

April 11, 2009

Saturday

Title: **The Means by Which Human Existence Can Bear Fruit**

DVD title: Means and Methods of The Tariqah for Integrating our Inner and Outer Existence

*Dinner blessing:* Bismillah. O Allah, we are grateful for the blessings You shower upon us every day, and the opportunities to remember You, especially in the springtime when so many of Your faces become known to us through Your *Jamal* and *Jalal*. O Allah Swt, we are grateful this year for the blessings of the friends who have come with us to share this repast. We ask You, Allah, to give them all peace and happiness and contentment in their lives, and success in their work and striving. We ask You, Allah, to protect us in our traveling, to fulfill our needs and heal those who are ill. Most of all, we ask You to bring peace into this world. Give us an era of peace. Give our work meaning in many corners of the world where we work. Give a deeper meaning, O Allah, that we serve You by serving Your creatures . *Amin*.

*Sohbet:* *Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem*. May Allah bless the hands of those who created this dinner tonight, and also by extension your minds and hearts (why stop at the hands?). This whole week I have been talking about the language Allah Swt gave us to speak. Before the time of Hazrat Adam (as), there was no language. The language was in *du'ā*, in praising Allah, because the only beings were angels. In the *malakūt*, only praises were there. There was no need to communicate in any other way. Allah Swt tells us that He taught Adam the names, and because those names were taught to Hazrat Adam (as), we have language. The names reflect the Attributes and Qualities of Allah Swt. Everything we say and think and do is somehow reflective of these attributes and names.

If you like, you are welcome to hear the talks I gave earlier this week.

I think it is a very important subject, especially in the world we live in today with assumptions about communication and a lack of clarity about communication. I used this as a way of also talking about *nisbah* and *jedhbah*, and I went into some detail about relatedness and attraction and what it means, not in the normal sense of how we think about it, not even in the normal texts of Imam Al Ghazāli and Ibn Araby. But [I spoke about it] in the way in which we have to understand it today in order to acquire proper relationships, as with Allah Swt. You know from hearing me speak a few times, and as my student here know, I always qualify [what I mean by that]. I find it very difficult to, except in shortspeak, refer to Allah in anthropomorphic terms. When we relate to Allah Swt, we relate to something that is present. When Allah Swt tells us in Qur'an to remember this and that, remember when I gave Musa this, remember when the people came out of bondage, I try to remind people it is because we were there.

It's like me saying to you, "Do you remember when I talked to you last week?" It's because we are present. The *ruh* is always present, and there is only always a present with Allah; there is no future and no past. That's why we call it Divine Presence, the Divine Essence, the illusion of *zaman* and the reality of the moment, *waqt*. With that in mind, we have to decode the distractions. We have to learn how to read the signs and respond to the reality. I spoke about the Ocean of *Rahmat*, and told a story I often tell about a little fish. *The little fish went to school – they actually reside at the school they go to – and the grandfather came to pick him up. He said, "What did you learn in school today?" and the little fish said, "I don't really know. I was very confused. The teacher told us about something called water, but I don't understand what it is. Can you tell me what it is?" The Grandfather said, "It's a very difficult subject. I can't tell you what water is, but I can tell you that without it, we wouldn't be having this conversation."*

Without the Divine Presence, we would not be having this conversation.

To come to that is more than a philosophical understanding, and it takes means. Both of you have laboratories. (The Shaykh addresses two guests.) You know about means and process. You know that you learn from opposites and errors and mistakes. What I have been talking about over the last year or so and trying to formulate in an acceptable way is what I call a systems approach to Islam. What has been revealed by Allah Swt is not just words that come in the form of Qur'an, and not just assumptions about meaning. There are aspects of these *Asmā' al Husna* that take on many dimensions and faces as one responds to them or reflects them. What we are given as a decoding tool are certain practices. The normal practices of Islam give us a broad context of good and bad, right and wrong, and general methods for remembering (prayer five times a day). Then there is the *Sīrah* of Nebi Mohammed (sal), and derivatives of these that come from *Hadith*, like the more formal *Sharī'ah*, *Hudud* and '*Ulum*, and things like that.

