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April 30, 2009

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Thursday

Title: [The Awliyā are Among us Today](#)

DVD title: The Example and Presence of the Awliyā:
Recognizing and Remembering their Madad in our Search for Knowledge

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. I was saying last night that it's very rare in the world we live in today to find an environment where the search for knowledge and inner peace, and where meditation and reflection, *dhikrullah*, is common and done with consistency. Every once in a while we get a reminder of the uniqueness of our own life, which most of us take for granted, because it's so familiar to us. The story I tell about this is the great desire I had to live by the ocean, and then in 1972 we moved to the ocean. It was only a matter of weeks or a month or two before I stopped "seeing" the ocean.

Every once in a while we get a reminder. Someone comes and sits in the *masjid* or at dinner, looks at us and says, like Shaykh Nooruddeen has done many times, "This is a little bit of Jannah." Or people come and are astounded to see all these white faces and mostly Americans, who are not just Muslim but practicing something. Tayie Rehem, the wonderful man who owns Soul TV who came, said the same thing. It's very difficult to think of this life as being somehow dualistic, where you have to split your life trying to see Allah Swt in everything (*ihsan*), [that is,] practicing Islam as a "religion," [or doing] practices, then living and working in *dunya*. If you look at it like that, it's very difficult.

The whole gist and intention of the practices of our five Orders as given to us through the Khwaja Khwajagān and the great Naqshbandī saints, and the Chistiyya, Qadriyya,

Shadhiliyya, and Mujaddidī lines is to create this integration between one's inner and outer life. To add to that is the attitude that somehow we are here, picking up the remnants of some scraps of something left by the *awliyā* of the past; and there is little or no value to the time in which we are living or to the people that live in this time. This is another fallacy. As I spoke last night in very deliberate and direct terms, there is a tendency to create a straw man to justify living a worldly life, because it has been set in the minds of people that the inner and outer life are so distinctively different that you have to break away from the inner life or break away from the outer life totally to live the life of a Sufi. But if you look historically at people, even in our own *Tariqah*, you find many very interesting stories, like the story of Abdul Bari Shah (ra) who was uneducated.

At the age of six, he was helping to support his mother because his father had died. His mother had moved to Hooghli. It is in Calcutta, and is a bridge over the Ganges. People live on it their whole lives and never leave it. She was spinning thread there. He kept being led by his father who had passed. He only lived to be 41 years old, born in 1859 and died in 1900. You may remember the story that some of his young boyhood friends wanted him to come and steal coconuts with them. He was the one who looked out for trouble. His father came to him in spirit and told him, "You are not made for this." This happened to him a couple of times. His father appeared from the *akhirat* and said, "You were not made for this." He finally turned his life completely inward. His first *shaykh* was the father of Hamid Hasan al Alawi (ra), my great-great grand *shaykh*. Many of these people though were very worldly, Ubadaiyya Uhrar (ra) and Shah Waliyullah (ra), people who did not create a schism or bifurcation [in their lives].

We see that many people of the past struggled with many difficulties and odds—physical, economic, social, and even moral and ethical ones—to establish a lineage for us today, which we should take as seriously, if not more seriously than we take our own family

tree. Both are pre-selected: one is by genetics and the other is by Allah. When we look to the future, we don't necessarily have a lot of hope for the world. We look backward, and wonder if there's anything we can learn from the past. But we are not alone, standing here. We have Allah assisting us. We are receiving the *madad* of Allah Swt and of Prophet Muhammad (sal), and of the *shuyukh*, through our *shuyukh* and our practices, and our hearts and minds. The practices we do, and maybe we should spend a little more time discussing them again in more detail, are things that coalesce our minds and hearts, our *ruh*, and our inner life and our outer life. [We should try to] learn the difference between the results of *muraqabah* and the results of *dhikr*, for example. There is a difference. When we look at them, we have to see that when someone comes here – and with all the imperfections of which there are many many in each one of us – they see something that has coalesced, something that is directed, something that is grounded in the past, in the hagiograph of Sufism, Tasawwuf, of Islam, something that is dynamic in the lives of people today. Not people who are copying just the past, but people who are using the most ancient teachings, the most mystical teachings.

