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Thursday



Title: [How to Be Near to Allah](#)

DVD title: Following Directions to be Near to Allah:
Removing Veils, Being Obedient, Journeying in the Asmā al Husna

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. This inner journey, which we call the *sayr ul suluk*, is like and unlike every journey. One of the first things one has to recognize in any journey is the directions. Just because a person has the tools, a car, or even a map (or even a GPS) sometimes the directions are not clear. Even if they are, sometimes the attitude of our own self overrides them. Then we make decisions along the way: “I’ll stop for a sandwich here. I’ll stop for gas there. I’ll stop to go to the bathroom there.” We don’t quite know exactly when we are going to arrive, unless we are very disciplined like some people and say, “Estimated time of arrival: 9:16,” and then target that. (We don’t know anybody like that!)

Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta’ālā*) created human beings so that the heart of the human being could come into resonance and make that return journey home, which means that there is a familiarity in the heart and in the mind, a memory of the home. Sometimes you hear stories about a cat, abandoned by its owners and travels halfway across the country and found the home of the owners again. Picking up the scent, I assume, some kind of scent—the taste, the *dhawq*—it finds its way back to its home, because it once knew its home. Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta’ālā*) creates this frame and makes human beings from clay, but places this *ruh* in the heart of the human being, and says, “Now, find your way home. And by the way, you can get there if you are very adept, still carrying the body. But at

some point, you will leave that behind and the *ruh* will return to its origins, having now learned many things on that journey, with many memories and experiences.”

Human beings are always adding to that reality. Not that Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālā*) needs anything added to Himself, because Allah is not a self. In some strange way, we add to the parts, of which the sum total is greater. That's a mystery. You can talk about mysteries, but you cannot solve mysteries unless they are not really mysteries. And the goal of all the bounties, provisions/*rizq*, *'āyāt*, *hubb*, and Love of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālā*) is that return. The world and all that is in this world, and the other worlds, have been created just for this purpose: the return. All the *anbiyā*/prophets, messengers, *shuyukh*, Qur'an, revelations and scriptures, and utterings of those who know are meant to fulfill that same purpose. They are the means. Allah said He created the Jinn and human so that they worship Him. In this case, *'ibāda*/worship is the worship of *'abd*/slaves or servants. Worship means to focus, remember, strive, and embrace not some distant God, but some dynamic, real Divine Presence that is present.

Ibn Abbas (*radiya-Llāhu*) said that the “*ya'abudun (that they may serve Me)*,” means “*li-y-'arifūn (that they may know Me)*.” All this is being created so we can know Allah. Allah tells us in the sacred tradition, Hadith Quds, “**I was a hidden treasure and I wished to become known. I created creation so that I may be known.**” Allah also tells us that to know Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālā*), we have to understand who we ourselves are, to know our self. To know our self we have to be aware of our relationship with our self and all this creation, and everyone else in it. It would be wonderful if we lived in a pure state of grace of Allah, but there are distractions and obstacles. There are also degrees and stations of nearness to Allah. If we don't overcome the difficulties on this

path, we don't attain that nearness.

We are told that we have to remove the veils/*hijab* over our self. The first veil we have to remove is the ignorance we have toward Allah. People really don't know about Allah, and so we make partnerships with Allah, *shirk*. We don't understand that the Attributes of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālā*), the Names of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ta'ālā*) are a means. As we come to know how these attributes operate within us, we remove the veils of disbelief. Because for the most part, most people are disbelievers, and most believers don't know what they believe in. For one who seeks to change their life from stumbling around in the darkness (in the heart of darkness) to one of walking in the light, illumined by the light of knowledge and love and mercy and the light of *yaqīn*/ certainty, it is necessary to remove doubt. For some, it means to change their attitude from a polytheistic one to a monistic one. Or it may mean to rid themselves of certain character traits or fears. Everyone has many things that create this kind of ignorance, confusion [that must be removed]; otherwise our soul remains in darkness.