Allah Swt also gave us other things. Allah Swt gives us in our own physical being doorways to the infinite. He gives us the *latā'if*, the subtle organs of perception with which we learn to resonate with the Divine Presence, pouring this out upon us all the time, because there's no end to all of this beauty. We walk on the property and see beautiful flowers at this time of year. The beauty is being poured out upon us. Are we seeing this beauty of Allah? To what degree? Are we resonating with it? Is it making us grateful? On one level. On another level, do we tune to it? Is it a *fath*, a doorway through which we can walk and enter into another dimension? We know from astronomical science, astronomy, and astro-physics, there are doorways through which you can move through space and time, and singularities in the universe. Allah Swt has given everything in every dimension of His Creation the same replications, so that there are quantum events that take place in our brains, just like in outer space. There are nanobots to be

discovered, and their equivalency in the far reaches of space, also.

How they operate in space and time is an interesting subject, but most important is Allah has placed these doorways inside of our self: these *latā'if*. The means to open those doors are as basic as how we deal with our relationships with human beings, and circumstances and events in life. They are as complex as the most complex aspects of creation. There are many ways in which we can relate to these openings or these entrance ways into other dimensions of awareness and consciousness and resonance. Of course, one of those ways is through proven methodologies which work, like the practices that we have been given throughout the history of our Tariqahs or Orders. [These are] ways in which we can create *mīzān*, some kind of balance or harmony and resonance in our life with the things that are around us, the realities in the outer: how we relate to people, how we relate to our work, how we serve humanity, how we serve Allah by serving humanity—all these things that we do in our work, or that you do in your laboratories, or people do here in their work.

Then there are the inner dimensions of that. What do we do when we turn inward? We make *muraqabah*. What is the real value of making *muraqabah*, sitting in silence, tuning our inner self? The world, the *'ālam al-khalq* and the *'ālam al-amr*: how do we build a bridge between these two? One of the ways to overcome the limitations of our habits and the fragmentations that we see in our society, especially today, is to become comfortable with and devoted to and dedicated to these means, just as you have do in your laboratories. You have to trust in the means. You test them out, but you have to trust in the means that you use because they create your baseline against what you measure. The original choice can be arbitrary, but as long as it stays from that point on unchanged, then you can measure against that line. Allah Swt has provided us through our *shuyukh* a means. It is demanding, and it takes a great deal of personal discipline. For some people,

it only takes belief and trust in the teacher or the *shaykh*; or trust in the process. But for most of us it takes discipline, along with the trust, of course. We wouldn't do something we didn't trust.

As we free ourselves from our distractions, it becomes much less difficult to come into a kind of resonance with these inner markers or '*āyāt*. Most people think that first you have to free yourself in order to do the practices. But the reality is that the only way one frees oneself is to do the practices. It would be like saying, "Well, if everything were absolutely perfect and I knew exactly what I was going to do, then I could just do one experiment in my lab and everything would be fine." As I said last night, very few of us are Nicolai Tesla, who tested everything out in his brain. Most of us have to go through a procedure over and over and over again. It takes a great deal of discipline to do that. One of the things that Allah Swt has given us is resistance. Wherever we feel resistance, we need to put our attention. Wherever we feel resistance, we know there is a need to make an adjustment. We have to make some adjustment and we have to look at what it is in us that is resisting and why are we resisting. We have to review our performance, and our desires, and we have to review our state over and over again until we understand which attribute we need to overcome that resistance.

A classic example in modern society is a person is walking down a street in New York City or Washington, D.C. and they see someone being mugged. Your heart tells you that you should do something but your mind tells you, "I had better not because it might be me next who will get beaten." Compassion is there. It takes no time for compassion to come. It is immediately there. Yet it is being resisted by conditioning of the mind. It may be wise to resist to that or it may be wise to just trust in Allah. You don't know. You have a decision to make. We are very often at these decision points. So we revert back to our cultural orientation and to our conditioning and our habitual patterns. All of which we

have to become aware of. If you are progressed enough that you see your resistance, then even that resistance and that reluctance becomes a means of remembering Allah Swt and you are in a state of remembrance. If, just out of fear, you run and you feel guilty, then no lesson can be learned.

This is why, in *The Hikam*, Ibn At'ala Iskandari tells us that often Allah guides us through denial. What is denied to us is often the means of remembering Allah. We read in Qur'an that we have the capacity to understand and we have the capacity to become more and more aware, but what is resisting that is our historical, cultural or ego patterns, our *nafs ammāra*, which we have to address. Many Sufis and many Muslims, whether they are Sufis or not, feel that this resistance has to be a very aggressive resistance, that you have to confront the *nafs ammāra* and you have to fight against the *nafs ammāra*. But it is not that, at all. Indeed, it is much more of a passive resistance, sort of in the Gandhian sense of passive resistance. It is not that it is not difficult. It is not that it is not dangerous. It is not that there is no pain attached to passive resistance, but you, yourself, choose to be a servant. You, yourself, choose to do what is meaningful, what is good and what is right, no matter what. It takes a lot of courage, a lot more courage, often, then it is to rail against something or just fight.

