

April 29, 2009

Wednesday

Title: [Using the Template to Please Allah](#)

DVD title: Pleasing Allah by Applying the Template that Guides our Fitrah

Dinner blessing: O Allah, we are grateful for having the sounds of the children making prayer tonight. Keep them healthy and give them long life, and make them good servants. Bring them enrichment and a newness to our Islam and to Tasawwuf. Among us are those who are ill and those who are traveling. Please give them Your *Shifāt* and Your Protection/*Hafidh*. For Shaykh Nooruddeen, we ask for Your special prayers as he goes through his treatments. We also ask You for protection for Grandma in Mecca as she sends her prayers. She asked me to remind everyone that she prayed for everyone three times at the *Ka'ba*, by name. Thank You, Allah, for the blessings You give us; and give us a little rain to get rid of the pollen. *Amin*.

Sohbet: *Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem*. We usually begin this journey when we are clear about our purpose for journeying, or we think we are. Then we slowly find out that maybe our clarity wasn't so clear, and we have to build an understanding of our self and our *niyyat*. The journey really begins, not when we started it 25 or 30 years ago, whatever it is, the journey really begins when a person is clear about their purpose in making it. Sometimes it takes 30 years to become clear about that purpose. What you have then is 30 years of discipline, 30 years of good intention behind it. That individual (whoever it is: you or I), when we arrive in that place of getting that clarity, we find there is another degree of certainty and of *himma* that comes along with it, not the same as the sincerity and *himma* we began with when we thought we began. But now it is a *himma*

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and a certainty because there is something very clear in our mind that has transcended a lot of the questions, or rebelliousness, or resistance, or a non-intentional journey.

We all come to realize with humility that all along the guidance we have been getting from Allah, the Prophet (sal), and the *shuyukh* has been a necessity even for us to just arrive at the point where we can say “I have this clarity.” It is a point between the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*. At different stages in our life, we are in different places: stages where we are freer or not so free, focusing on our outer work, education, family, or career—a second, third, fourth, or fifth career. If we knew about all this in the very beginning, we wouldn’t be journeying, we would have already arrived. The guidance and instruction we have received along the way, if it is good instruction and if it comes from a good place, is instruction on how important it is to empty ourselves and not to deceive ourselves, and not to deceive ourselves by any kind of a pretense of hierarchical importance.

The highest importance is to please Allah. When one comes to that, it becomes more than words. It’s an instruction that, while you are praising Allah and trying to see Allah everywhere, you are ultimately seeking that Divine Presence, Truth, or Reality inside your own self. Allah Swt gives us these means, like prayer, and *muraqabah*, and service. . They are means, not ends in themselves. And we are responsible for finding the time and placing the attention on it. No one else is responsible for that. I think there is pretty much agreement on the fact that one can only make vast changes in the world we live in after we change ourselves. We can look around the world and say, “Look what is happening in the world today.” We can use the world as a goal. We can use the world as a target, because if you really, really want to change things that are happening in the world, you come face to face with the lack of knowledge, the lack of expertise, the lack of connections, or the diverse complexities of the world. It is very much representative of what is inside our own self.

We can develop our compassion and mercy, our generosity and forgiveness, and become more tolerant and more patient. We can even refine our knowledge through the world in the world, but fundamentally, we have to arrive at a fairly basic and profound understanding about metaphysics or physics: the reality we are seeing is not reality. Just like the ideas we have about our future are just our ideas. There is no assurance of it. “I’m going to move to Greece and get a beautiful house on the coast, and live there the rest of my life.” And you get there, and the first thing that happens is an earthquake. You come to accept that all of this is potential. There is a potential for real knowledge, a potential for happiness and peace, a potential for love and understanding, a potential for friendship and respect, and for all these things. Allah Swt has provided throughout the ages means to develop that potential. Part of that potential is to be able to accept and keep those means happening while the things you expected don’t come exactly the way you expected them to, and the things in your own self did not change exactly in the way you expected them to. So, then you can see your own self-deceptions, assumptions, and presumptions. There is a context for seeing that.

