

May 16, 2009

Saturday

Title: [The Spiritual Principle of “Never Complain.”](#)

DVD title: Sustaining a Positive World View:
Apply the Spiritual Principle of “Never Complain”

Dinner blessing: O Allah Swt! We humbly offer our prayers to You, for our love and praise of one another, beauty and creation, especially in the springtime; for the taking of the food, which You provide us in our own gardens; for the opportunities You give us to respond to Your qualities and Your values. We ask You, Allah (Swt), to bless us in Your giving and in Your denying and Your opening and Your closing. We ask You, Allah, to send Your blessings on our Prophet Mohamed (sal) and his companions and to our *shuyukh*. O Allah (Swt)! For all the members of our community give us health and well-being. *Amin*.

Sohbet: Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, **“Soon there will dawn an age over people where there will remain of Islam nothing but the name, and of the Qur’an there will remain nothing but a script.”** In most people’s minds when they read that is the question, “What did the Prophet (sal) mean?” It is the same as the people who think about Armageddon and Book of Revelations. The fact is that he said **“soon.”** For most people 4,420 years is not soon. Certainly one can look at the world today and think, “It could be now.” Maybe it is now, because people today in the name of Islam do all sorts of terrible things. [They] misuse the Qur’an and quote it for purposes, for things that it was never intended to be quoted for. If we pursue a logical and pursue a rational continuation of that thinking, we are forced to ask ourselves a lot of questions.

We are surrounded by so much beauty and good in this world, as well as evil; yet, it seems to be very hard for people to pursue and to sustain a vision of the good qualities (we call them the Beautiful Qualities and the Beautiful Names of Allah Swt) in other individuals. How is it that, for most people, the effort to sustain a positive world view and a positive view of other human beings is beyond their grasp? Why is it that something as simple and as pure and as natural as looking for the beauty in others, not only eludes most people but doesn't even enter most people's minds. Then, of course, the next question is, "What, if anything, can be done to encourage and sustain this point of view?" It is also possible, as we well know (some of us intimately know). [But] after many years of striving, practicing and proclaiming our place on this path, why is something so simple as maintaining that positive, constructive [view], and articulating a positive and constructive understanding of gratitude elusive, if not nearly impossible to do? Certainly it is a very sad thing to contemplate.

We know that we can spend many years in meditation and intention, days and weeks in *khilwa* and *itikāf*, Ramadān upon Ramadān upon Ramadān fasting, even making *hajj* and still not even be able to sustain the simplest of commands of Allah (Swt), or to maintain the guidance of our *shuyukh* or *shaykh*. Then we think about how easy it is to complain, how easy it is to answer honestly something that eludes the Truth like, "How are you?" "I feel terrible." Instead of, "How are you?" "*Alhamdulillah.*" "You sound like you have a cold." "Yeah, *alhamdulillah*, I have a cold." "How do you feel?" "*Alhamdulillah*, I am okay." That is not just *mujabala*. "Is there anything I can do for you? May I make you a cup of tea?" "*Alhamdulillah.* If you want to make me a cup of tea, fine." The complaints and the excuses are very easy, but it seems that the expressions of gratitude are few and far between.

When gratitude is expressed, it seems that expressions of gratitude somehow qualify to be

in the realm of what is *khafi*/silent, and complaints seem to be in the realm of *jahri*/aloud. They are given free expression, without thought. Why is it that wrestling with our own emotions, tendencies, doubts and habits is permitted to be done so much in public as if it is a shared event? “Come one, come all!” “Oh, there is somebody. I will complain.” “O there is someone. I will gossip.” “There is somebody. I will express my doubts.” Yet, the attainment of harmony, and the expression of humility that comes from the admission of one’s own personal weaknesses, wrong actions or loud thoughts are kept such a secret. We protect those things. Don’t we realize that we embarrass ourselves much more by what we say than by what we don’t say? Why is it that we hold in such high regard being the protector of our ego, and we don’t hold near that regard when we are told (and when we even say) that we are trustees of the *amanat*? Why is it that it is so easy, even after so many years and years and years of practice, to defend ourselves? Why is that more important than defending the Truth, the teaching, the teacher, the *shuyukh* or the Qur’an and the Sunnah?

