

March 25, 2009

Wednesday

Title: Reliance on Allah

DVD title: Reliance on Allah:
Practices that Create a Receptive Heart for Allah's Subtle Transmissions

Dinner blessing: O Allah Swt, we thank You for the blessings You brought to us this week, and for the opportunities You have given us to remember You. We ask You, Allah, for those people who are struggling with illness to give them health, and for the members of our community who are healthy, keep them healthy. O Allah, in this time of renewal in the spring, renew our hearts and souls, renew our efforts to seek Your Divine Presence. Give us good direction that we can hear and see great thoughts that You may congeal into good actions. For those who will be traveling in my family, we ask You for Your blessings of safety. *Amin*

Suhbat: One creates a receptive vessel in the heart for the transmissions that are coming from Allah Swt in the form of the subtleties of the Names and Attributes of Allah Swt. It is to not attribute to one's own self any of the external or internal states that one experiences. Because there is a tendency when one experiences a state to attribute it to their own self, one dwells on it and covets it. The practice has been throughout the history of Islam to attribute those states to Prophet Mohammed (sal) or to the *shuyukh*, to one's *murshid*. This includes a practice like *rābita*, or a result of their *muraqabah*, or of some *hal* that comes by the blessing of Allah. [The practice is] to not hold on to it, but to let it pass through you; to recognize that it came to you, but to attribute it to the *shaykh* or the *shuyukh*. All of the *ambiyā* or *awliyā* have maintained this practice from the very

beginning.

What is required of the ‘*abd* is to divest oneself of a personal attachment to these external and internal states. The seeker has to know and come to understand, with the highest degree of awareness, that whatever Allah Swt wills for us and sees fit for us is more beneficial and is more appropriate than whatever we would choose for ourselves. That makes it incumbent upon the seeker to apply this state in relationship to the *shaykh*, and to strive to attain the “secret” of the way from the *shaykh*. Recognizing the secret is recognizing a truth that is elusive. It is not some kind of mysterious understanding. It is just something that is elusive. The point of this is to demonstrate to the seeker that only when one has a high state of humility (along with the practice of prayer, *du’ā*, and *daruḍ*), when one has a high state of reliance on Allah Swt (we say, “I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed *Shaytan*”) do we find our safety and refuge in Allah. The recognition of this state is indicated by our willingness to repent, to make entreaties to Allah, and to take seriously the possibility of everything being lost, ruined.

If the ‘*abd* recognizes in herself or himself the inclination toward contentment, then immediately one has to affirm gratitude, *shukr*, thankfulness, for example. If one finds themselves discontent, immediately one has to seek refuge and entreat Allah for help; otherwise, there is reliance on your own self, which forms a barrier. I’m not telling the other side of the story, because we talked last year in depth in Charlottesville about *tadbīr* and this subject, and I don’t want to get into that subject right now. This doesn’t mean you don’t have any volition. With your volition, there is an understanding of where that volition or will comes from. It’s very important that one acknowledges the providential reality or attachment to Allah, and to attach more importance to that than to everything else. [It is very important] to get to a state where we are not heedless even for a moment of our state. Even if you spend a day in misery and pain and suffering, don’t let any time

pass without turning your entreaties and reliance and trust to Allah Swt.

This is why, when we talk about a systems approach to Islam, you see in the physical world certain things happen that build your strength. If you go out and work every day in physical labor, your muscles develop. It's the physical reality. If you are a surgeon and practice surgery every day, you become better at it, hopefully. Whatever our job is, we become better at it by practicing it. So it's very important to realize that by practicing reliance and gratitude, even if you are in a state of pain and suffering, you will become more adept. The results of that practice will effectuate change. Why should we think that it's any different spiritually than it is in the physical world? It's not. Indeed, you see the bridge between the physical world and spiritual world in an example like this. It's in the reality or in the circumstance of the physical or mental or emotional world that you choose to turn your reliance or gratitude to Allah, and a bridge is built between these two worlds: the inner/*bātin* and the outer/*dhāhir*.