There is a context for seeing that clearly, and there is a context for not seeing it, like a *munafiq*. Because the things of this world are apparently linear and deterministic, we tend to get caught in questions like “how does it work” and “if I do this, what will the result be,” like throwing a stone in the pond and watching the ripples, and calculating how long it will take to return. You are dealing with repeatable phenomena. But dynamic changes in human consciousness are not only the results of linear efforts. There is an element in them of love; of surrender and submission, of obedience. There is an element of spontaneity in them. Those really allow for radical and rapid shifts in the paradigm that are reflections of the inherent goodness in the human being, the *fitrah*. Every human being’s heart is designed to resist *fitna*, and to accept *fitrah*.

The fact that there is a relationship between everything in the universe doesn't mean that we understand what that holism really is, or what that relationship is. But we are able to see these relationships over and over again in multiple ways, if that is what we are looking for. We can see that the result of our actions or inactions lead in certain directions. We have the tendency to make assumptions and [create] "as ifs": let's pretend if such and such happens, or if the circumstance was this way, what would happen? We keep going back to all this linear stuff. Look at the world today and see the kind of frustrations there are, like in the Middle East, or the incalculable harm this potential pandemic might cause, and how you see events running along a certain path. How do you change those events? Nothing logical [as a solution] makes sense [in these circumstances]. There is no logical end to the Middle East situation, or to what will happen to Pakistan or the Taliban in Afghanistan.

You can trace down the original source of the swine flu logically. We know that every pig should be killed. That's what our predecessors said. The Jews said don't eat it, and the Muslims said, don't eat it. But we don't pay any attention to the rules, guidelines, and suggestions because we are too smart. So we have pig farms. Nobody should eat pork. I know what kind of statement that is, but it's true. Research was done years ago about microscopic parasites in pork that don't die when you cook it. How did the Jews know that? How did the Muslims know that? They didn't have any microbiologists at the time. That's just an example of arrogance in human society. We all have this kind of arrogance.

We have it about prayer and meditation and family, and about community and all this other stuff. Let's build a straw man and knock it down. Let's create out of a factoid, a fact that doesn't exist, and that will be "my excuse to do whatever the heck it is I want to

do, because I'm beyond being accountable to anybody, especially someone I can't see like God. I don't have to be accountable to anyone – I'm free!" But that's not freedom. If you were in an airplane and weren't accountable to the pilot; if you forgot something at home, and you told the pilot to turn the plane around, you would have a big problem, and not just with Homeland Security. You would have a big problem with your psychiatrist. You'd be there a long time. We're all accountable.

Every one of us, as we become aware of what we are accountable for, has to have more and more *taqwa*. It's fine to be a little child and only be accountable when [the parent reprimands the child], but somewhere that has to transition. One day the parent isn't going to be around anymore. What will happen to the accountability? If we are 8 years old, 14, 25, or whatever, you start to realize the kind of self-deception and fiction you create in your mind to excuse everything you don't feel comfortable with, you don't like, you don't want to do, and don't want to feel, do or see. One day, if you are really lucky, you'll wake up and realize, "O my God, I created this whole fiction." *Taqwa*. All this stuff you don't like is created to say, "Here, you can learn ahead of time so you don't put yourself in the position of real spiritual, physical, and social danger."

There is no end to the pigs, because there is no end to people who want to eat pig. You want to eat pig? Fine. Every once in a while Allah makes a pig virus. You know I'm not talking about the people in the Amazon who go and kill a pig once every 6 months for a big feast. Then you start to realize, as you start to see yourself in your fictions and deceptions and what you have created, and how you have to sustain certain things you have created, and how you want to transition certain things, that the level of complexity is very high. You don't even think about it, but it is like if someone were watching, they'd say, "If you can just stay out ahead of the game you will survive. Don't get caught in your own self deceptions." Some of us are very familiar with these kinds of self-

deceptions, and some of you haven't even begun to be familiar with it.