These are tough questions. If you don’t approach them the right way, you can become pretty disillusioned or disheartened, which is, of course, what the *nafs* is designed to do. Why is it that these questions that I just raised are silenced the moment they arise in ourselves, and barely tolerated by our own selves, barely listened to? We only listen out of tradition, or the choicelessness of choice when they rise inside of us in this form. Yet, it is so easy to forget to contemplate these questions and to admit that we already have the answers to them. It is so easy to remember all the complaints and faults we see in others, but manage to miss them in our own selves. At the very least, we should silence them when we begin to hear them about others, just like we are very adept at silencing criticisms when we begin to hear them within our own self about our own self.

Shaykh al-Akbar (ra) along with many others said that the means of overcoming these

problems is, very briefly in two words, “Never complain.” What does it mean? Don’t complain about the hand one is dealt in one’s life. Don’t complain about the circumstances. And don’t complain, he said, to either a friend or an enemy. Most of all we shouldn’t accuse Allah that He is treating us badly, or that we are suffering because of Allah. We know that by complaining and accusing and reacting and seeking the higher ground at the expense of those whom we love the most, watching out for our own complaints, our own hurt, our own pain, we can quickly lose track of the ones who love us the most, and whom we love. We can quickly lose track of what is ultimately right and good, and we need therefore to deal properly.

We need to understand, not just the words, or the idea of gratitude and humility and submission are important. We need to give up this fear of being humiliated, being watched, being judged and to really, not just say that we have gratitude but to practice very, very hard at having gratitude. We need to stop proclaiming our problems verbally or by affect or by attitude or through our actions. We need to, *subhanallah*, praise Allah by proclaiming the blessings that we have. Shaykh al-Akbar (ra) said it was better to tell a lie in the form of expressing gratitude towards Allah for the benefits *that we have not received yet*, then to state the plain truth in the form of a complaint or a criticism. In other words, it is better to express gratitude for something that has not come to you yet, as if you have it, than it is to complain.

So is there really any one of us that does not live under the protection or the grace of Allah? Allah says in Qur’an, **“If you count favors of Allah, you can never add them up.”** (14:34) or/and (16:18) For all the blessings we enjoy every single day, we don’t mention and we don’t acknowledge them. Certainly if we do acknowledge them, most often we don’t acknowledge them for what they really are, to the depth and extent of them, all that goes into these blessings. Most of us don’t talk with Allah. But when you

speak to Allah (swt), when you speak in gratitude, it is almost a feeling that it is embarrassing. It is not the cool thing to do: human beings don't talk like that. We are worried about who is going to hear us and who is going to judge us. Many people don't worry when they gossip or when they backbite (they don't even know when they are doing it), or when they complain to so many people who will for sure misunderstand them. [You] worry about the one person who might take what you are saying wrong or see what you are doing in the wrong way and judge you, and yet don't pay any attention to who is judging and misunderstanding when you complain. Of course, people do misunderstand, because they tend to project their own attitudes, values, fears or doubts onto your circumstances.

So it is Allah alone Who will bring us to that reward, Who grants us the ability to understand, and Who gives us the means and gives us the power to change our circumstances, or bear the weight of them, at least. It is Allah (SwT) Who gives me the means to struggle through times when a day can be a year and a year can be like a day. Allah says that: **“If Allah afflicts you with some hurt, no one can remove it but Him. And if He desires some good for you, no one can repel His bounty. He causes it to reach whomsoever He wills of the servants. He is All Forgiving and All Compassionate.”** (10:107) Then you see people, it is sort of ironic People with dementia have more sense than the people without it. Your mother-in-law complained and was paranoid for so many years. She turned out to be the sweetest little thing in the world, because her essential goodness came out. We should all understand that is the essential good, for those of us who struggle at keeping our tongue on a leash or our mind. Just think about all the things we complain about when we are of sound mind and body, and how many things we complain about when we are in relative harmony and balance with our emotions and our environment around us, while the blessings are so obvious. We feel we deserve more and we close our eyes for the benefits of the goodness that come to us.

Then we act surprised if we are deprived of what we do have. If someone criticizes you unwarrantedly in the moment, you are afraid that the person will shut you out. They won't respect you anymore. And you won't be surprised, because you did the same to them.

How come we are so aware of the lower part of our nature? Yet we seem so totally absent from the higher part of our nature. It is like the highest part of our nature, we have to struggle for, but the lowest part of our nature is naturally there. The truth is that the highest part of our nature is naturally there, and the lowest part of our nature comes from the interface with our destiny in the world. Still, Allah (Swt) forgives us and blessings and bounties come to us. This whole system is designed to uplift us. The little bit of good is potentially magnified and the bounties still come to us, even as we criticize others or having doubts, even when we don't have the proper gratitude. Yet, when we feel the slightest loss, when all of a sudden we realize that all of this that is coming towards me, and there is some element of discomfort, then we think that we have been abandoned by Allah. But all that has happened is that our attitude has been tweaked.