It's very important that one understands reliance on Allah is not laziness. It is being aware in every moment, not being heedless. It's a means of not claiming self sufficiency spiritually, but rather to see that one becomes self-sufficient in the world by relying on Allah. It is necessary to understand, in this case, the saying, "Less is more." If we have piety, if we have *taqwa*, if we have *khawf*, it should be for a good reason. The best reason is not to claim spiritual self-sufficiency. That should be the greatest fear: that we become complacent in our spirituality. This was a major teaching of the Naqshbandiyya at the time of Allaudin Attar (ra). It certainly still is a living teaching today. There is a moment when a *wali* is no longer reliant on just their ordinary self; where the person attains to a permanent state/*maqam*. Whatever the shortcomings or weaknesses may be displayed in the individual, it evokes an explanation, not a rejection of the individual.

For example, we understand in the world how [special] circumstances affect people's behavior, making their behavior to be different than it would be under normal circumstances. For example, war, poverty, being the victim of an act of violence, having to take actions they would not normally do would have an effect on an individual. Because this world creates certain shadows and aberrations in all of us, to find and maintain one's center in their *fitra* is very difficult. Often there are remnants of personality or character traits that remain, but they have no life in them. But there are attitudes. For example, a person changes their ideas and principles and beliefs drastically, but they still have certain behavioral patterns that remain uniquely theirs. These may not be necessarily appropriate, or fitting their state, but one should not judge their state by these things. These are just behavioral characteristics that have been habituated into patterns. They may be just personality traits.

We will see in a person who has attained to the state of friendship of Allah Swt that there is knowledge. The nature of the common person, or weaknesses or limitations of the ordinary person who has not journeyed on this path will not manifest in those individuals. There should be no fear of that happening. The implication here is that in our own self, if we keep our humility and reliance on Allah Swt, we won't be too harsh on our own self as changes come about. We notice certain patterns in our self: it could be anything, not just behavioral, but word patterns, facial patterns, things like that. But they have no depth in them any more, and we should not be too harsh on ourselves as we are being reliant on Allah. We should have fear, a kind of anxiety that we may at some point fall back into a previous state. But when that station occurs, one has become firmly entrenched in that humility and reliance on Allah. You lie down in bed late at night, 3 or 4 in the morning, and to your lips comes some *du'ā*. You review your day and make *muhasabat*. You are extremely critical of your own self, so at that time you turn your reliance to Allah and you are thankful that you remembered that. It happens like that (Shaykh snaps his fingers). If

there's any sense of pride in that, you ask Allah to forgive you for that kind of *rida*/pride. These things come naturally with the practice.

In the Naqshbandi teaching, it is said to us: "*It is necessary to be inwardly with Allah, and outwardly with Allah's commandments.*" When you combine these two capabilities, then you have arrived at a very subtle and important state. This is what the Khwaja said. "*Just as his outer qibla is the direction of the Ka'ba, the seeker's inner qibla should be the Essence of Allah (the Qualities of Allah). The eye of the heart/qalb should absolutely never deviate from this direction. The truth should be his aim in both worlds. He should sacrifice his enter being for the Sake of the Truth (al-Haqq).*" On a simple level, every time we pray and turn toward the *Ka'ba*, we inwardly should be turning toward the essence of Allah Swt. What is the essence of Allah? The eye of the heart should be turned toward the Haqq, the Essential Truth. Not the truth of this situation or that situation, the small 't,' but the Truth, the One Truth, the Unitary Truth.

There are people who don't believe such a thing exists, but they approach it from a philosophical point of view. There is controversy about a unified field theory, was Einstein correct, and so forth. This is all from a mental point of view. This is not what Khwaja is saying. He's talking about the Qur'anic 'āyat, "**The Truth stands out clearly from the untruth.**" We have examples every day of what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad, what's hypocrisy and what's not. If anyone has any question about those examples in your life, just turn on the news. You'll see. Hypocrisy will stand out from the honesty. When they asked Mansur al Hallaj, to which *madab* (school of thought) he belonged to, he said, "I belong to the *madab* of my Lord." Khwaja Hamadani, who was a great Naqshbandi teacher, said, '*The business of the seeker is with the master of the school, not with the school itself.*' It's an important statement. To be inwardly with Allah Swt conveys the same meaning.