Why would human beings do something so self-destructive when they are blessed by Allah? Allah creates this whole universe for human beings. It's not just as simple as, "It doesn't matter what I do, as long as I do some good in the world." At the end of the day, that will be on the plus side, but internally, that doesn't change anything. The answer is when you operate out of what is negative: hate, resentment, disobedience, lack of concern for your fellow human beings, defensiveness, being critical, or the deception that people think someone is criticizing them when they are not, you become careless. I mean it: care – less, less caring. The strangeness is that you show more care for strangers than you show for your own family, for your own brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles, because they pose no immediate threat to your self-deception and fiction. You wind up having no policy for life and no real future. It's one of the things people like about Obama, when he says, "We are not going to look to the past but to the future." It's very pragmatic, but it's also a sign of a believer. At the same time, we have to see how self-reflective he is about his own errors.

When we look for change in what is mostly a linearly paradigm, we expect to find that change through a linear answer, but our prayers are non-linear. We may pray for someone's health or well being, but even that is not linear. When we enter the path with great yearning, when we are on this path with a great desire; when we are really willing to face ourselves, that reality in itself becomes a means to remove our biases and bigotries, to remove our defensiveness and aggressiveness and passivity to whatever degree we can in the moment, and to rely more and more on the *Rahmat* of Allah Swt.

We realize that no matter how we approach it, there is something greater that is the catalytic, transformative force. I'm making my effort, but something far beyond me which

we call Allah, or the Divine Presence is the catalyst for change. It is just pure arrogance not to think that. The future becomes something very open, and the past becomes past. What's good about the past is that the love, care, and concern; the safety and friendliness, and the brotherhood and sisterhood remains. It's not past, unless you wipe it out (as some people have tried to do), but then where are you? You have a person without a past, without a place, without a name, and without an identity. "I'm going to go 3-4 generations back for my identity. I'm going back to New Jersey and pick up my identity there from 60 years ago." It's ridiculous .

At the same time, the present is an opportunity for each of us to affirm again and again what our purpose and goal are. Potentiality is not the same as predictability. Predictability is what science has been about since the scientific revolution, since what we know today as modern science has developed. The truth is a human being is not just a human being. A human being is an integral part of an all- encompassing, all embracing, material and non-material reality. We human beings are an integral part of the universe that is not as predictable as much as it has potential. It does not just have potential on the physical level, but it has potential in other dimensions, spiritually. A human being who understands this is a believer, a person who has been able to take a jump from just the material, linear, physical, desire, historical, past, present and future into another realm where life is about something much deeper than just what you do in it. It's more what you do with it. Therefore, I think a human being who understands this approaches the practice with a goal of coming nearer to truth, whatever that may be.

There is a story that when Jesus came before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him what was the truth, and Hazrat Isa (as) remained silent. The reason why he remained silent was there was such a dichotomy between the truth and the person who was asking about it. There was such a distance, that he knew nothing he could say would answer Pilate's

question of what is the truth. Yet, arrogantly—especially in our youth, but sometimes some of us maintain this for a long period of time—we walk around pretty much assured that we know what the truth is. And then we are judging situations and people and circumstances by that. But the reality is we don't know what it is. You come to the point where you become so clear and so absolutely sure of the truth that your behavior reflects it most of the time. Of course, we are all flawed beings so it will not reflect it all the time. This person can become a believer, not just a believer in some philosophy or ideology or text book, but a believer in what it directs us to.

We believe in the reality of this life. If we pray to Allah or pray for peace, it's because in our heart and soul we know peace. You know that you are created by Allah, and you are tested by Allah until you can remove the self or *nafs* to the degree you can be at peace and nearness and oneness with Allah Swt. It doesn't matter where you are or what you are doing. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be some place where you want to be, or to do something you like to do, but that is not what matters. We should try to remember that as we pray and make *du'ā* and *dhikr* and send out good intentions, that's what we are created to do, just like the sun is created to go through a process of putting out gasses and gamma rays and huge atomic and electromagnetic fields to produce light. What we do with that light is up to us. But there would be no us if it weren't for that light.

