

May 7, 2009

Thursday

Title: [The True Nature of Disagreement](#)

DVD title: Distinguishing True Knowledge amidst Differences:
Reflect and Ask Questions of Your Self

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. I think we all recognize that the subject is an important one that I was speaking about last night. I was talking about the human ego and Qur'an, and that true knowledge not only forms the basis of faith, but brings many benefits: contentment, peace, understanding one's place, being able to see the interrelationships within this reality or system. In that sense, we can understand why people, who have such knowledge no matter what name they call their religion or spirituality, are people who say to us or teach the importance of faith, [like] the Rasulallah (sal) or Prophet Isa (as).

In the world we live in today, part of it or some of it, people think there is a great schism or cavern between knowledge and faith, and that somehow knowledge is antithetical to faith. We know this is not so. When we increase our knowledge and reduce our *nafs ammāra*, we still have to raise the question: how do we know what is true knowledge? The skill and inclination to support our own arguments, mental gymnastics, fears and desires claim to be knowledge based. We understand at the other end of the spectrum, the type of personality or group of people who support their argumentations for ego's sake based on "knowledge" often call it faith, often attribute it to being the words of the faithful. It's the same on both sides: one is ego based, and one is truly knowledge based, or truly faith based.

You can wander down a path that leads literally to hell, one that leads us away from our responsibilities, sense of purpose, from our family and our friends, from the security we have in our religion and our *dīn*, in our community, and in our home life, and in our Tasawwuf. In other words, [it leads us away] from the security we have in real love and real faith, and it can all seem to be true. Again, you can take teachings like the teachings of Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra), who speaks almost in a monastic sense about rejection of the world, family, kith and kin. You can take that as being a denial of the value of the world, or as being what he intended it to mean: understanding a state of non-ego involvement with the world, and understanding where all of these things fit. When we say it is the safety and security of something like family and community, it's not usually meant to be something that is antithesis of fear; rather, it is the antithesis of ignorance.

Security in knowledge means you can appreciate your family, your life, your work, your religion, your way of life, and your Tasawwuf in a way that is clearly separate from the ego. It's a humble recognition of dependency on Allah, not a kind of psychological narcissistic dependency. As we know, there are two sides to everything. To be able to distinguish between what is more pure and more reflective of the larger reality—that is, a mirror of the greater system—doesn't mean others can see that or emulate it based on fear and ego. Allah Swt made us all different physically, and in our mental and emotional capabilities and attitudes, and in our language and in our culture, and in the color of our skin, and different in the way we perceive things and think. In this difference/*ikhtilāf*, there seems to be a multiplicity and variety of faces, colors, and cultures. There must be, therefore, a reason for all this difference.

Allah points to this in the Qur'an: **“If Allah had willed, He would have made mankind one people. But still they will not cease to differ, except those on whom your Lord and Sustainer has bestowed His mercy. For this did He create them.”** (11:118-119)

For what, for the difference, or to cease to differ because one has recognized the Mercy of Allah Swt? All these differences are going to exist, until we are able to receive the *Rahmāt* and *Rahīm* of Allah Swt. He seems to be telling us we are created for that: to be able to purely receive the Mercy of Allah Swt. Allah said the difference is a mercy. When we are able to educate ourselves with the knowledge that is reflective of the essential *haqq*, or as Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra) perhaps would tell us, “*when we love Allah more than anything else, more than we love our self, and more than we love our kith and kin,*” we can serve Allah through serving what Allah loves, not what we love. If we serve only what we love, it’s obvious: it will be very selfish. So we serve what Allah Swt loves.

What does it mean? [It means we serve] those people or individuals or groups who either have the capability, intention, inclination, or who have achieved a sense of submission to Allah; whose hearts find tranquility in Allah, and where one finds Allah; who are in resonance and harmony with the reality or the system. When we serve through whom He loves and through those who maybe at times *we* don’t love or we find fault with, as long as we remain with an ethical and spiritual understanding, have that good *adab*, are serving from that true knowledge, the knowledge of or remembrance of why we were placed here, then our faith and knowledge will increase. Though we see difference all around us, we will be in some way the thread of unity that goes through all those differences: the peace maker, the trustworthy, the trustee, the *khalifa*.

Of course, everything is created in its measure. There is a limit to everything, and also to difference. To learn how to manage differences will provide us with very positive results. If intentions are sincere, even if there are differences of opinion, greater knowledge will be revealed; but if there is insincerity, differences of opinion will bring about controversy, dissension, and separation. Differences of perspective can increase one’s intellectual

vitality and intellectual stimulation with the cross-fertilization of ideas, and new ways of looking at things. Of course, the opposite can happen, too. When people are operating from the ego, and they don't have respect for people of knowledge, [or] of those who they are speaking to, then there can be intellectual exhaustion. You can see that easily on the Internet in the blogosphere. If you are blogging with people of high intelligence who are interested in the subject, more than just giving their opinion, you can tell. It increases your own knowledge and sensitivity. We have to really take a serious account of ourselves, *muhasabat*, and be very real about reality. Many benefits come from differences, and many challenges.