Each one of us as we seek the truth must act in a way that is in accordance with the Qur'an, with the *Sunnah* of *Nebi Muhammad* (sal), and not even the slightest bit of our external conduct should be inconsistent with that law. This of course is very, very difficult, but the genuine seeker is a person who strives for that. Your body is with the sacred *Sharī'ah* and *Sunnah*, and your *ruh* is on the sacred path with our innermost being in contact with Allah Swt. There are many ways in which people strive to do that. They strive to do it by a lot of supplication, a lot of prayer. They strive to do that by limiting their work in the world; by being in the company of the *shuyukh*, and being in *suhbat*, like we are now, and looking forward to it; and by being conscious of where you are, not just being there and having your body present.

In India, and it's also done in places like Turkey and Morocco, we used to regularly go to the tombs of the saints. A lot of people say this is *bida* for Sufis to go to tombs and "worship dead people." We don't worship dead people. Going to the tombs of the saints is a special spiritual blessing, depending on how you understand what it means and to what degree you can concentrate. The benefit that can be derived from this physical closeness at the tombs of the *awliyā* is not dissimilar to the benefit you get from the physical closeness of the *murshīd*. Physical distance spiritually is not an obstacle in any way to *muraqabah* or contemplation, or *tawajjuh*, which is confirmed by Prophet Mohammed (sal) in a *hadith* where he states that it is pointless to view the outer forms of the occupants of the tombs. The real point, he tells us, is to focus attention upon the people in those tombs and to contemplate their unique spiritual attributes. It means you have to know whose tomb it is, what made them special, and why or how they became that way.

Khwaja Bahaudin Naqshbandi said, *Nearness to the Lord of Truth is far better than nearness to His Creatures.*" He talked about tombs. He said in this couplet, which seems

to be the opposite of what I am saying but is not: “*What comes from clinging to the tombs of the great saints? Do what they did and reach the intended destination.*” You go there to remind yourself of their unique qualities, which, in reality, you are not going to remind yourself of to the same degree if you don’t travel the distance, sit in the heat, sit there for the same period of time, do the study to understand who the person was and their position in the Tariqah. You just say, “Ah, *bida*. We don’t go to the tombs of the saints.” Not going to the tombs of the saints is like saying, “Why should I move to California to study with the best neurosurgeon in the world, when there is a mediocre one right here in Youngstown, Ohio I can study with?” It’s like that. You don’t think twice about picking up your body and moving it somewhere else for worldly reasons. Why should we think it is any different? We should pick up our bodies and go to Medina and sit at the tomb of Prophet Mohammed (sal). And we should go to the tomb of Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra) in Baghdad, some time in the future. We should go to the tomb of Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili (ra) in Upper Nile, as we went to the tomb of Nizammudin Awliyya (ra), etc.

When you make that journey and sit there, just like a person makes the journey to sit with the *shaykh*, even if it means driving down from Washington every other weekend or every 40 days, it puts you in the right state of mind. Every day you can practice that by going to the *masjid*, to prayer, to *muraqabah*, to visit the sick, or going to speak to someone on a serious level about something important in their lives, spiritually. These are all the means. These are the teachings of the Naqshbandiyya. It is very important that we put our attention on what the truth is. Going to the graveyard is not important; that happens to be where they are residing. The spirituality of the *wali* who is present in that tomb is only a means to concentrate on the truth. In that [is the] opportunity to demonstrate your sincerity, your effort, your humility, your patience, your tolerance, your perseverance, and your knowledge that the tomb is insignificant. Whatever is living is the *bāraka* of that saint and that truth.

Those people who call it *bida* are lazy people. They don't understand. They are arrogant, and they are insolent. They think that their interpretation of Islam overrides the reality that makes Islam, Islam. What is Islam, if it isn't seeking the truth, seeking the safety and security that comes from gaining knowledge and submitting to Allah Swt, and to those to whom Allah tells us to put our reliance on, which are His *Ambiyā*, *Awliyā*, and the *shuyukh*? This awareness, this vigilance... another word for vigilance in Arabic is *muraqabah*... Allaudin Attar (ra) says, "*The path of vigilant awareness, muraqabah, is more productive than working on the basis of negation and affirmation.*" [It is] more productive than saying, "*La illaha il'Allah.*" Anybody can repeat "*La illaha il'Allah,*" but to make the effort to reflect on the meaning is something else. He said,

By the path of vigilant awareness (muraqabah) one attains to the highest degree, to the level of dispensation and access to the realm of the angels. The constant practice of vigilant awareness (muraqabah) includes paying attention to the feelings; paying attention to the negative ideas that invade your ruh and mind at random, and viewing the universe with the eye of kindness and mercy, and enlightening your inner being. Unity of the spirit and compliance of the heart are products of the faculty of muraqabah.

