and the laws of nature. Repentance has given way to revisionism.

These are all signs of human beings in a society that has freed themselves from the bondage of Allah, freed themselves from responsibility to God. Such people walk among us, and such people exist within each one of us. Like everyone carries a herpes virus at the base of their spine. It's aggravated or agitated by certain circumstances, and appears in some but not in others. So too in each one of us there perhaps is this virus of arrogance and lack of humility. It's almost as if when the environment is correct, we can take advantage of it and deny or free ourselves from the burden of God, the burden of personal responsibility, the burden of striving to better one's own self spiritually, the burden of having to adhere to certain guidelines and principles. We are all guilty to some degree.

What it creates is a world of “demigods at war” who conspire against one another in their Olympian reality, just like the gods on Olympus conspired against one another and deceived one another. That same struggle goes on inside of us. The vitality and reality of human existence that Allah Swt provided us with has given way to this kind of Orwellian

“Brave New World” or “1984” mentality where lies are the truth, and war is peace, and by extension, fear is religion, or doubt is religion, or power is religion. We find that just like the boulder rolling down the mountain causes an avalanche, or the global recession picks up speed (or whatever manifestation you want of this degraded human state), the demigods don’t find themselves; but the pious observer sees, with rapid acceleration, a falling away from Allah Swt, away from a reality that transcends this physical world, away from preferring Allah to preferring things of this world, away from ease and rest to a world of laziness, away from humility and repentance to a kind of arrogance and belief that “I am the exception.”

[It has come] to the point that everyone is walking around in the pious garb with the pious attitude with the spiritual name “Sufi” or “Muslim” pouring water into the lake of milk: “Nobody will notice. I’m the exception.” The rapidity of the collapse of the infrastructure of human goodness that’s based on *fitrah* is almost as intense and rapid as the involution or collapse of matter, when the energy or light is retracted back into the black hole, until all matter in the universe becomes the size of one proton. [This is] the eventual destination of the physical world, when all that is left is the Yawmi Qiyama. How rapid our spirituality can decline as long as we keep it in the parameters or definitions of the context of the Divine. It’s as if there is still a live seed within this empty shell.

When this Divine presence departs, and all that’s left is matter, the *dunya*, left alone, it rapidly meets its destiny, its disintegration in a kind of uncontrolled free-fall. For a moment before one hits the ground, one thinks they are flying. Before one recognizes the truth of gravity, they think they are weightless. Before they realize the harsh reality of their own demise, they are thrilled at the greatness and beauty of it all, the power of it all,

one's own heroic position. Or, if you happen not to be the god in power at the time and you are oppressed, and if you feel the force around you is not a Divine force, [you realize] that is trying to get us to understand that we should seek harmony, piety, humility, and the Divine presence and make ourselves present.

Instead, we have set up these rivals to our Lord. We haven't had to go through that wake up call. We haven't rejected belief; therefore, we don't feel guilt. We keep our belief. We call ourselves by names and do the minimum of worship so that we can call ourselves believers. And in that way we avert the mirror. We still say, "*La illaha il'Allah Mohammedan Rasulallah,*" and we still call Allah our Lord. The irony is our belief or disbelief has no impact at all on the reality that Allah is our Lord and still present. But we are not present with that presence. The only thing that has happened is this idolatry which puts *us* ahead of any practice, ahead of any sense of real communal responsibility to the Ummah; ahead of anything that allows us to be humble has turned our humanity away from where its destiny was to be or could be, and focused us on our lower nature. [It has] focused us on the lowest common denominator and gives us all these things in the world to comment on, to compete with, to challenge.

Maybe even in some strange way it creates a kind of devolution or dissolution of human society as a focal point for our energies to turn us away from Allah. In this day and age, it's the economic crisis. In other times, it's a war. In another time, it's disease and pestilence brought about by an environmental disaster, or by human lack of concern about oneself or other human beings in terms of the *amanat*, or a combination of all of them, which seems to be what we are facing today. We forget that Allah Swt created us out of clay. Isn't that interesting, when you think about it? Allah created us out of clay, just like

for millenniums human beings have created idols out of clay to worship—inert matter. It reminds us that somehow, again, Allah created us out of clay; and we act like we are gods and we create gods out of clay to worship. It's a very interesting point /counterpoint.

Then Allah decreed a term, we are told. He set conditions, a period of time that this matter will keep this form and be a container for possibilities of remembrance, a container for possibilities of rising above this form. He made it so when the *ruh* leaves this container, it dissolves, deteriorates. The idols that we create can last for millenniums. We can dig them up all over the world. That's because they never had any *ruh*. They were never made to contain anything real. In the same way, in a strange kind of analogical way, if we bring our goodness, *fitrah*, and sincerity into the institutions we create, if we bring Allah into those institutions – meaning the spirit comes from Allah – they will stay alive and viable and serve many generations of people, theoretically. But when we remove the goodness from things and replace it with greed, and things of *dunya*, and turn them into clay idols that we have created for our own self aggrandizement, they will deteriorate, just like our bodies will. I know that sounds inconsistent with what I said before. It is, and it is not.

If what we create as human beings is alive and serves Allah, not the institution but the purpose of the institution—in other words, if people have success in *dunya* and they take some of that success and use it *fī sabīlillah*, for other human beings, philanthropically (to serve the poor, help the needy, and preserve the living things in this earth)—then the *ruh* is in it. When they are only used to create idols, even though the institutions may stand, there is no life in them. It's like trying to breathe life into an idol. It won't live. What we don't see is that we do this somewhat to ourselves every day when we don't allow our *ruh*

to feed us. When we don't allow the living Divine reality to be part of our life as an essential, ever-living part of our life we deteriorate: mentally, spiritually, emotionally, individually, collectively, communally. And we are part of the greater deterioration in the world. Worse than that, we cannot fulfill our *qadr* properly.