A human being like Gandhi or Abdul Gaffur Khan could not come up with the concept of passive resistance unless it was a law of the Universe, unless it was a reality. Human beings cannot create anything that has not been previously created or intended by Allah. I am not talking about Allah sitting on a throne somewhere intending something and casting it down to the earth like Zeus on top of Olympus. But rather, the system will not bear it; there is no new creation within the system. It is already self-contained. Whatever we are going to discover has been already intended. As mysterious as it may be, as unseen as it may have been up until the point that something has been discovered,

nonetheless, if you don't see it reflected on every level of creation, it does not exist.

When we use words in Islam like *Rabb*/Lord, most of us don't understand what it means. We say it how many times a day as good Muslims? We say it all the time. But what does it mean? Does it mean that Allah is like a Lord and we are slaves on a plantation? Or does it mean that there is an overriding relationship between ourselves and our Creator, and that creation is constantly going on. As we know, biologically, micro biologically, it is constantly going on. Our cells are being destroyed and created all the time. The skin I am wearing on the outside of my body is not the skin I was wearing when I was born. Every seven years it is being replaced. Who is watching over all of this? Again, we get to this point where it is like a paternalistic mentality, "The Lord sitting on a throne is watching over you." It is not that. It is the Creative Force that is always operating. We are always in a state of creating and re-creating. Even when we die, there is a transformational process that goes on with our cells and the atoms and molecules.

When we become attached to that understanding, attracted to that understanding, we begin to understand what is the Mercy of Allah Swt. What does it mean that one of His Attributes is everlasting, endless? What does it mean that there is in this everlastingness, in this endlessness, we have the major role? Everything in this Universe has been created for us. What we find ourselves attracted to, attached to, and naturally relating to is that Divine Reality, that Divine Force, that Divine Presence that we call *Rabb*, that we call Allah Swt. When we say "*Rabbil 'Ālamīn*," it does not just mean the Ruler of all the Worlds in the universe, all of the solar systems and all the galaxies; it means all the systems that comprise us. [It means] every element of our respiratory system, our circulatory system, our reproductive system, our digestive system and then within that, all the systems within those systems, down to the sub-atomic level is that Divine Presence. It is always active. It never stops. If it stops, then we stop. Why? Because all of this is

created for us. We are at the nexus of this creation. All created for human beings.

Some people don't think you should have birthday parties. But if you walk into a room and someone is throwing a surprise birthday party for you, you feel very uplifted and grateful. You say, "O, my! You are thinking about me." Well, the whole universe is thinking about you. This whole universe is Allah. When we begin to understand this by turning inward and seeing its reflection outward, then *shukr* comes naturally—thankfulness and gratitude and humility and trust. They just come naturally because that is what is in resonance with seeing. When you perceive, just the act of perceiving the vastness of this creation and its focus on you—happy birthday, on your birth, on your reality—is enough to liberate you from your *nafs ammāra*. You don't have to fight your *nafs ammāra*. You only have to turn your attention towards your Creator—*tawajjuh*. You only have to turn your attention towards Allah Swt.

You don't have to fight your *nafs* all the time. It is not that you don't resist your *nafs*. Of course. If someone comes up to you and says, "Here, Ali, have this nice brandy," you say, "No. I am a good Muslim. I won't have it." Whereas, someone else may say, "Have this good brandy," and they say, "Oh, gee. I really like the taste of that. But I am a Muslim. I'm not supposed to." Then you are resisting your *nafs* on that level. If you really understand who you are, then things pass by you or through you. Or the doctor says to you, "Unfortunately, you are in a lot of pain. Take this codeine." And you say, (moaning) "I'm a Muslim. I am not supposed to take anything that is intoxicating or..." But you can take it, because it is for your own survival and for your own well-being. So you can take it. The fact that you say, "I don't wish to take it. I wish I didn't have to take it" means you are remembering Allah Swt. You are keeping the balance. You are still in resonance. The rigid rules do not apply in Islam. They keep you from understanding your relationship with Allah Swt. They keep you from understanding your relationship with

what Allah Swt has provided for us.

