

March 14, 2009

Saturday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: **Keep It Alive By Focusing on Gratitude**

DVD title: Count Allah's Favors in Gratitude:
Abandon Complaining through Self-Interrogation

Dinner blessing: O Allah! We can see the Spring coming through the trees and the flowers pushing their way through the hard ground in their cycle of life and their renewal. We ask You, Allah (SwT), to sustain us and give us the strength to break through the winter into a new spring in our lives, to protect us and guide us in the right way, O Allah (SwT). We ask You for Your special blessings for tomorrow as we praise Your Prophet (sal) and bring a reminder of his message to the people of Richmond. We ask You for the continued improvement in the health of Shaykh Nooruddeen and the health of Sidi Abdul Hādi Honerkamp and to the health of those who are here and those who will be arriving here on their train of their *ruh*, in the future, O Allah (SwT).completeness in health and well-being. The students in Turkey have asked for our prayers and our blessings and send their salāms to everyone here. We ask You, Allah, to give them protection and health to Ella Noor. O Allah (SwT) and to our children, make them sincere Muslims and Sufis and to come with open minds and open hearts and good questions, O Allah (SwT) so that they may find peace in remembrance of You. Allah, give strength and wisdom and humility and courage to our leader, President Obama and his staff, that they may bring us through not only this economic trial, but to reaffirm principles and good actions and sincerity in the hearts of Americans. *Amin.*

Sohbet: Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, "***Soon there will be a dawn of an age over***

people when there will remain of Islam nothing but the name and the Qur'an. And of the Qur'an, there will remain nothing but its script." I guess you could, and some people do, make the case for the fact that this time may be that time, because in the world of Islam today, people do all sorts of terrible things and misquote and misuse the Qur'an, politicize Islam, and use it for all kinds of very cruel and terrible things. If we pursue the logical and rational line of thought of that, we have to ask ourselves some very important questions, questions we have been asking ourselves – or should have been asking ourselves – over the last 15 or 20 years, questions like: how does something as simple and as powerful as the pursuit of Truth, and the pursuit of Beauty, and the pursuit of mutual respect for human beings, their good qualities, seem to elude so many people? How is it that agreement and mutual understanding and working for mutual goals somehow are beyond the grasp of people who have been chosen or elected or positioned to supposedly do their best for their constituents or for humanity as a whole? Why is it that something as simple and as pure as seeking what is good and what is true can be so elusive?

After so many years of striving, so many years of practicing or proclaiming one's place on this Path, still people have to ask the question, honestly, "How much energy have I really put into it? How much have I really given of my full attention to this Path? Have I really, really brought my full self to the worship of Allah, to the teachings, to *muraqabah*, to the meditation? If I have not, why has it been so difficult to do that? If I have, and I have been able to sustain it, how was I able to do that and how can I share that with others? If I have not been able to sustain it, how can I have the humility to try to find the answer to how to sustain it?"

Obviously, a person can spend many years in *muraqabah*, in *niyyat*, and fast many Ramadans, and still not be able to sustain the most simple of the commands of Allah (Swt) or, indeed, the guidance of the *shuyukh* and the teachers. How easy it is to complain and to increase the difference. How few and far between are the expressions of gratitude in so many of us. Why is it that the idea of expressing gratitude brings on silence, and yet complaints are given full voice? People are embarrassed to show their gratitude, but there is no embarrassment in complaining? Why is it that people get upset when they are judged, but they have no upset when they make the judgment? Why is that wrestling with one's emotions, doubts, fears and habits have to be so much in public, is even acceptable to be in public as a shared event, a shared spectacle; yet, one's sacred thoughts and beliefs, you hesitate to share with brothers and sisters that you have lived with for 20 or 30 years. Why is it?