Go back to Abdul Bari Shah (ra). His father, who passed when he was quite young, was an alchemist. He was involved in some very powerful things, *karamat*. Yet he was a very pious person, a very pious Muslim. In the history of Islam there are many such people like this. We've all had the experience of having these things told to us, but it doesn't really register. We feel a little pride or happiness. You can't put your finger on just one thing that makes a difference. You can have a group of people who just read, read, read; or recite, recite, recite Qur'an; or serve, serve, serve, and they might not evoke the same response. When a man like the gentleman I was talking about earlier (and he doesn't stand alone in the group of people who have come here and visited us), is a man of 70 years of age. He has lived all over the world and comes from a spiritual and religious background. He was for many years a *murīd* of another *shaykh*. He talks to you and sees

with the lens of someone who is observing, not coming with any intention to get something. He sees something that most of you do not see and do not appreciate. It's one of those situations where if you really think about it, it's both a joyful and a sad situation.

It's like the example I give when I taught the Indonesian young people about Islam and democracy. I'm not trying to promote American democracy, but draw a parallel between something of the past and something of the present that has a benefit to human beings and reflects a natural inclination of the *fitrah* of human beings against the strong pull of *fitna* in the world. After being with them for six hours (which was really 3 hours, with the consecutive translation), you see a transformation in them. Especially those young people, because they are exceptionally intelligent, whether from Jakarta or west Java, or a village, and not because they are on the Internet all the time. Something in their upbringing has made them very intelligent, very receptive, and transparent for the most part. When I realized that it only took three hours to de-program them of some really strange and anti-Western ideas put into their heads by Hizbul Tahrir, or by people who were very Salafi in their mentality, and then to evoke from them very serious questions, you can become very elated at that possibility, and very sad. It only takes 3 hours to accomplish that, and the world is such a mess. What could you do if you had 10 hours, or 12 hours? It's a sad commentary in a way.

In the same vein, you don't appreciate what we have and who we have become. There are certain signs of progress on this path, and if you look at them and see them humbly, (and humility is one of them) then you can start to grasp what is being seen that you are not seeing. That reflects what Allah Swt says in the Qur'an: **you have eyes but you don't see**. We really don't see ourselves, often, very well. When we do, it's often distorted by immediate circumstances: concerns about health, money, work, or whatever it may be. When we realize that progress is being made today in the 21st century without

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the obvious notables (Imam al Ghazāli (ra), Ibn Araby (ra), Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili (ra), Ibn At'ala Askandari (ra), al-Mursi (ra), Ibn Abbas (ra)) we have to come to the conclusion that maybe there are such people and we don't see them. I've been blessed to know some of them: Shaykh Uthman Sirajjudin Naqshband (ra), and of course Hazrat (ra), and Shaykh Kaftaro (ra).

Assuming there aren't many of them around, this progress is being made because we are in the presence of Allah Swt. Allah is present, and we have had the experience of that presence in our lives. We have had the experience of the shadow or reflection of that presence, [at least]. It's like driving or walking some place, and saying, "When was that tree put in there?" "Oh, it's been there for the last 20 years, you just didn't see it." We've all had the experience of not seeing something that was always there. That's sort of the way we treat the *dīn*; we don't realize it is there. We become hyper aware of every breath, every move, every thought, every thing we do on a worldly level, but very detached and [blind to] what's happening internally to us; therefore, we are out of sync and out of balance.

It's very difficult for many of us, or most of us perhaps, to think of the rewards to come later from the unseen in the *akhirat*. It's all philosophical. It's very difficult for us to detach ourselves from the world and be in it, especially when we have a great deal of fear of that detachment. But we have to realize that detachment doesn't necessarily mean physical detachment. That's not what is important. What is important is detachment from undesirable mental and spiritual habits, from the assumptions, the justifications, and the rationalizations for our distractions and for our desires (as if all desires are bad and they have to be rationalized). Desires are not all bad. Some things are inevitable. Some things are given to us by Allah so we can fail, and learn from the failure. Some things are given to us to succeed so we learn from the success. Distractions are also a challenge to

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remember if we are in the right place at the right time.

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What's important is detachment from those attachments that keep us from being aware of the Divine Presence, that keep us from humility, from balance, from trying to understand what is our *taqdir*/destiny, Allah's plan, if you want to call it that. Human beings normally want to stay in the world and live in a constant state of awareness of *dunya*, and maintain our questions about the unseen world, because somehow if we maintain those questions, we don't have to buy into it. We don't have to own it. Yet, we might go look for the truth in books or in readings or politics, but the truth will be found when we are receptive to it. It can be found in all of those places to some degree, and also in certain work, certain service, and very frustrating kinds of work. Go work in Darfur and see the frustration. You find the truth in its opposite. Often, we can come to a conclusion that we are looking for something that cannot be seen.