One of the things that makes us feel more close together on this night every week is the fact that when we look outside, it is dark. If we were sitting outside in the dark with no fire and no light, we would be listening into that darkness to be sure we were safe. Even knowing we are not sitting in a jungle with wild animals here – maybe a rabid possum or crazy raccoon – if we were sitting outside in the dark, part of our attention would be on the darkness. You've done that. It's good for sharpening the attention, but it fights against turning inward. But when we sit here, we feel safe in the walls around us. There are certain kinds of *hijab* that make us safe, like the ladies wear *hijab* for a certain kind of safeness. There is security in the *hijab* that Prophet Mohammed (*salla-Llāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*)

put between his wives and the world when he passed. They are symbolic also. To stay in darkness for long periods of time is a scary thing. We know that even some human beings, some in this room, experience some depression in the long nights of winter. We are beings who thrive on light. Not only do we get Vitamin D from it, but we thrive on it psychologically. The first thing we have to do is put ourselves in some kind of situation that removes ignorance, darkness, from us.

The next thing we have to do to be aware of the nearness of Allah Swt is to practice *ta'aa*/obedience—it is very difficult—and *'ubadiyya*/servitude. Allah Swt has said: **“Worship your Lord.”** The Prophet (*salla-Llāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) narrated what Allah told him: **“Those who seek nearness to Me do not succeed in attaining their goal except in proportion to their fulfillment of all that I have made obligatory for them. My servant always seeks nearness to Me by means of the *nawafil* until he attains My love for him.”** Not only do you do the *fard*, but you also do the *sunnah* and the *nawafil*. Some people take that to mean only the prayers. We understand that to mean to go beyond what is just necessary, what is expected, and what is the minimum in everything. I don't mean to be excessive in things that are not good, but to reach beyond the minimum in the good acts. In doing that, one is obeying Allah Swt. Whoever discovers that Divine Presence, even gets a glimpse of it, becomes humbled by that presence and worships it.

Of course, we who sit here know I'm not talking about worshipping some physical manifestation of God, or some god on high. It means we are in that state of obedience and service to those Attributes or the Presence of the Divine as it manifests in our life. How could one do that if the person themselves didn't have good *adab*? That's another

stage of proximity to Allah: to have good *adab*. Most of us have to transform our less than worthy attitude or *adab* into something that is praiseworthy, something that is exemplary, because that process itself brings one near to Allah. “Near to Allah” means making one more aware of Allah. If one is distracted by their desires, and their wrong attitudes and bad conduct; or [if one is] constantly defensive, fearful, or anxious of repercussions; [or if one is] greedy, or finding joy in creating confusion or pain in others, how is it possible that person can be aware of the Divine Presence? It’s virtually impossible. All those actions that work against that resonance and harmony, against our own self and destroy our own body and mind, make it impossible to come near to Allah.

If there is anything that causes someone who loves you displeasure, it is when you make choices that keep you away from the person who loves you; or when you turn away from the person that loves you and cares for you for something else; or when your actions are selfish, and you abandon the individual or you lose the trust of those who care and love you. It’s not religious knowledge. This is just every-day knowledge, ([and] disappointment). You could condense it and say a person turns toward humility instead of arrogance, from jealousy to compassion, from stinginess to generosity, from ingratitude to gratitude, from hypocrisy to sincerity, from attachment to superficialities of the physical world to attraction and love of reliance on Allah’s word about paradise, from despair to the light of hope, from anger to patience and perseverance, from impatience to patience, from loss due to catastrophes and calamities to unconditional trust and surrender, even at the most bitter times of facing what appears to be denial from Allah. And it goes on and on.