Why is the attainment of harmony and balance and humility that comes from *muhasabat*, and from the admission to one's own self and to Allah (Swt) (not necessarily to others) of one's own personal wrong actions so easily kept a secret that we try and keep it a secret from Allah, to the point where we do not repent? We are embarrassed to repent in private to someone or something we can't see and Who won't respond to us in any verbal way to embarrass us; and yet, in public, we do things that are terribly embarrassing or humiliating, or we don't dare speak. Why is it that we guard our ego as if it is the most precious possession, the most valuable thing on earth? We put all of our energy into guarding our ego, but we don't take the *amanat* seriously. We don't guard our planet and we don't guard the environment that we live in. We don't guard the trust that Allah gave us, and we don't even think about the trust. We wake up in the morning thinking about our self, and guarding our self; but we don't get up in the morning thinking about the

amanat.

Hence it follows that defending our self is more important than defending the Truth or the teaching. And why are these types of questions silenced the moment they arise in ourselves? Why, when these questions arise, do we silence them? Why do we distract ourselves? We barely tolerate them. The only time that we tolerate them is when we are sitting like this, listening as a captive audience out of tradition or the choicelessness of the choice. You chose to come to dinner, so you have no choice but to listen to this. Once we even ask the question, why is it so difficult to contemplate it, or to admit to ourselves that for most of these questions we have the answers? We just don't want to articulate those answers because we know that it will mean that we will have to end our complaints and our fault-finding, and we will have to look at our own faults and manage our own temperament. We will have to deal with ego, and we will have to take responsibility. We will have to do the practices that allow us to raise these questions in the first place. Maybe we are the sort of person who can talk about these issues philosophically as long as it doesn't have to do with me, myself. Because when we silence them, we are going to hear other things.

Many of the *shuyukh*, people like al-Ghazāli, Ibn al-Arabi, Abu'l Hasan ash-Shadhili and others, all gave a similar teaching when they told us, "Don't complain." What does it mean? Basically it means don't complain about the hand you were dealt in life. Don't complain to either a friend or an enemy. Most of all, we shouldn't accuse Allah (Swt) that Allah is somehow treating us badly, and we are suffering because of His treatment to us, because there is no Him treating us. There is only the reality responding to ourselves. We know that if we are complaining and accusing and reacting, seeking the higher

ground at the expense of someone else while we are watching out for our own self, we can quickly lose track of exactly what it is we should be on track to remember. We lose track of love. We lose track of what is right and what is good. We lose track of gratitude and humility and submission. They become anathema. They become pejorative terms in the way an atheist might use it.

When we pay more attention to whether we, ourselves, are somehow being watched, we are potentially going to be humiliated. We have to have a way out of that mentality. The only way out of that mentality is to have gratitude and to promote *sakina*/tranquility. The way to do that is to stop complaining verbally or attitudinally, and put at least half, if not more, of that energy toward affirming and proclaiming the blessings of Allah (Swt).

Ibn Araby said it was better to tell a lie in the form of expressing gratitude towards Allah for the benefits we have not yet received, than it is to state the plain truth in the form of a complaint. [It is] better to tell a lie in the form of expressing gratitude to God for the benefits we haven't yet even received than it is to state the plain truth in the form of a complaint. The truth is that no matter what you would say, it wouldn't be a lie, ultimately, because don't we all live under the protection of Allah (Swt)? So what we have that we are proclaiming or what we don't have that we are proclaiming, we really do have it. We do have things to be grateful for.

If we count the favors of Allah, we are told in Qur'an, you can't ever add them all up. There are too many to add up. It seems that it is a simple thing to count the blessings, so to speak, that we enjoy, but we hardly ever mention them. Then we talk a lot about Allah, about how many of us have talked to Allah. I don't mean just repeating, "Ya Allah!" We have trouble talking to Allah, but we don't have any trouble talking to others.

[There are] people who gossip and people who backbite and people who complain and people who, somewhere between gossiping, backbiting, do something that is called “kvetching” Who is it we are talking to when we complain? Invariably we are talking to people who don’t care, who don’t understand, and definitely do not want to keep it a secret. So we project the worst of ourselves outwardly. Then we are surprised when the response we get is rejection or distrust.