The greatest thing we can benefit from in this life, in this world, in this community is to take the different talents, and knowledge people have, and affirm with that our purpose, our unity, the unity of the community, of the *ummah*. Doing that intelligently with little ego and with real sincerity increases your faith, and turns your attention more easily toward Allah (*tawajjuh*), and makes it natural to serve one another and have good *adab* toward one another. Those differences can create that beautiful tapestry, and successful spiritual individuals, and even successful commercial enterprises. They can create a community that will survive generation after generation, that will survive and carry on Islam and Tasawwuf in the way it should be practiced and lived. But, it takes each one of us, each individual, to give time, effort and sincerity to the contemplation of the self, to the means one uses to express their thoughts and ideas, to the trust one places in Allah, and to the deeper and deepest perceptions one derives from looking through the lenses of the *latā'if*.

If there is disagreement, and there is that egotistical element to it, people will be distracted. They will be caught up in communication problems, in flaws, in distractions. If people get their psychological satisfaction from disagreement, there will be

destruction. If they are motivated to show off their knowledge, understanding, cleverness and ability, that is also a destructive tendency. It is taking very powerful and positive characteristics and making them into something dangerous and destructive. But, if truly from the core of our hearts in the privacy of our own self, in the dark of the night and in the early morning hours come to the conclusion that what we really live for is to those things in *dunya* which are good, and promote those things internally in our self which are good (externally service, and internally love and kindness; externally in articulating things in the words and affect that makes those elements of goodness, of *fitra* real); if we want to end deviating into error and following our own vain desires, and really serve Allah, then with that attitude, affirmation and *niyyat*; and with that promise (contract) there will be success.

I think it was a *hadith* that says if one follows one's own vain desires, one will stray from the straight path and not be among those who are rightly guided. Egotistical desires are antithetical to knowledge and happiness, but not antithetical to differences. Differences can give rise to the egotistical approach, or to the humble approach. I think all of us know that one's own ego stifles the truth and promotes (as we see from the world we live in today) corruption and genocide, and incredible levels of ignorance. You see it in the news every day. You wonder how do people not get the message? Remember how the AIG company took all of its people out to some conference center? How many weeks did the media play that up, and how many Congressional committees talked about that, and how angry were people about that? So what was the news today? Bank of America did the same thing. The point is what does it take to get the message? It's such stupidity and arrogance, such a disconnect from reality! But it's reflected in individuals, even in us. We think certain things can't touch us, that we are safe and secure. It's burying your head in the sand. But it has a purpose.

This is difference to the nth degree of corruption and negativity. Yet, at the same time, the most arrogant “religious” person is a person who walks, speaks, and acts like the *dīn* or their knowledge is an entitlement. They might be *hafez* of Qur’an, or an *‘alim*, or they may be very high in a worldly measurement, but by the measure of Allah, they are nothing; yet, their influence may be very strong. Allah says in Qur’an: **“Do not follow vain desires for it will mislead you from the path of God.”** (4:27 or 5:48) **“If the truth were in accord with your own desires, the heavens and the earth will surely have fallen into ruin and all that lives in them.”** (23:71) That’s prescient: it seems to be what is happening. Note that it says “the earth would truly have fallen”—not “the people.” Many people lead others astray by their own selfish desires, without having any real knowledge. If we see ourselves and other straying, there is no real knowledge or truth that is talking to you or that other person’s soul. There is nothing that is leading one in the right direction.

The desire comes from the ego and gives rise to a lot of actions and attitudes that are not necessarily the best, and may be wrong. We are not trapped by that unless it starts to become attractive to us. If the truth was more attractive than one’s ego desires, there would be no difference between Sunni and Shi’a and Sufi. Or, as Allah says, there is no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab, or a black and a white, or white or black. Difference is very important, and though it may exist, at its core it doesn’t exist. If there is no difference between a black and a white, it doesn’t mean that everyone becomes somehow gray. It means black and white somehow exists, but there is no difference between them. Of course there is a difference, right? They don’t become the same thing, but there is no difference in their knowledge and piety. The difference becomes a foundation for understanding no difference, while difference remains.