What we see when we develop this kind of attitude are the things that would be the least likely in a cause-effect world. You begin to act because you know your actions are good and right. You come to the conclusion that you have come to a path and you have been placed on a path, and you have been shown a path in the search for truth because you know that search is right. Until then, Allah tells you, you are raised as a Muslim so pray. You have accepted and embraced Islam so pray. Fast at Ramadān if you can; make Hajj if you can; read Qur'an; look to the life of Prophet Mohammed—here is a template for

you. This is your template. Wherever you go, there will be a template. If you want to be a Jew tomorrow, there is a template to be a Jew; don't be a Jew in name. If you want to be a Christian, then be a Christian who has a Christian way of life, of Jesus, not a Christian who is an evangelical right-wing crazy person, who is closer to the Nazis than they are to the truth. There is a template.

Do you want to create your own template? Hah! Nobody saw you descend from heaven. Nobody saw you become a prophet. You weren't predicted in the Qur'an that you were coming next, so get it out of your head. You accept that this is who and what I am, and here's what I have to understand, and here's what I have to change. If I put myself in any place, in any circumstance, with anyone in any situation for any length of time that is not conducive to that change, I'm going to destroy myself. I'll be destroying my integrity and my life, and wasting my life.

If we do the things that come naturally to our *fitrah*, doing the things we are guided to do, we come to a natural state of goodness. We will do things that reflect our goodness and will produce goodness around us and in other people. *Insh'allah*, it will affirm that state so much to us that we will want to increase our praise of Allah Swt. We are part of a larger dynamic reality in the universe. Yet we still do these things like pray, meditate, fast, serve one another, because in the nature of the world in which we live, and the nature of distraction, these are the safeties for us. These are the things that will negate our arrogance and that will keep us at some level of humility. Ibn At'ala Iskandari (ra) said that even your wrong actions, even your sins will be a means of reminding you of Allah, because you become humble and ashamed under those circumstances.

When I make *du'ā* like when we are blessing the food, or talk about people who are oppressed, or talk about people who are sick, of course we are praying for them.

Moreover, it is a reminder that illness, hunger, and oppression exists. Poverty exists. It's not far from us; it's near to us. Poverty may not be near to us at this moment, but illness is near to us. There are people among us who are ill. Oppression may not be near to us, but there are people among us who feel they are oppressed by the circumstances they are living in, maybe oppressed by the rules and regulations they see. But they are not rules and regulations. That's not what they are. They are very, very sincere suggestions to a mature individual who can see that they are important to do, because you need the template and that kind of openness. Otherwise, you will be doing exactly the opposite of what you think you are doing. You are going to imprison yourself in your mind, in your prejudices and biases, and eventually you will be very alone and lonely. Maybe when you are 80 or 90, but that's what will happen. You are oppressing yourself.

We recognize that oppression exists and that there is misery in the world, and that we are inextricably linked to all those people on some level, even the most terrible of them, as well as the best of them, the most good ones. When I make *du'ā*, I know that I can affirm with Allah Swt the possibility that oppression might not exist, that illness can be overcome, that misery can give way to happiness. Isn't that the future we are talking about? There is a certain amount of energy, *bāraka* put into it. Eventually, something changes. It doesn't change linearly. If there were so, there could be a number put on it, like if 10,000 people prayed for exactly the same thing at exactly the same time, things would change. There are people who say that. But they are really talking about *bāraka*, potential, energy.

