

March 21, 2009

Saturday

Title: It's What's Inside that Counts

DVD title: Subtleties of the Inner Journey
The Necessary Inner Attachment of the Murīd to the Murshīd

Dinner blessing: *Bismillah.* O Allah Swt we are grateful for the opportunity you always give us to gather together and to share this repast, to remind us of how bountiful Your blessings are to us, and how much You provide for us, who are so undeserving that we even forget to thank You properly. Allah, in this reality You have created for us out of Your own consciousness and self, we ask You to give us the means to find our way back to the core of our beginnings, to the essence in Your Light and Love, to Your Mercy and Compassion. O Allah, we ask You for safety for those who are traveling in their returning. We ask You for health for those who are ill. We ask You for compassion and clarity in our hearts and minds. We ask You in our meetings that are coming tomorrow that you give us good guidance and understanding, and a means to serve You better, and safety in our going and returning, *insh'allah.* And give safety for Amina in her traveling, and Parvez in his travels, and safety for Fatima who is in UK and her returning. Give strength to Shaykh Nooruddeen who is in northern Virginia at a *Mawlid* tonight, that his energy is not dissipated because his heart is praising Your Prophet (sal). *Amin.*

Sohbet: What we have to understand when we speak about the transformation that transpires when a sincere person is on a path of inner development and understanding is that on the outside, the coconut might look fine. But when you crack it open, the meat might be moldy and it might be fermented inside. You can't tell from the outer behavior of someone their state or their piety, no matter the bump on their head, or how many

beads they do, or even if you watch them while they are praying. You can't tell. The way you can tell is the way they deal with real situations as real human beings. But it has to have with it certain characteristics and qualities and attributes that one begins to acquire of Allah's Names that manifest even at the most difficult times, even when the person them self is distraught, repentant, ashamed, humiliated, or elevated in a state of ecstasy. There are many stories. I'm not sure if this one was about Allaudin Attar (ra) or not. *When he came into the presence of some of the seekers, one of the people put their head down to their chest as if they were in muraqabah to appear pious. He said, "Lift your head. I can see the smoke rising from behind it."* You can't tell.

Once someone came to Shaykh Abu Hafis and said, "I feel the desire to give khutbah." He said, "Why do you feel that desire?" The man said, "I feel the need to serve the people better, and you have given me certain knowledge. May I have your idhn to give the khutbah?" He said, "Yes, you have it." And the man got up and started giving the khutbah. A man came up to him while he was giving the khutbah and pleaded with him. "I have nothing to put on my back, and it's cold out. All I have is this rag I am wearing." He immediately took off his cloak and gave it to the man. Abu Hafis said to him, "You liar! Get down from the minbar!" He immediately came down and said, "Ya Murshid! What did I do? What lie did I say?" The shaykh said, "You said you wanted to serve the people." "Yes, was I not?" He said, "No! You gave that man your cloak." The man said, "Why should I not have given that poor man my cloak?" The shaykh said, "You should have waited and given the opportunity to everyone in the congregation to give it. If they didn't give it, then you should have given your cloak to him. Then you would have been teaching the people."

This is the subtlety of this path. Everyone of us would have thought, “What a wonderful thing to do: to give this man his cloth.” *Alhamdulillah*. But the subject was teaching the people, not showing your generosity or your piety. In the Muslim community, in the world we live in today, just like in the world of the 13th and 14th Century, people are more concerned with showing their piety. People study and want to gain knowledge. I don’t doubt their sincerity. So they study different aspects of Islam, and they memorize many, many things. They know how to say them at the appropriate time. But often, it’s very questionable as to what their motive is, more than their own spiritual growth and service to Allah. The only way you can know is to look at the attachment the spiritual seeker has to his attending *murshīd*, and to the Prophet Mohammed (sal)—not the outward show, but the inner.

The enthusiasm that the *sālik* has to serve is different than the zeal that the person may have for their own perfection or their own annihilation. Most of us, just like then, are very attached to surviving. We are not attached to annihilation. If we learn how to drink from the *fadl* of Allah Swt as it comes to us through our *shuyukh*—and as I said last night, this is not about the *shaykh*; it is about us, seekers—if we learn how to drink from the favors that are given to us by Allah through the Prophet Mohammed (sal) through the *shuyukh*, then the door to real knowledge will open for us. We will be able to grasp the point, like the point of what it meant to be the *katīb*. [It is] not to inspire people by the talk as much as it is to understand the meaning of what is being said, because Allah Swt tests you in that sense. The system responds to you. Allah presents this old man in tattered clothes to the *katīb*. Because he has made so much progress, he doesn’t have to wait another five years to learn the lesson. Rather, the lesson is right in his face at that moment. He got the permission; he gave the *khutbah*. The man came; he got the lesson. Boom. No waiting. This was prepared. Prepared to be humiliated? Not the point. He was prepared to get the lesson.