Pursuing truth, knowledge, understanding of life, success, recognition—all these things have components that can be seen, but often we cannot see them. Yet, someone else comes and sees what we don't see. We often can see the other person who is creating disruption and *fitna* in the world. We can see the power that lies in the hands of people who are destroyers. Allah says to us, ***“He who knows the things of this world through Allah, his inclination to things will really be an inclination to Allah Himself.”*** It seems that all we have to do is make our inclinations toward Allah. What examples do we have? We have the examples of the *awliyā*, of the *ambiyā*, of the Prophet (sal). People have found a way to worship Allah and to serve the community and take care of their families, and conduct their business. We have seen such things, all of us. The criteria for being among those who are respected and counseled is how you behave in the Presence of Allah. If you don't believe you are in the Presence of Allah, you don't really pay much attention to how you behave. It's a real blessing to see your misbehavior a hundred times

a day. It's more of a blessing than to see your good behavior one time a day.

How we believe in Allah. How we can reach into the future and sense what it is we are being taught; where it is we are headed. What it is we are creating—even the baby in the belly—and how can we fulfill the goal of that process? How we can make what we are creating fruitful, beneficial and *ibāda*? It is a process that we have to learn from the past, and draw from those who came before us, and integrate our life and our *adab* and our values to, and then develop from all that in our own self our personal responsibility given by Allah Swt to us. Not only are we supposed to take care of this creation and the creatures, but in the process, we are supposed to evolve. It's not a bunch of perfect people who received the *amanat* and who just sit there and take care of it. We have to evolve and develop in that process. We all have some laziness and doubt that we cannot see through, things we can't taste, smell, or hear metaphorically. Sometimes we want something to prove to us that what we are doing is wrong. And sometimes we want something to show us that what we are doing is right.

We are told that Allah makes who He wishes rise up, and those whom He does not wish, no one can make them rise up. What does that mean? If we have the courage to ask ourselves what that means, to really draw from our full self, we really regret those years that we didn't allow ourselves to see. And all the reminders are there: this person who came and saw, that person who came and saw. Sure, they are seeing an amalgamation. They are not looking deeply into everyone's life. They are not looking into the skeletons in the closets. But there is an overall uniqueness, and a dominant vibration. But we all have to contribute to it. It's not like something is established and doesn't experience entropy, or become weakened, dissolved, or changes characteristics. We really do need the companionship of the elders and of the *awliyā*, to keep the company of good people and have *suhbat*. Sometimes people don't want to live in that rarified atmosphere,

because when they leave it or lose it they feel such a tremendous change.

It's like if you outlived three husbands or wives, the thought of getting married again would be pretty difficult. Having lost a beloved, you fear the loss of the next one.

People would rather stay away from it, and not get to psychologically or emotionally involved in spirituality. It's not that you are removed from the world; that's a metaphor.

It's that you are removed from the effects of many things in the world, and that is scary.

Many of us will spend an enormous amount of time and energy dealing with the confusions of physical, worldly life, but won't give ourselves 40 minutes once a day – let alone twice a day – to learn how to create another foundation for seeing, living, working, and serving Allah, and to keep in contact with the *awliyā*. Who are these people? Khwaja Mahmood Baqi reported that Shaykh Ibn Araby Shaykh ul-Akbar (ra), answers that question: *“Those awliyya on whom there are many karamat, are reported to have repented on their last breath. They are said to have said that they wished that they had never had any karamat at all. If the superiority of a wali were to be measured with the exhibition of his powers, this karamat, it would be impossible for that person to ever use them.”*

In this world there are *walis* who don't display a lot of power. There are people who help us, who are there for us, who Allah sends to us, who carry our message. There are people who come to us, whose message we carry, who are sent to us so we can serve them and help them, who come to us just for respite, to experience something they might have or cannot have, or could try to have but are not ready to have. There are people who help us with their *madad*, and who we help with our *madad*. You don't even have to know who they are. They don't even have to know who they are. They don't have to know who others like them are. The reality of understanding the role of lovers of Allah Swt – and if you don't consider yourself a lover of Allah, then imagine the kind of influence a lover of Allah Swt would have on someone who could come and see something you don't see.

Imagine, if you have the honesty and humility not to consider yourself a lover of Allah or Muhammad (sal), just think if you were. What would people see? Understanding the role of the lovers of Allah, the *awliyā* and *shuyukh* in their lives lies in that metaphor of cutting bread. You have a nice fresh loaf of bread and you cut the heel off. There are people who like the heel. I like it. There are others who will eat it, but who don't particularly like it. They really prefer the soft inner part. For most people, the heel is something they don't want, but you will eat it if you have to. The journey is like that. You get the whole package, and eat the middle part sometimes, but under strict instructions you have to go from one end to the other. It's a very good metaphor. You start with the ego that is unresolved, and you end with the *nafs*. You go from heel to heel. By the time you reach the heel after eating the soft part of the bread, you really appreciate the heel again. Our *nafs*, our doubts and fears, our desires, our lack of clarity, our lack of ability to articulate who we are and what we believe is sort of like the heel of the bread.