Many of the *‘alim* never got this; they never put it together. This argumentation went on

for centuries, and still goes on today on *ikhtilāf* and what was meant by it. We can say that through resonance or harmony, through the blessings of Allah, every one of us can become conscious of the extent of our vanity and desire nature, and how it affects our opinions, attitudes and beliefs, and how we communicate. There is no such thing as being too busy to take a few seconds to communicate with one's inner self, with Allah, and to reflect on one's self and on the Divine Presence. We have to help each other do that by being present in the Presence, so we can climb out of the patterns that are destructive. We have to listen to ourselves when we give our opinions; see ourselves as we express what we believe and don't believe. We have to look at how we externally do things, and see how we affect our own heart, our own soul and mind, and how we affect the hearts, souls, and minds of others. We can understand differences of opinion, of an interpretation of an *āyat* of Qur'an. We can understand even that people might have a difference of opinion on a *hadith*. But we can't make the assumption easily that just because there is a difference of opinion means they don't really believe in the Qur'an or the Sunnah. That's a big jump. Yet, we do that quite often without realizing that's what we are doing, whether we are talking about Qur'an, or just something between two people.

The difference of opinion doesn't mean that both people are not equally committed to what they are talking about. It could be a difference of opinion about your job, or how you raise your children, or how you run the community or whatever. But there has to be receptivity, but as an affirmation of the commitment of the other believer in what you most believe. That's only about opinion. Yesterday we talked also about perception. Only when we really refine our sights through our *latā'if*, when our intuition become really good, and very clean and very pure—like the body that is washed clean and pure, entering the grave—can we be sure that we are perceiving things correctly. We should with sincerity and urgency dispatch ourselves to our inner realms every day a number of times to practice looking through these lenses called *latā'if*.

When you are really sure that what you are seeing is right and good, and proper, your ego is gone or at such a low level that your presentation of your sight, your transmission, the *tajalli* of your sight goes into the sight of someone else. Their *latā'if* become awakened. It's not that they see as you do, although it may be true. It is that they arrive at seeing as you arrived at seeing; therefore, their affirmation of what is seen and yours become good science: a repeatable phenomena. It's a testimony to the truth. You can pick up a writing by a great Hindu philosopher, a Zen master, a Tibetan Buddhist, or Ibn Araby a Sufi Muslim and see that they say similar things. How is that? That phenomena is repeated. That gives rise to the concept of the scientific method, but it comes from something that is not the scientific method. It creates a space for that. You can use that to look at things of this world, physical things maybe or mathematical or biological relationships, or physics. But it comes from something else. It comes from insight, from *kashf*. Archimedes said, "Eureka!" When sitting in the bathtub, his *kashf* awakened.

We cannot then conceive of a real believer being consciously motivated to purposely contradict the Qur'an, the Sunnah, or the Hadith of the Prophet (sal). If one sees clearly, one sees clearly how pure those revelations are. Someone who is sincere in questioning differences is not intending to contradict it. You can extrapolate that to your own communication, friendships, relationships, and family, and your own relationships with your own inner self. What is it you are affirming? What is it that is the common, revealed truth upon which you are basing your mutual activities and responsibilities? Take some time this week and look at your own attitudes, and expose within your own self where your opinion comes from: your ego, or your knowledge and faith? If you can do that by looking at the source of the ideas, and by questioning the justification of adopting certain attitudes, ideas, and words to the exclusion of some other ideas, words and attitudes, you might come to some interesting conclusions. We can expose our ego by not only

questioning the justification for the opinion or attitude we have; or why we adopt certain attitudes or ideas, or by the normal way of just reflecting on the source of those ideas.

To add a little more of what you can do this week: take the time to assess the circumstances that affect either yourself as the person with an opinion, or someone else with an opinion, and the degree of commitment that you have to what your opinion and attitude and affect is. Ask yourself, if the circumstances change, would I still have the same opinion? What's your opinion of the economic crisis in the world right now? If the stock market keeps going up and up, and everybody keeps saying, "See? Everything turned around. Everything's fine," is your opinion that they are a bunch of fools who really don't get it, and who are perpetuating the same thing over and over again going to change or not? What do you base it on? Are you going to base it on the Dow Jones average? Are you going to base it on the words of a charismatic President, or on an understanding of what it takes to overcome greed? Have they just found a new way to be greedy?

Is greed so much the god of humanity today in the capitalistic system we are living in today that you can—with a few sacrifices, a few deaths, a few people jumping out of buildings, and a lot of people out of work, a lot of anger and angst, maybe a few killings—actually lead a pretty comfortable *dunya* life with it, if you happen to be among the successful greedy people. What will change your attitude and opinion of it? Or if you can, ask yourself, "What are the pressures on me that consciously or unconsciously led me to assert a certain attitude, opinion, or way of communicating? Are those ways justified, or am I just looking for reasons to express my strengths or weaknesses of character?" Then we have to analyze the subject itself: the idea, attitude, plan, or solution to the problem, whatever it may be—the decision you have to make, or the decision you wish others would make for the benefit of humanity and the benefit of their souls—and

ask how am I expressing this concern: in a strong way or weak way? Is there a better way to do this? How much doubt do I have in my *kashf*/insight and knowledge? If I follow this way to the end, am I following Shaytan or Allah? We have to buy some protection, insurance.