The idea is that you get to a state where you get the point. You get the point of what is in front of you. You have committed yourself to those practices and those means which inevitably sharpen your perceptions so that you see. Your eyes begin to see instead of not seeing. In a strange way, you learn that what you think is going to give you progress is really regressive. And what you think you are trying to avoid so you don't regress, may very well be progress. It is just what Ibn At'ala Iskandari (ra) talks about in the Hikam. Sometimes you realize the blessing is in the denial. You realize that this idea of perfection isn't possible, not on the path, unless your own self becomes the focus of your attention. Not in a normally selfish sense, but you watch yourself very carefully. You watch out.

The Khwaja Khwajagan and the *shuyukh* of this line would talk about the benefits of being in the company of the *shuyukh* or the *shaykh*. You know this is not a subject I like to talk about, but I feel it is necessary to talk about for all of our spiritual progress. The issues of *adab*, for example: that you act in the same way in the presence as you act in the absence, or to undertake difficult tasks that require high levels of attentiveness, and not try to avoid the things that are discomfoting. When you are doing things that are uncomfortable for you, so as to refine your insight and intuition, you don't make a spectacle of yourself doing it. You don't draw attention to yourself. You don't act uncomfortable, even when you are in an uncomfortable situation for you.

Underneath all this is the next level of meaning of “**inna ma'l usri yusra,**” which we all understand to mean, “**With hardship goeth ease.**” The next level of this is to understand that when the task at hand is very difficult, and requires a level of *tawajjuh* and intuition – a high level – Allah gives us ease because we understand it is impossible for us to accomplish whatever it is on our own. That's why it is very important on this journey of

Tariqah, of Tasawwuf, that we don't think we can accomplish anything on our own. We [should] think, "I will accomplish as much as I can on my own," but the impossible only because possible by the Mercy and Grace and Tawfiq of Allah Swt. We know the level of our own accomplishment, but our accomplishment humbles or even humiliates us. We know that we can't reach the next level. Someone else may be looking at us and saying, 'Ah, you have reached such a high level.' But you, yourself know that "I've reached a ceiling, and only Allah Swt can shatter the glass ceiling." What does it mean that only Allah can do that? It means you have to come in resonance with that glass ceiling so you can walk right through it.

The recognition of what Shaykh Allaudin Attar (ra) is trying to say to us in this teaching is that though the seeker has to always recognize how inadequate they may be in their own actions; and know their own limitations and shortcomings, or be able to accept their own inability or incompetence, at the same time you have to realize it is because of those things that you get the Grace and Favor of Allah. Again, I remind you of the story of the man who called out to Allah, "Help me! Help me!" And Allah sent Jibreel to help him, but Jibreel came right back. Allah said, "Well, did you help him?" Jibreel said, "No, he was being attacked by bandits, and while he was calling out to You, he was still throwing stones at them." He still thought there was some agency within himself that he could save himself. Until he stops throwing the stones, he cannot be helped.

The lesson of our great predecessors is: what is required of us in every situation—large, important, small, insignificant, whether it concerns the things of *dunya* or things of the *akhirat*—we have to sublimate our will to the will of the *murshīd*. But the will of the *murshīd* is not calling the *shaykh* on the phone and asking, "Should I buy the Ford or the Chevy?" Or, "Should I take this job or not?" Or, "I can't make any decisions; you make them for me." That's not what it means. It means to adopt the point of view of caring,

seeing, sacrificing, submission, trusting, and repenting, and worshiping and forgiving and seeking forgiveness that one finds in the *murshīd*. It's not about decisions.