In the midst of all of that, we may have food on the table and a roof over our head; we may have money in our pocket and we may have prestige in the world. In the midst of all of that, we don’t think about, “Wow! What a miserable person I am. Look at all this bad stuff that I am doing and how merciful Allah is to me.” You don’t think that. You think that there is vegetable and animal and fish hierarchy and there are human beings and Allah. Then above Allah, we have placed our own opinion. Who understands that it is Allah who gave us the power to do that and to mislead ourselves.

Allah (Swt) gives the means to struggle through time. Sometimes the struggle is such that a day seems like a year. Sometimes life is such that a year feels like a day. You look back and say, “Ah! I wanted to accomplish that this year and I didn’t quite make it. When the day seems like a year, we don’t say, “O goody. I have all this time.” We just complain, “Oh. Will this day ever end?” “Will this day ever end?” We don’t realize that Allah gave us this long day to fill it with things that we forget to do on the short days.

Allah (Swt) says in Qur’an: **“If Allah afflicts you with some hurt, none can remove it but He. And if He desires some good for you, none can repel His bounty. He causes it to reach whomsoever He will of His servants. He is the**

All-Forgiving, the All-Compassionate.” (10:107)

Again we see that, those two concepts, right next to each other. Allah is All-Forgiving and He is All-Compassionate. The implication is that there is something to forgive, and over that is His Compassion. Then think about all the things that we complain about over our lives. When we have a sound mind and a sound body, when our intellect is really sharp and we live in relative harmony, when we have food on the table and we have time for meditation and *dhikr*, when we have time even for *sunnah* and *nafl* prayer and all of that, just think about all the things that we complain about when everything is so good. When we are balanced and our emotions are okay, when the environment around us is pleasant and supportive and the blessings are just flying to us, still we complain. Somehow we feel we are missing something, or we deserve something more, or we close our eyes to the benefits to the things that are around us.

Then, if one of those things is deprived, we get sick for three or four days, or a week. If one thing is removed, like the avocados don't arrive, or the thing we were expecting in the mail didn't come, or it has rained for three days, we complain and we act surprised as if we have been deprived of life itself. God forbid, you should tell someone something that you know they don't want to hear but you feel they should hear. Then you live next to them for the next 10 years, and they will never talk to you. They won't respect you. They won't thank you. You know why? Because if they said it to you, you wouldn't thank them either. Allah forgives us, and the blessings and the bounties are showering upon us, even though we criticize, even though we backbite, even though we have this fear, and even though we restrain from speaking, and we don't address the real issues, and we don't ask the real questions, and we don't have gratitude. Even though we feel have

been abandoned by Allah, still Allah puts a roof over our heads and food on our table.

How many of us sat down to this beautiful meal tonight? It was a beautiful meal. Thank you. How many of us sat down to a beautiful and healthy meal tonight and asked ourselves if we deserved it? I am not talking about the few of you who like to flagellate and beat yourselves all the time and pretend that you don't feel like you deserve these things. But if they were missing, you would say, "Where is my share?" Not many of you. People are like that. Nobody here, of course. But how many of us sat down and said, "Do I deserve this meal? Have I come with the right *adab*?" "I think I will skip dinner tonight. I have a little headache." "It's cold. It's wet. Nobody will miss me at dinner tonight. After all, I went to the *dhikr*. So I don't have to the dinner." Are they thinking about how the people stood over the hot stove today, cut up the vegetables, made the dinner for you and said, "Gee. I hope that people like this. I hope they like this meal.?" "I have an earache." "I have a polyp up my nose." "My foot hurts." (Loud stage whisper) "I have diarrhea."...or mental constipation.

So many of the things that attack us, so many of the problems that we have as individuals and causes so much pain, or [the problems that] attack groups of individuals, like the economic situation in the world today are really results of our complaining against Allah or of our absence from respecting Allah, from our lack of humility, our lack of gratitude. We may show some humility and draw people's attention to the fact that we are doing that; or we complain but we say, "Look, I'm not complaining. I want to point out..." There is a real causal relationship between the state of our immediate world, and the greater world. Then we can look at those few people, if we can see them, who have unending amount of forgiveness and mercy and compassion. But do we sit and wonder,

“God! How did any mercy, any compassion, any love survive given this environment and people like me?”...or if not like me, like the person next door?