There is no dearth of signs of progress. Every single one of us recognizes those changes

in our selves, because we know ourselves better than we know anyone. We have to pay attention and turn our attention to our self. This is what Allah Swt means when He says: **“Know yourself and you will know your Lord.”** (The attribution is difficult to find, but it’s true.) When you know yourself, then you will know where you stand with your Lord. If you have anger, you know that is not Allah. Why? Because I gave you the litmus test a couple of weeks ago. It is *rahmat*. If there is no compassion, no mercy, there is no Presence of Allah. I don’t care how many times a person puts their head on the ground, how well they do *wudu*, how much they can quote Qur’an, or how much the Christian can quote the Bible. Without real *rahmat*, there is no presence. Allah is not present. It’s like saying you will grow your crops in salt. You can’t. It’s not the way the system is set up.

This inner journey, the *sayr ul suluk*, is the most important journey in life. It is absolutely obligatory for all seekers. Those who are the most beloved by Allah are permitted to make this journey—permitted. Do you know that all of us sitting here have been permitted to sit here and make this journey? We got a ticket. It was a reserved seat. When Abu Bakr and Aneesa came in tonight, their place was set. There was a place reserved for them. What was at their place? Their tea and food. Why? Because I knew they were coming. Do you think that Allah Swt didn’t know? I knew they were coming in a relative sense. Maybe they could have run out of gas, or had to stay late where they were. Maybe they are not feeling well, but they were expected. Our place is set for us. They have a saying in Farsi when someone is not at home, which I can’t quote exactly, but I can give you a translation. They say, “Their place is empty.”

Another stage, and an important and significant one, is the journey into the *Asmā’ al Husna*. Once you deal with these first three levels, then you can really begin to journey

into the *Asmā' al Husna*. In our practices, we journey in the realm of the lesser saints and then in the realm of the greater saints. We can talk about that another time, why it's important is to get to the point in your practices where you are journeying in the realm of the greater saints. The *madad* you get in that is exponentially different than you had before you were in that state. When one journeys in the *Asmā' al Husna* and the *sifāt* of Allah Swt, each one of these names and attributes purify us. As you come into sincere, real, contact and understanding of that, they have an effect on us of *tazkiya*/purification. They purify our *bātin*. As our *bātin* becomes purified, our heart becomes polished. Our *adab* becomes refined. We become worthy and gain the permission and means. The veil over our magnet has been removed, and we are being attracted towards Allah Swt's Presence. [Is it] somewhere out there? No, [it is] right in front of us. We are becoming attracted to the *nisbat* of Allah Swt. This is, again, by the mercy and grace of Allah's love, that love which is manifest in our own self through these names.

The great teacher Tirmidhi said:

Allah, exalted and glorious, taught His names to His slaves. Every name pertains to a particular spiritual domain. For every domain, there is a sultan. Every domain has its assembly, its discourse, its gifts, its rewards that are bestowed upon the people of that domain. And He has assigned special stations to the hearts of the Elect.

It can happen that a *wali* stays in the first *iqlīm* and knows only the names that pertain to that station, that domain. When you are in the circles of your meditation, different circles or transmissions have different names of Allah with them. Sometimes it happens that a

person stays in that first level of the names of Allah and only knows those names. Then it happens that some of the *awliyā* have a station in the second, third or fourth *iqīm* at the same time. Whenever you turn toward that name, on whichever level it is, that name is bestowed on you. The attributes are bestowed upon you. As you go through those levels or circles, those names are bestowed on you: *al-Ghaffur*, *as-Salīm*, *ar-Rahmān*, *ar-Rahīm*, *al-Hayyu al-Qayyum*. As you turn toward each one of those names at the appropriate station, the person who has completed those stations, who has absorbed those attributes, become a *wali* of Allah. That's a person who has really benefited by all the names.

Tirmidhi goes on. *“That which the common people partake of the divine names is their faith in the names.”* The average person just has faith in those names, the faith that Allah is merciful, kind, forgiving, serviceful, lawful, present, peace, etc. Those who are in the middle level, similar to the common people, their share of the divine names depends to the degree their hearts are opened. How much is your heart open to this name? How much is your heart open to compassion? How much to you anticipate the Love of the Beloved? Do you put the food out before they arrive? Do you think to do that? There are thirty some people in the room, and what did I say? “Is the food put out for them.” Why? That's how I think. How did I come to think that way? When I was 19, did I think that way? At what age did I begin to think that way? Is it genetic? Why do I care about everyone?