In other words, when we break our word to Allah—remember that we gave our word to Allah, not our ancestors—when we break our bond with Allah, to those higher values, every time we do it, we are turning away from the source of our own life, our own sustenance, the source of our own existence. Once we get to the point where we consciously and determinedly cut that rope (Allah tells us to hold fast to the rope), then what we have done is died, spiritually, whether we still live physically or not. We can go on living and claiming; but the real essence of our life, the real purpose of our life, the real potential for success; the real opening the doorway to eternity is closed or ended. All the entropic forces that will pull us downward and cause us to degenerate or decay will work like cancers to bring us back to that state of dust, consuming us, dismantling our structures and institutions, our idols. We have allowed our principles and word to fail and all that will remain are traces of a once potentially wonderful reality, sort of like the last scene in the Planet of the Apes.

Allah Swt says in Qur'an, **“Travel in the land and see what was the end of those who threw aside the truth.” (3:137)** That land is also our own individual life. The land is symbolic of what is happening. What is happening in the world today? Is it not caused by individuals? People embrace ideology over the truth, the idol over God. It's one thing when you lie to yourself and strive not to do that and realize it and repent. That's all part of the process. But these people are totally outside of that. We can sit here somewhat in

judgment of them, and rightfully so, but we don't dare turn our attention to our self. That land is also our own self. Travel in the land of your own self and see what the end is of [for] that part of you that threw aside the truth, and decided you can exist without Allah, without your *muraqabah*, without your *adab*, without your personal responsibility, without your word, without your *bai'at*, and arrogantly say, (whatever you say to yourself).

Know that when you lose your knowledge of Allah – I don't mean about Allah. We had someone once on a program who was an absolute expert on Sufism, who knows more about Sufism than I know. Has been to every *dargah*, every *madhar*. Knows every year of everything and has read every text. A nice person, who knows that much (a very tiny bit) about Sufism. How do I know that from one conversation with him? I could talk for one hour about how I know that. One telling thing is, and this may drive some of you a little crazy: he proudly says, "I'm not a Muslim." If he doesn't understand what a Muslim is, how can he understand what Sufism is? At least he could have said, "I'm a so-and-so, but of course I'm a Muslim." Then I would have thought that he understands that you have to be a Muslim to be a Sufi on some level.

When we lose our knowledge of Allah and therefore forget Allah, then we are on a pathway to oblivion. We have lost the truth and the reality of why we exist. We have forgotten why (if we ever knew) Allah made us out of clay and breathed life into us. And to forget that we are the essential ingredient in Allah's creation, that we are the connection between all things and Allah; to forget that everything in this world is an '*āyat* of Allah; to forget that everything in this world is the *alam* of Allah Swt is to never learn that we have a real purpose in life. The world that we will find ourselves in after the fall

(and I don't mean winter) is a world that we are wandering in [that] wherever you turn, wheresoever you look, there is deception and hypocrisy; wheresoever you look there are lies; wheresoever you look there is greed, and disregard for human well-being and welfare. Certainly we all have some of that illness. But without repentance and humility, without sincere practice, without *tafakkur*, reflection and *muraqabah*, there will only be dissolution.

The consideration of our own self as somehow independently and exclusively existing on our own is like living behind the veil you cannot see reality through. We have retreated from the truth, from contact with the Divine, from contact with those who know or who have any real knowledge, those who Allah has His hand over. Upon leaving this community of believers, and becoming a member of the community of "believers" who use belief as the shell, we find ourselves in a very, very estranged world where we don't know who we are, and we can't name anything around us. Allah Swt gave Adam (as) the names of things. By naming the things, Adam knew the attributes and qualities of Allah. Allah showed to Hazrat Adam His presence in creation. By forgetting those names, we forget Allah. We may remember the name Allah, God, or Jesus; but we forget Allah, and we lose our ability to see and recognize our own self or anything around us. [It is] just as if we woke up one day with total amnesia, and everything around us was alien, including we didn't know who we were or where we came from. If that isn't hell, I don't know what is.

This alienation from Allah and from Allah's creation for which we have responsibility puts the false or insincere or arrogant human being at the center of creation. Even though Allah created this whole world around our self, He gave us the means to have that *nafs*

evolve. But we live in a world where we see the devolution of the self; consequently, we look around and see anxiety, fear, restlessness, doubt, questions, arrogance, partisanship, and disparate economic realities, hate, war and worse, genocide, and accusations. These all come from a wellspring of reality, but a reality that human beings have created. They last as long as human beings last. This fear and anxiety, instead of it motivating us to have *tawbah* and *taqwa*, *khashiya*, *shukr* and *rahmat*, as it should and is designed to, all we have done is abandoned our God.

We put ourselves in His place. In so doing, we have made ourselves very distant from the Divine presence. We continue to engage people, to communicate, to have ideas and thoughts and opinions and attitudes—almost like a film where the places aren't real, the script is fictional, and the actors are long dead, but it is still playing on. Consequently, we have become the veil. We have become a wall. We have constructed out of all these idols, a wall between ourselves and Allah. It takes up time, and our energy, our job, and we are tired. We have every excuse in the world. Even we have the guilt about our own excuses. “I know I should be doing this. Shaykh has asked me to do this. Allah told me to do this in Qur'an, but I knew it before. It was in the Bible. But I have a better way to do it.” or “I feel guilty about that. But, what do I have to do now?” “I'll have my dose of guilt tonight at 9:15 when the Shaykh talks. I'll get over it by 10:30, quarter of 11 or when I wake up in the morning.” Remember what the Prophet (sal) said: ***“A person goes to bed a Muslim and wakes up a kafir.”*** *Asalāmu aleikum.*