Then there is the delusion that comes when we haven't experienced our fears yet, and our doubts dominate. Or our desires seem to be reasonable and plausible, and our clarity seems to be very clear. We impress people with our ability to articulate what we think we want and believe, and we are in a total state of delusion. Allah Swt has created this world, this system in such a way that people can call you, and you can give them your advice; you can work at your job, or your business; you can answer every question given to you, but unless there is the presence of the Sayyid, Nebi Muhammad (sal), it will just be another game to stay ahead of. That's not the way of the *awliyāi*. A *wali* is a person who, on their deathbed, prays, "O Allah! I wish I never had such power, such *karamat*. I wish I never had the distraction of writing, talking, or teaching. I wish I never had insight, because it has only given me trouble. It has only kept me away from You in the inner. At the end of the day, all those insights didn't really help me. People respected or

feared me, or looked to me for the truth. But the only time they saw the truth was when I was referring to You.”

This is not just among spiritual people. Look at the politics in Washington. People would rather deceive to gain status. They would rather be obstructionist than help people who are dying, who are in need, who are losing their homes and who have no food on their tables. Every day you see the same thing being played out, as if by playing it out over and over again, it will somehow take over. I don't know if you saw the news today about Chrysler forced into bankruptcy by the hedge funds that wouldn't buy into the negotiations. This is just obstructionism; this is Shaytan. This is the pattern, over and over again, in the human being. It's just people saying, “We're not going to cooperate.” Where are the values, the principles? They are not in the forefront. Allah Swt provides all kinds of excuses for why we can put off until tomorrow what we should finish today. The major one lies in our own *nafs ammāra*. This is why people turn against it. They have prejudices, fears, and doubts, and don't understand that whatever comes, comes by Allah Swt. We all have that *taqwa*; we all fear that. We don't want to lose someone we love, or mess up something that looks good; or create misery for ourselves and others.

Tasawwuf teaches us that we have to come to understand and be forgiving and compassionate human beings, not be self-centered, not turn against what is good, or turn against *awliyā* and *shuyukh*, or the means, or the *khanaqah*, or Islam or whatever. I was looking at something on Youtube today about someone I happen to know. The caption read, “So and so is a self-realized Sufi master.” Nothing could be further from the truth. That is not to say that person is not a good person, but the deception is very strong. It is a powerful deception. Anyhow, who would want to carry that title? It's only something someone else says about someone. You know you couldn't say it about your self. That's the saving grace in all this. What does it mean? It would be wonderful for someone to

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say, “A person who sought to know the self their whole life.”

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The *walis* are a good example of people who really do know themselves. A person can walk in this world and address the needs of humanity and serve humanity. That walking, and that addressing, and that care and concern and compassion comes directly from Allah Swt. The tireless efforts come from Allah Swt. The desire not to be known, or if you are known, to be known as a servant, comes from Allah Swt. Even if we say that Allah doesn't care if you worship – that's in Qur'an. You can't not worship when it is so obviously true. Though most of us can't distinguish most of the time between certain nuances and subtleties, we are given a lot of instruction from the unseen world, like Abdul Bari Shah (ra) by his father in the unseen world. We are given instructions through the miracles of science; the miracles of nature, the subtleties in our own conscience. We are given instructions through the words of people who have other experiences, and through those who have been dead for centuries, but who are still instructing us in their texts. We are given instructions through love. Slowly, perhaps we come to realize it all comes from Allah Swt. We wonder, are we really sure that Allah is a reality? And then June 18th will come, and another miracle will happen (a birth).

I have never been at a birthing where I didn't weep. You see the miracle of life, and you see the miracle of death, too. It's hard to develop our subtle organs of perceptions unless we put our attention to it. We can do that while we work, while we study, while we garden, and while we change diapers. We can say, “I am a Sufi. I am a Muslim. I am a believer.” And every night you can go to bed and say, “Am I still a Muslim? Am I still a Sufi? Am I still a believer?” And you wake up in the morning and say it again: “I am a Sufi. I am a Muslim. I am a believer.” *Alhamdulillah*. Just to end where I started last night on another note. Put them together and they form a whole. Don't think for a minute that you are not in the company of Allah Swt, or that there are no longer any *walis*. Don't

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think there isn't the potential to understand that in your own self, but it does take effort.

Asalaam aleikum.