If we say that Allah Swt is everywhere, then it is not some physical reality that is everywhere. But the knowledge and the Truth, and the Beauty, the *Asmā' al-Husna*, the Ninety-Nine Attributes of Allah and more are everywhere and cannot be contained, and they are also within us. This turning inward and looking through the *latā'if* gives us this very powerful lens or microscope to see through *qalb*. Then you see through or under the power of *ruh*. Then you see under the power of *sirr*, then *khafee*, *akhfah*, and *nafs*. You see through these different lenses, the reality. When you see it, at some point you realize, “This is all created for me.” This is all my means. This is the means by which I can identify with my Creator. Though I cannot see or understand the fullness—*Allah Hu Akbar*, because Allah is greater than anything I can see—I can identify with Allah, His *Wasila*/Means. This is the means by which I am going on, the means by which I am traveling, this is my transport. And why do I want to? Because I have in me the natural attraction, natural, magnetic attraction towards Allah Swt, towards Allah Swt, not out there, but towards everything, swimming in that ocean. In my humble understanding, this is the premise that is at the root of the essence of Islam.

Islam, as we know it today, in its rules, regulations and guidelines is fine, of course. We follow them. We try to follow them. But it is extrapolated from something much more subtle. It is extrapolated from the seeing and the knowing of the Truth. It is not something that is imposed from the outside. When there is deviation from the norm, and the Prophet’s (sal) life is an example of that normative behavior, when we deviate from it, we know we are deviating; therefore, we can measure that deviation. We can try and bring it back into resonance. Nature serves us in the same way. Nature serves us by not only providing us with our food, but providing us with testimonies and affirmations of our relative fragility in this world, the subtlety of our own existence. I mean we are very

subtle aspects of this creation. Look what happened just yesterday, with tornadoes across the country. How does a human being resist a tornado? It is impossible, you cannot resist a tornado. You cannot resist a volcano. You cannot resist a tsunami. You can't.

Although we are at the center of creation, we have no power over these things. So we have to learn to trust the events that come upon us and come to a point where we understand what exists beyond just our physical existence. Then we have to deal with the things that we are dealing within society today: the greed of individuals, their selfishness, their greed, their lust for power, their lust for money—all the things that we are dealing with in society today—and the pollution in the world today, and the global warming that is a result of the ethical and moral corruption of human beings, more than anything else. We understand that we have the *amanat* that we have accepted from Allah Swt. Remember when we did that? Do you remember? We were there. “My relatives did it, you know. Fourteen hundred and some years ago, my relatives accepted, or my friends of my friends of my friends, or people I don't even know. They weren't even my relatives, because I embraced Islam later, so it couldn't have been me. This is not my trust.”

Your destiny has made it your trust. We have to remember that. We have to realize that clearly we are brothers and sisters of one another, or we are corrupters of one another. We have to be the protectors and sustainers of one another, or we are part and parcel with the destruction, the greed. What does it mean? We have to be members of a community of individuals, a community of believers. The goal of *tawhid* in *dunya* is clear. To create a society of people who are upright intellectually and ethically and morally and good human beings is a process. It is a process of awakening. It is a process of being in the company, keeping the company of good people. Sometimes keeping the company of good people shows you your own fallacies and your own weaknesses.

Sometimes keeping the company of good people just lifts you up. Nonetheless, we can live our little life in our house or our apartment or in our job or wherever it may be, but Allah Swt has shown us that the real safety and the real security and the real knowledge comes from being part of the *ummah*, and joining in *jamah*. Understand that when we join in the *jamah* in prayer, or in *sema*, or in *muraqabah*/meditation, we are filling a very necessary space of filling a very necessary space of making something that was not complete, whole. When, in the same way, we serve our neighbor, when we serve our community and serve our society, we are filling a very integral place in this creation. It always starts with us. It starts with Allah, but it starts with us being aware of the fact that things are not complete until I am complete. I should say it in a little bit better way: Things are not complete unless I am striving to complete myself. I don't have to be totally complete because Allah has told us that He will complete the task for us. In today's society, whether we are Muslims or not Muslims, there are many problems that we are keenly aware of now, and we have to begin somewhere. We have to begin with ourselves.

Shaykh Noorudeen and I were having a conversation on the phone today about the benefits and the usefulness, and the uselessness, of talking, of giving *dars*, or talking at conferences, going somewhere where you talk for a half an hour or an hour. You leave and what is left? Then we took it into the realm of cyberspace as we do. One of his favorite examples is that we have 20 or 50 people sitting in a *dars*; and it is one thing, but as soon as it is put up on the internet, there are 50,000 or one million people that are available to it. That is true. But we were also looking at the other side of that, which is the assumption that you can read a book or listen to a *dars*, or spend a minimal amount of time in any practice, and be under the illusion that you are really gaining benefit from it. But the only way to really gain tremendous benefit is to turn yourself inward, discipline yourself, and make time (and I am going to use this short speak) for Allah Swt in your

life. Meaning, make time to look around and to speak of those attributes as they affect you in your life.