The Prophet said, “*Allah is more merciful towards His servant than a mother is towards her child.*” Yet when something comes that seems to assail us, and causes pain, and causes confusion, causes misunderstanding, causes us to get angry, do we remember the Mercy of Allah (Swt)? Do we remember to warn those who we love about the things that elicit or engender that mercy? Do we tell our children to have *adab*, but we don’t question our own *adab*? We tell them to persevere in difficult times or we tell others to persevere in difficult times, but our perseverance is not as strong as it should be; our patience is not as deep as it should be. We thought the world was bad over the last eight years as we were running roughshod all over the rest of the world. Then there are those who thought, “Oh well. I mean this is costing a lot.” But no one would listen.

There are certainly things to fight over in this world, and there are things to surrender over, too, especially when our surrender is our strength. There are things we have to fight for. You can talk about [fighting for] a way of life, or the Democratic principles, but what we really have to fight for is our consciousness, to stay attentive, to stay responsible, and to be able to have the courage to speak out and the courage to act. That is what we should fight for. Allah says: “**Fighting is prescribed for you though it may be hateful for you. It may be that you hate a thing that is good for you and it may happen that you love a thing that is bad for you. Allah knows and you know not.**” (2:216) If we operate with the assumption that whatever comes is from Allah, and it is up to us to reflect upon ourselves to find the mercy and the grace in it, to find the submission and the trust in that circumstance, either by it being given to us or it being denied to us, that is the

only solution to all these questions, all these challenges, all these accusations that are not about ourselves.

The only answer lies in this kind of gratitude/*shukr*, and love. [The answer lies in] realizing that what Allah (Swt) has designed for us is good even if it doesn't look good all the time, sort of like a fruit on a tree. A big, juicy apple three weeks into it being an apple is not big and juicy. A nice, big juicy peach that we are waiting for, if we eat it too soon, is a very hard and disgusting fruit. We all go through the stages of hardness and disgusting and sourness before we get to sweetness—all of us. No exception. You have to know when something is sweet.

Allah (Swt) designed us to be good and to be resonant, to be harmonious, to be kind and to be generous, to be humble and to be patient, to be just and to be all these things. That is the design, and He has given us an appointed time to make that design a reality, to create the prototype. He says that if you do that, then you are worthy of the company of Allah (Swt). You have learned how to keep your ego at bay, and you have learned how to persevere. You have learned how to speak kindly and you have learned how to be humble. You have learned the benefit of being in the company of others, and you have learned all these wonderful things and they become you.

Then we get a fever and we say, “Oh God. I have a 101 fever today. Ya Shaykh, I have a 101 fever. Oh, excuse me, is this a good time?” “Of course. Of course. Let me get out of the shower and it will be a good time. How can I help?” “I have a fever.” “How much is your fever?” “My fever is 100.2.” “Okay. Well that is not a bad fever.” “I just can't do anything. I can't concentrate.” “Ah, but I have something for you. You can take

Belladonna and alternate it with ferrum phos and here is a *hadith*. The *hadith* is, “**The Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, “One day’s fever is equal to a year of atonement.”**” So do you still want the remedies, or do you want the fever for a couple of days?”

What Allah (SwT) has told us is that if we allow ourselves, if we do the practices, if we refine ourselves to be able to see things the way they really are, then we are truly the trustees. What does a trustee do? The trustee doles out the trust. If you have a trust it must be for someone or something. Otherwise why have it? So if we are the trustees of this world, what are we supposed to do? We are supposed to dispense things at the right time. To whom? To the ones that the trust has been given. To do that you need to have certain criteria; you measure up to that criteria and this is what is expected of you, but it is in your control now. It is not in my control any more. I have fulfilled my obligation. I have dispensed the trust, whatever it is. I have dispensed it. Now it is your responsibility. You see, the coffers are empty. There is no more. Now it is your responsibility.