We have to seek the protection of Allah, praise Allah, serve Allah, remember Allah, and look for Allah in everything. In doing that, we can at least have some insurance that we are on the right path. How do we stay resonant with this greater reality, with the system? How do we stay resonant so that we are attuned? When you take a stringed instrument like a kanun or guitar, and you tune one of the strings, then you know the intervals so you can tune the rest of the instrument. A really good musician learns to hear it. You don't need the electronic tuner or go all over humanity to find a tuned oud to tune the rest of the ouds to. You hear it. You have ears to hear and you can tune to that. This is really important. Go through your day. What are you tuning to?

You are about to have a meeting. What is the ground note you are tuning to in that meeting? In a discussion with your daughter, your wife, or your cat, what are you tuning to? Will it be a chaotic conversation that has no center, and therefore you are safe because there is also no circumference—center everywhere, circumference nowhere? It seems to me that a real Muslim, a real Sufi, a real believer, is always seeking to reconcile, to come to agreement, to come into resonance and harmony, and not disagreement. There may be disagreement. We already discussed that. We are human beings: too much blame or too much praise, and we will run in another direction. There are many examples in the Qur'an of disagreement and dissension.

It's easy to think about what I want to communicate to so and so (our self and other), but how much time do we spend communicating with our self? That's where the patterns are

established: how you convince yourself of whatever the other part of yourself wants to convince. How do you get what you want? How do you remember? Is remembering increased and made deeper by forgetting? How important is it to forget? Did you see the article in Newsweek recently about forgetting? It took me back to Reintegrative Therapy 30 years ago.

This 34 year old presented a paper on the science of how to forget certain things—reframing. (I taught that to you 20 years ago as Reintegrative Therapy.) You put up an image of yourself (reflect upon your own self) and then have that image put up another image of the self, and do certain things with those images until the things that were stimulating your angst, unhappiness, depression, fears, or phobias would neutralize. When they neutralize in the images, they would neutralize in you. Because if you did just with you, your ego would get in the way and you would be self protective. If you can remove yourself by one or two degrees, you can do it. I used to give the example that every time you drive by a hospital, unknown to you, something happens inside your consciousness that triggers all your responses to hospitals. Someone you loved was ill, or died in a hospital. How do you get rid of that blockage? How do you create space where you can put something else in that space? That's what this guy is doing.

How many of us reflect upon ourselves? You have tough decisions to make. You are giving birth to a baby soon. The baby will eat and sleep and not cry much, *insh'allah*. They get to be about 3-4 months old and start crying, so you give the baby what it wants. Then what happens? They cry more to get more of what they want. Not giving the baby what it wants is unnatural. Wisdom has to be there right from the beginning. The other aspect of that is, if by the time the child is Ahmed's or Abdi's age, if every time you anticipate what the child wants and give it all the time, it inhibits language development. Because you make it not have to ask or communicate—short cuts. You have to think

about your words, attitudes, responses, decisions, and how you are making them. It doesn't have to do just with babies. The subject is still differences, disagreements and agreements, dissension.

The reality of this system is, it wants to come into harmony and balance. It wants to be tuned. That's a terrible way of saying it; it's like saying this glass enjoys being full and attributing human qualities to it. But it is true that there is a consciousness in the system, and that consciousness wants to be at peace and at rest. "Consciousness wants" is not what I want to say. Our ability to be aware, to be consciousness allows us to create and to experience harmony and resonance amidst difference. It allows us to agree and disagree with common intentions, common goals, and common purpose. Even that disagreement or discussion is not disrupting the overall consonance or harmony of the moment or of one's life and one's state. In other words, it fits. It is part of the reality.

Yesterday was a little more practical, though I gave some practical examples today. Applying this is obviously a moment to moment challenge, not just because you choose it to be, but because that's what we were created for. We were created to begin somewhere with very little skill and a lot of potential, and end up with a lot of skill and very little potential. Then we enter the grave, still skillful, as the Buddhists say, "Skillful means." Knowledgeable, balanced, harmonious, aware. We can look back and say, here are the moments where our knowledge and faith became stronger, and it had this influence externally and internally, until I became at peace, resonant, and I entered into the next stage—slipped in like water being poured into water. The trail you leave is the trail others follow. Sometimes your work is indicative of that. That's why we do the work we do: we purposefully leave a trail, called a legacy. Other people's work doesn't necessarily do that, but their life leads a trail, or their faith, wisdom or knowledge. But everyone is leaving some kind of trail. *Asalāmu aleikum.*