Think about all the energy you put out in resistance, and in torpor. It sounds tautological. Think about all the energy you put out in resistance, and in preserving your opinion, delusion, or fiction, or your deception. If any of us took a tenth of that energy and just accepted who we are, then we could be anywhere and be fulfilled. We could be doing

anything, as long as it is good. Then if it is not, we can learn from it. Eventually, something changes. Your knowledge changes. Decisions change. At some point, you get somewhere. Think of all the incredible energy needed to put a satellite into space. Then it goes at 24,000 mph, freely going around, balanced with the gravitational pull, being whipped around the earth in an elliptical path. It's like that. You put all this energy out, and then you get to a place where you are just cruising. But still we are in this world, and entropy happens. We have to keep putting out some kind of energy, like a little thruster rocket every once in a while.

If we know that Allah is within us as well as outside of us, near us and accompanying us, then we have an unlimited source of goodness at our beck and call, energy flowing through us, *fā'id*. That's what a world of possibilities means. There are no guarantees. The arrogant, the ignorant people in this world think they can operate from some sort of a fixed goal strategy with no flexibility. But an intelligent individual, who understands at least some degree of reality or potentiality, understands you cannot operate only on a fixed goal strategy. You have to operate on possibilities. You have to keep things flexible. The future is open. But you operate from a position of something that is inviolable. That's why religion and spirituality play such an important role in people's lives. It is something to turn back to, something to ground yourself in every day, five times a day.

Among us there are people who are given responsibility for telling you those things. And undoubtedly they become the target of the blame and become the straw man that has to be knocked down and not listened to, just like teenage children want to disobey their parents. It's a sign of immaturity in the guise of maturity. If we were all grown up when we reached our maximum height and ability to vote and procreate, that would be an interesting definition of mature. It is not the truth. We are grown up when we are humble, serviceful, compassionate, and we stop self-deception and deceiving others, and

we stop deceiving ourselves spiritually. When we are looked up to for our goodness, and when we fear the loss of that goodness, and when we can apologize and ameliorate what we say and do at the times we do it wrongly, we can affirm a deeper, more profound, trust and belief.

An old man was standing outside his house weeping for three days, weeping and wailing. The great Shaykh Junayd (ra) went to him and said, “*O Abul Hasan! If you think crying helps you in any way, tell me so that I might join you. If not, then keep quiet and be at peace!*” Upon hearing this, Abul Hasan said, “*What a wonderful teacher you are!*” Even among the *awliyā* there is that self-indulgence. But you have to be able to recognize the good teacher. Each one of us had the possibility of knowledge and truth. Junayd (ra) said, “*There are two things most exalted in our time: an alim, a person of knowledge who acts upon his knowledge, and an arif, a knower, who speaks about spiritual experiences and the truth.*” These are very rare gifts: knowledge and gnosticism.

We can say the same thing today: the best thing to do in life is to please Allah. To please Allah is to fit into that template and have the confidence to commit oneself to compassion, mercy, love, understanding, tolerance, and patience, not falsely, but truly to be self-reflective, and know how to repent for the countless times when you fail to do all that. Knowledge without practice is not really knowledge, and *marifah* without *haqiqah* is not *marifah*. We can hardly find anyone in the environment we live today where knowledge, peacefulness, meditation, and speaking about the Divine is something hungered after and looked for. It’s very difficult to spend your life trying to see Allah in everything and everywhere, and to find those kinds of gems and jewels. But it is not impossible. It is possible.

We can have a lot of hope for the world, and work at the work we are all working at on some level. Yet Allah is constantly assisting us, and speaking to us through the *shuyukh* and the text of the Qur'an, and through our conscience and our practices. What does that mean? Ultimately, it means this creation is alive, dynamic. Allah is present. Some might say Allah has not abandoned His creation, but I don't like that dualistic mentality. It's not going to unwind, but it may go through some difficult stages. Allah is present, and there is a comfort in knowing that. Or shall I say, once you overcome your arrogance, you better have the comfort of knowing that. When you have arrogance and self-deception, you don't have to know that. You just keep companionship with your own ego and selfishness. Once that goes, once something causes you to be humble or humiliated, you better know that Allah is present. Otherwise, you'd be lucky if you are still around to be a patient of Nuradeen's (a counselor). *Asalām aleikum.*