It is the same thing when you get a transmission, or you make *dhikr*, or you are asked to do something, or you take on a responsibility. It is the same thing—no difference. A mother who is about to give birth to a child says, “Gee. I am really tired today.” She turns to her friend and says, “Would you mind having this baby for me?” It is the same thing. *Manana*. Everything is by the *Tadbīr* of Allah (SwT). We don’t control anything. Everything is by Allah’s blessing, including the ability to purify ourselves, to have the ability to see that life is a gift, to be able to see this community as a special opportunity, to be able to be creative together, to be able to do things that are exciting together, and to love one another and to care for one another properly. Not just to live here, like some

people have done for 20 years or more and make no friendships.

We say, “Where is so and so? Where did they go?” And I say, “Were they ever here?” Physically they were here, but being here means to develop friendships, and mutual care and concern, and trust and understanding. [Being here means] give someone some comfort, someone who would not normally be your friend because they would not normally be your brother or your sister, and you would not normally have lived 20 or 30 years with them, either. So why stop now?

How do we heal ourselves of things? You have to get yourself out of the way then you can heal yourself. You say, “Gee. I have this pain in my finger. I wonder if I could heal it with *dhikr*? *La illah ha illah la. La illah ha illah la. La illah ha illah la.* “Ah. It still hurts. It must be something wrong with the *dhikr*.” Yeah. What is wrong with the *dhikr* is that you have a wall between yourself and the *dhikr* and the finger. And the wall is called you, ego. “Hm. Is this really going to work? *La illah ha illah la. La illah ha illah la. La illah ha illah la.* It doesn’t work if it doesn’t work for me. It only worked five hundred years ago for some saint.” That is ridiculous, ridiculous. I have this twitching eye thing again. So during the *dhikr*, I thought, “Gee. There is a lot of *shifāt* in the *dhikr*.” Remember what I said about the *shafī*? Well, my eye is about 75% better. Why? Because I got out of the way. It came to me. I did it. It feels better. *Al-hamdulillah*. Really. *Alhamdulillah*. Would that have come to me while I was sitting at my desk? Probably not. It came during the *dhikr*.

As soon as that happened, I thought about some of the people in the *dhikr* who needed some healing and I tried to go to them. Right? Why? Because the next thought after your

own self should be for everybody else. (Actually, usually it is the other way around.) The next thought should be, “Hm. Where can I spread the rest of this?” You don’t even think that way. You think, “So and so has a problem with this. So and so has been sick this week. So and so has to make a hard decision.” And you let your body go and you do what you do. That is how it should be with everybody, unless you are an avowed atheist. They talk about values and qualities and all this other stuff and at the same time they feel, “Well, there is no punishment so I can do whatever I want,” which of course is in and of itself a punishment. Just think about a life limited to what you already want. You don’t do anything new. You are just going to use the tools you have on hand, but you can’t introduce anything new to the equation.

Well, that really is the way we are. Everything is within us. We don’t have to be introducing anything new from the outside. But that is the struggle. You get to the point where wisdom dominates. Insight and patience, perseverance and tolerance, being meticulous about life and the things of life—that is what is really important. Those are all transferable models. So when Allah (SwT), when the Prophet (sal) says what He says, ***“The dawn of an age will come over a people when there will remain of Islam nothing but the name and there will remain of the Qur’an nothing but its script.”*** It has not happened yet, but you could see it on the horizon, if you really wanted to. It is encouragement or admonition (or whatever you want to call it) to remember. Before you reject something, either verbally, intellectually, habitually or out of fear or self-degradation, give it a chance. Give it a chance. You know you can be a pretty passive participant in *muraqabah*. It is not like you are being asked to walk a tightrope, just to give of your time. So you can say, “I really put my full effort into this for ten years or five years. Full effort. Not partial effort. And you will see. It works. It really works.

You cannot have possibly put your full effort in *muraqabah* and the practices for five years. You couldn't possibly do it. Well, I guess there is a possibility. I should never say it as an absolute. But it would be very hard to put your effort into it and not get results. That would really be impossible. I can't imagine it. I can't imagine it. But the other thing you would have to do is attune your seeing to what the results are; otherwise they could pass right by you. You could have all this potential and never use it.

Salām aleikum.