The other thing is to realize that only when we do that can our guide take advantage of our state. I remember when Hazrat and I would travel somewhere together. If I was silent; he was silent. On occasion he would say things like, "How are things in the community?" But if I would let him know my state, as in state of mind, he would speak. He would take advantage of my state of mind, or my question, and he would address it. Very, very few times would he initiate it. That's because your state of mind, or what's on your mind, or what's in your heart indicates that you are in a state where you can receive some beneficial guidance. If you are only in your head and jabbering and jabbering, theory, theory, theory; Hazrat would not like that at all. He would cut off those kinds of conversations and change the subject. But, if from your heart you say something, he seizes the moment and gives benefit. That's what happened to me. That's what it means to act in accordance with the will of the *murshīd*. It's a two-part thing. It's to bring the state you are in clearly to the *murshīd*, and then to follow whatever the guidance is that comes.

The other requirement is that unless you are cultivating the soil of the heart of the person you are in front of, you should be very reticent to engage with that person. Unless your default, your intention, and hopefully your habitual state is to try to cultivate good things in the heart of the person who is in front of you, you should only do the minimum you have to do with that individual. It would be like me telling him to buy a lot of seeds and plant them on the driveway. He would put all the effort into it, and nothing would grow. And if anything happened to grow, it would be driven over by a car. This is not arrogance, saying I'm better than you. It's wisdom. There was a story, I believe it was of Junayd (ra).

He was standing by a fountain. A dog was in the fountain. The dog got out and came close to Junayd and shook himself off. Junayd, seeing the dog was about to shake, pulled his cloak close to him between his legs. Then the dog shook himself off. Then, having the power of speech, the dog said, "Whatever dirt would have gotten on the hem of your cloak from my shaking this water off, you could have easily washed off with clear water. But because of what you did, the dirt that has flown into the depths of your soul, you will not be able to cleanse. Do you think you are superior to me, O Junayd, because you are a man and I am a dog?"

How many of us act like that? It's very difficult to know the inner nature of an individual, and it's even difficult to understand the inner nature of a brother or sister on the path of Tasawwuf. It's even harder to understand the inner nature of a whole community, a *khanaqah* of Sufis, to the degree that you can conduct yourself properly before that individual or that community of people—especially a community of Sufis. I don't mean that just because you live in a community like this one, and you call yourself a Sufi that you are a Sufi. Let's fantasize for a moment that everybody is a Sufi here. (Thank God it's only for a moment!) Then can you not understand that everyone is at a different state and station, yet everyone is sincere? If everyone loves the path and the *murshīd* and does all the things I've told you in the last few days, and tries very hard, is it not possible that there are errors being made and misinterpretations taking place? These are errors and misinterpretations about your spiritual existence, your eternal existence, not about a job, politics at a job or whatever. This is about your soul. The errors in that kind of a community are errors that are not errors. The errors are a means to greater understanding, if you are sincere, if you understand where you are, if you understand the *munasabat*. If you don't, you could be anywhere.

The subtleties of the spiritual state, of the people of the *tariqah*, and the community of believers in the *khanaqah* or *zawiya* are very, very subtle. Just like the subtlety of the story I told you about the *katib*. Who would have thought? That's why it is said – and we know that to some degree it is true, despite the fact that not everyone who calls himself a Sufi is a Sufi – some of you may be benefitting by just being constantly in the company of others who are. Someone who comes down the road may benefit from the company of all of you, because everyone to some degree is striving. If you don't benefit, it's because of your own arrogance. Because in your own arrogance, you think you can somehow shape and mold the practices, the teachings, the attitudes, the etcetera, and put them on some kind of a time frame you want them on, on a calendar you want to create. Mitra, what year is it in the Persian calendar? (We have different calendars.) Precisely, we also have different calendars. The one we use now is 2009. But in the Julian calendar it would be something else. Precisely, that's the point.

These calendars are created by people, usually for some political or personal goal or end. Why is the Islamic calendar based on the *hijra*, and not on the day the Prophet (sal) received his first revelation, or the day he returned to Mecca? Do you remember what the explanation was? It's a subtle reason, not an obvious one. This was a time of transition. You have to go out to come back in. The most significant event was his leaving, not his returning. This began the spread of Islam. From the perspective I'm telling you, which is the one put forward by Khwaja Allaudin Attar (ra), when you mingle with people whose states are subtle, you will make spiritual progress. That's why *subhat* is the cornerstone of Naqshbandi teaching. From this perspective, it means every day you are losing ground if you don't try to befriend a believer or a person on the path in some way: FaceBook, Skype, Twitter, Flickr, Delicious, Digg, or that old fashioned thing, the telephone, personal conversation, carrying a bowl of food to someone else. "So and so is sick; I should take them some food." That's wonderful. "So and so isn't sick. I should

take them some food.” That’s better.