The methods, to be relevant in the world we live in today, have to be timeless methods like our meditation. That is fine, but time is different in the world today. How we discipline ourselves and how we assign ourselves to certain time frames, that has changed. It used to be you would be riding a camel or a bullock cart from one place to another and had plenty of time to think. I tell the story that I was in India once. We were traveling at 120 km an hour up a road, and we passed this man on a bullock cart with a little switch in his hand and one foot on the bullock. He is just going along like this [at a very slow pace], and we go whish, [speed] past him. Of course, our car breaks down three or four kilometers up the road. So we are stopped dead, and I am watching. We watch the man come up, ever so slowly, up the road and pass us. I watch him disappear into the distance. And we are stopped dead, waiting for someone to come along to take the part to the next village. We were stuck there, and I reflected. It was really a profound experience for me. What is he thinking about going at that speed? And what am I thinking going at the speed that I was going at?

Whatever I was thinking about, I know that I have only one hour to think about whatever I am thinking about, or to have the conversation that I am having because I am going to be at my destination in an hour. He is not going to be at his destination until dark, maybe. Who knows when he set out? Who knows when he will come back? The world we are living in today constrains us for contemplation. So we have to make the time. We can make time. We can create time. We have a lot of space in which to create time, but we have to invite ourselves into that realm. We have to move into a realm where we can create time. One of the most important things to Rasulallah (sal) was to sit with people

and speak with them.

*At one point when it was time for prayer, and he was in the middle of a dars on a subject, one of the people stood up to leave. He asked him where he was going, and he said, “It is time for Asr.” And he replied, “You have time to make Asr prayer, but me? I will only be with you for a short period of time.”* What does that mean? That the Prophet (sal) was against prayer? Of course not. We have to make the time to do what is right and good for us, and realize that we are swimming in the ocean of that Divine Presence. We are uplifted. We are buoyant; we are floating in that ocean of the Divine Presence. That means that we can draw from it. Obviously we can sit here and listen to me talk all night. The most important thing is not so much what I am saying, but that we are gathered together to remember. We are here eating the food and drinking the tea, and [enjoying] the creations of Allah, and sharing space and time together for the Sake of Allah Swt. That *suhbat*, in of itself, is the core to a person’s peace of mind and peace of heart in awakening.

There is very little that any of us can accomplish alone in this world. Even if we sit and we can write the most brilliant text that will change the world, someone else invented the computer that we are writing it on or devised the pencil that we are writing with. We are totally interdependent beings. When we gather like this, and we sit together and we affirm—in the Name of Allah Swt, in the Names of Allah Swt, the Attributes of Allah Swt—our willingness to gather together, then progress is being made. Transformation is being made that we don’t even see. But we will have to make the choice again. We will have to make the choice to come to dinner again or to come to visit, or to find another place similar, or other people, and to set aside the distractions of day to day life, as good as they may be, and to turn ourselves inward towards Allah Swt, to be in the company of

those people who live Allah Swt.

This is the way that we can legitimately love ourselves. This is the way that we can legitimately know ourselves, and respond to the *Tajalli*, the *Fa'īd* of Allah Swt.

Without that, who are we? We are creatures created by Allah and we are not realizing why we are created, and we are not humbled enough. Gratitude and humility, trust and submission, these are all means for this experiment in human existence to bear fruit.

These are all the means by which our full potential will come forward; not just our spiritual potential, but our intellectual and creative potential will come forward. Whatever we are striving for in our work, or in our laboratory, or in our teachings or in our schools or for our children will come to fruition when we submit, when we realize that we stand at the interstices between these two worlds. We stand at the dividing line between the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*, and we have to spend time in both. It doesn't have to necessarily be equal time because the teachings are so powerful, and the meditation is so directed and so focused that forty minutes of that is sufficient for us. Forty minutes or thirty minutes twice a day is sufficient for us to balance out everything that we are doing in the outer world. Then whatever else we get from that is tremendous creativity, insight, intuition, sensitivity and understanding of love and affection, trust, trustworthiness, faith, faithfulness. These are the rewards of the Jannah here and now. Enough. *Salām aleikum*.