There is a beautiful definition of *muraqabah*. He tells a story.

When we first went to the district, work on the inner being had been done with each of our companions. The purpose was to test their own aspirations and their own inner beings in the effort to understand whether or not a particular quality was constantly present in them. That work proved effective in the fullest sense, and the resulting skill is a permanent

acquisition (maqam).

When the venerable Khwaja used the expression, ‘work on the inner being,’ he was alluding to the ascent from the ordinary degree of maturity to the superior degree of maturity. In the realm of material management, it is after puberty, the age of ordinary maturity, that the human being starts to apply his skill. In the realm of spiritual dominion, the malakūt, his managerial skill comes into play as a result of his superior maturity. These situations need different degrees of intelligence. The people of the heart apply the adjective “mature” to those who have really and truly attained to this second degree. (Author of The Rāshahad)

In his work, “The Secret Garden,” Shirazi, the great Persian poet, has touched on this subtle mystery with these verses. ‘*They said to a shaykh, ‘You must marry!’ ‘I have yet to reach maturity,’ was his reply. ‘When a man achieves sainthood, he becomes mature. Until then, he is no more than a child.’*’ This journey, this goal at this stage is the seeker’s inner desire for the inner self to become the same as one’s exterior self, and for the exterior to become the same as the inner being. Just as we deal with whatever life brings (the difficulties or the tasks, the challenges of life in the material world) to the extent of our ability to function in the physical world, we also do what we see is proper to be done in the malakūt (the realm of the angels) by assigning our capability to another authority.

What we don’t personally possess in our own ability, Allah will provide for us. One of the examples often given is a person who has sincere love of Allah, Allah gives them the *wajd*, the ecstasy. The ecstasy proves that you are not in control. You lose yourself. You find that in every mystical teaching, not just Sufism. Of course it’s been said that there are those people who can go from this world to the malakūt at their own will. And there are

many stories about that. The one I tell often is about Mevlana Jalaludin Rumi (ra) and his hand appearing in the tent with a tray of sweets for a follower who was on *hajj*. The idea is that when we create resonance and harmony in our outer being with our inner being, this is when the real door to a higher spiritual station is opened. Or as you would maybe know, learn, remember, or discover yourself: in the transmissions, there are the transmissions of the lesser levels of the saints, and then there are the transmissions in the circles of the greater levels. In this step-ladder of transmissions, one arrives at the last (some say) six, or (others say) four transmissions in the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi teaching, which are the levels of the greater masters. That is just a technical thing.

The other point on this subject is there is a transference of responsibility and power. As one becomes more resonant with the outer and inner, and these doors are opened, one is tested to see if they have the managerial capabilities to be able to manage their inner states. The accompaniment of the *murshīd* through this stage is very important. You can make the analogy that you are being groomed in an enterprise or company to take over managerial responsibilities. It's not just knowing how to do the work, but how to deal with the people, how to evoke the best work out of individuals, how to show the proper respect and have the proper control, and how to understand the goals and purpose of the organization. It is the same kind of analogy, because everything in the inner is reflected in the outer. How do you manage your life, your finances, your relationships, your marriage, your children? How do you manage your duties and responsibilities in your community? Is it similar to how you manage your work that you earn a living from? What is your attitude toward the people you work with, your employers or employees? Is it similar to how it is with your brothers and sisters or spiritual guide? These are all measured, and these are all part of this teaching.

You look for consistency and move from the mastery of perfection (*kamil*) to the mastery

of the *maqam*, the spiritual station which you don't fall from. For this, there are certain things that have to be embraced and practiced. We will leave that to the next time, *insh'allah. Asalām Aleikum.*