I’ll give you an example in my own self, but it is not bragging. I can sit here and tell you all my faults and take up all night. But I’ll tell you a benefit, which I can do in two seconds. I got some Dudonis Feta cheese. For whatever reason, it made me think of our neighbor, Lou. When I came back from Washington, I called Lou and said, “Come over and have a coffee.” I put together coffee, olives, Dudonis, and some *zatar* and things like that. He’s a chef; he likes good food. When something good happens to you, you think about people. You want to share their goodness. You don’t have to want something *from* them, you want something *for* them. This is why every day you must develop the friendship and treat those people, or that person, with goodness and good care. Unless in your heart you have a sense of friendship and love for the individual, it’s dangerous to be on familiar terms with people. If you don’t have the right guidelines and rules to follow, the result will be the opposite of progress.

There is Persian couplet. It’s Nūruz, so I have to quote Persian couplets. “*No respect is paid to one who lacks good manners. It is even a mistake to be well-mannered.*” All these years we talk about having good *adab*, and then I say, “Don’t have good *adab*.”? The best *adab* is at times to not show the good *adab*, not that the persons are not deserving of it, but they cannot appreciate it. They will turn it against you. Yet at the same time, you can’t be walking around the world worried that every time you act nice to someone they will turn against you. So you have to befriend. Come toward the person in friendship and love. What is meant in this context of good manners is the tendency to claim a kind of self-importance, and to regard yourself as better mannered than someone else. That’s the subtlety of that: don’t have pride in your good manners.

I told you the story about the cheese. By Allah, I swear I have no pride in that. I am only

telling you that's what happens on this path: that's how you think; that's how you act. Now when I received from that neighbor a communication, he says, "Dear brother." What does the *hadith* say about the enemy and the brother? It's the proof. Everything that is said in Tariqah can be proven by Qur'an or Hadith. And if it can't be; don't listen to it. The value of a *muhadath* in this case is if you really want to understand something that is being from another perspective, he can tell you the *hadith* that goes with that teaching. The person who just learns them to impress people is exactly what this teaching is about, too—the danger.

And it gets even more subtle. If you have a vision of something that seems to be not consistent with the Sharī'ah, you still have to adhere to the Sharī'ah even though your vision is such that it is not consistent, and not assign any value to whatever that vision is. Why? Because then you still struggle with the understanding. If you don't struggle with the understanding, you will not get any understanding. The Sharī'ah will just be a bunch of rules and words and regulations. You will never evolve an understanding of what it is. It is never what's on the surface: do this, don't do this. This is good, this is bad. It is: Why? Where does it take you? The problem is, not everybody who has a yearning for real knowledge has necessarily the capacity to see this. It is proven historically, time and time again. Not every *waliyullah* (saint) has been able to reconcile their insight with their religious knowledge or belief. This becomes one of the meanings of the *siratal mustaqim*.

If you stay on the baseline, then you can measure your progress. Those who have been able to reconcile, and resonate, and harmonize their insights with the Sharī'ah or with the religious belief or their *iman* are exceptional beings. They are the beings who, when they act, even if they act without any knowledge, they act in accordance with what Allah Swt has given us. In the *hadith qudsi* where Allah speaks through the lips of Prophet

Mohammed (sal), He says, **“I am the sitting companion of one who remembers Me.”**

What we can end with and try to understand is for a community of people who live in a state of sincere remembrance of Allah Swt, who are reminded by each other that is where they are and that is what they are doing, and who are reminded by their own thoughts of their neighbor or in their relationships to strive for that friendship, all things become possible in that circumstance, in the community of sincere believers. I’m not using the word ‘believers’ in the lowest common sense, which is still a good meaning, but in the most subtle sense. Anything and all things are possible. Of course, it is much better to experience that than to just talk about it and hear about it.

Of course, you can be happy just being Mr. Bojangles, who was a real person who spent most of his life in and out of jail for being the town drunk. If he had lived in India or Pakistan, he would have been *majdhub* and in a mosque. People would have fed him and cared for him and found it to be a blessing, even if he was drinking, because he was abstracted and in a state of ecstasy. But in Mississippi, he was thrown in jail. But they let him out, knowing he would be back. That’s sort of the way life is: intoxication or prison. *Alhamdulillah.*