It comes naturally as you achieve the level of these names and go through the circles of these attributes of Allah Swt. How do you know? There's a light that goes on. Eureka! “The food's not out for them. Put the food out for them.” Or there's a light and some

space. “Hmm. Someone’s supposed to be sitting there. Oh, yes, it’s them.” Or you feel love in your heart for someone, and they call. The love for that person preceded. It knows no space and time, no speed. Believe me, there is no one who doesn’t enjoy, according to their capacity and measure of spiritual light, what comes into their heart. It’s a joy. The people of the highest level, the *awliyā* who are totally free of distractions, who dress in the light of the names, they have direct vision of these attributes of Allah Swt. They receive the light of each one of these attributes in their hearts.

Every *wali* has his/her own level or station. That station is given by Allah. This is your place. You stand at this door. You are part of the sacred service. The President has Secret Service; this is sacred service. Your place is at this doorway. Where we are placed is according to our capability and degree and knowledge. When your heart comes to that station, your mystical journey reaches the destination, depending on the level of your piety, your awareness of the names, your receptivity, your servitude, all the light you have allowed to come into your life. For Allah, Allah is near to you anyway. Where you are placed by Allah is different. Allah is as near to you as your jugular vein: pretty close. If you are claustrophobic, it’s a problem.

In this sense, what the journey means is that certain veils have been removed that obstructed your vision, the vision of your heart and the light of the divine attributes from shining through your heart. This was the journey you and I were created for. But the journey of the heart toward Allah, to be in the awareness of Allah’s Divine Presence, requires certain rules of *adab* that are related both to the *dhāhir* and to the *bātin*, the outer and inner. We can go over those some other time. There are ways in which one prepares themselves for these attributes to come into them. I’ll give you an example. A person on

such a journey gives up their attachment to their material possessions, and fully engages themselves in the service to their *shaykh* and the Prophet (sal) and Allah. How? By remembrance, turning one's attention to those attributes; by obedience and trust in Allah. Those are the means. Allah tells us that directly: **“Remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself totally to Him.”** That's the means.

Also, here's a second example. Internally, you should be detached from the world. You should be looking out from a place of security. Externally, you should periodically go into seclusion to detach yourself from the world and people, especially from people who you know hinder your journey. There may be people in your day to day life you want to keep near you. You may want your journey hindered, though you don't know it. Some people keep certain people near them subconsciously to hinder their journey. To make this journey, you have to see and change yourself. What did Allah Swt tell the Prophet (sal) about such people, especially the ones who block the way toward Allah, who distract others? He said, **“Keep away from them and avoid those who call upon anything other than Allah.”** If you hear someone never calling upon Allah, stay away from them. You can chew on that for a while.

There are more means and more principles. We shouldn't try to escape from them. If you lived in darkness your whole life, and all of a sudden someone turned on a light, it would be a bit shocking. Now you are finding out what it is you have been touching all along, and whether it's what you thought it was. Allah Swt said to Prophet Mohammed, **“Read, in the name of your Lord. *Iqra' bismi-rabbika.*”** He couldn't read. Did Allah forget he couldn't read? Did Jibreel have to remind Allah that Mohammed couldn't read? What does it mean, “Read”? It means read the signs. When you are on a journey, you

read the signs. If you are on a material journey, you read the signs on the billboards or on the road. On the spiritual journey, you read the signs in your heart and soul, and try very hard to minimize your dependencies. People can depend on one another, and some are dependent on things. Some people are independent of distractions, and some people thrive on distractions, but they don't thrive spiritually. You can only use the tools that are provided. What's so hard to believe or understand about *Tasawwuf*? It's exactly the same. *Asalāmu aleikum*.