Most of the problems that attack us as individuals, that cause us so much pain, or attack groups of individuals and societies are really our complaints against Allah (Swt), or our inability to see that Divine Presence, which in of itself is a kind of complaint, ignorance. We react to the way we were taught. I read an article about how the Catholic Church used to punish the students in Catholic school. What they succeeded in doing was to make a real bond between all people who went to Catholic school. [A nun might have] wacked you on the hand with a ruler or slapped you on the upside of your head. The problem was that one day she might do nothing when you did that thing, and if you did the same thing the next day, she might whack you. So you never really knew what was the real cause [of the punishment] other than she was having a bad day. There need to be

guidelines, understandings, contracts. My daughter asked for an e-mail account recently, and I have to tell you, my kids very rarely ask for anything. So I thought, “Fine.” I wrote a contract. I made about a twelve point contract which she read, signed and agreed to. I don’t think any child should have an e-mail account or any kind of iphone or itouch without agreements. Because if you don’t have agreements, you don’t know what the boundaries are. You just don’t know. You could be doing something perfectly innocent one day and get chastised for it, and the next day, nobody would pay any attention to it. You have to know what the boundaries are. It does not serve the children in saying, “Okay. I trust you. Have this.” Then when they do something intentionally or unintentionally wrong, you come down on their head. State what is right and wrong. Isn’t that what Allah (SwT) has done? Of course, it is more nuanced than that.

Most difficulties, problems attack us as individuals and cause us a lot of difficulties or pain, or attack groups of individuals as in large societies; but really behind it all, are very profound opportunities and teachings. We can at least look at those people who have so much forgiveness and so much mercy and so much compassion and marvel at the circumstances under which that mercy and that compassion was developed, let alone sustained. You can certainly make a case for somebody like the Prophet Mohammed (sal) to be a little angry at people and not trusting, and yet he is a model of compassion—or Prophet Isa (as). How many of us found fault in our parents when we were children only to realize in later life how sweet they were and what their real concerns were for us. How patient they were. How tolerant they were. Prophet (sal) said, ***“Allah is more merciful towards His servant than a mother is towards a child.”*** Yet when something comes to assail us, causing us pain, causing us doubt, causing us confusion, misunderstanding, anger, criticism, where is the mercy that we are remembering? Is the mercy not there? Is there no mercy somewhere in those circumstances?

But it is not for us to say to someone else, “Now look, I’m sorry you are having a hard day. That was a difficult thing. Somebody said this to you or did that to you. You should see the mercy in that.” We should be careful that *we* are seeing it. How many of us run to the merciful side of our character and the compassionate side of our character and the forgiving part of our heart, first. We know it is right, because we tell our children and other people’s children without any hesitation what *adab* is. The most important thing is to have respect. I tell my children all the time, “Your word is your bond.” I wrote them a letter for the trip and I told them for weeks before they left to take care of their mother because she was not feeling well. When they got to Iran, I received a telephone call and Mitra was telling me how well the children took care of her on the way, *alhamdulillah*.

Can I assume that would have happened without me framing it? I can’t. I would hope that after framed a few times, one doesn’t have to frame it anymore. We tell them that the respect and *adab* that they have towards others and towards adults is the way of having it towards Allah, and then what do they see?

So many of us do persevere in difficult times and others of us sort of collapse. If we do persevere, it is not happily or trustingly. It is sometimes habitually or resentfully, or trying to prove something, when all you have to do is switch the reason for it. You are surviving; you are persevering. You are having to be patient—not because it is your habit and not because the more resentful you are the greater strength you have—but because inside of us, the whole of creation is there providing *madad* for us, providing support for us, assistance to us. I understand that you can see it as semantics. That is okay. If ideographically (I still quote her Bachelor degree paper) we can associate two things together and have people believe them, why can’t we associate good things too with difficulties that we have. We can be patient.

At the very least, we should be patient, even if we don't have good graces about it, even if our *adab* suffers somewhat. If we don't have patience, we have lost our existence. Of course our body is walking along the earth. We can talk and we can act and, but who are we? What is our character? We don't exist. The real existence that reflects our *fitrah* lies in the manifestation of the Qualities, of the Names of Allah (Swt). The gratitude and the patience naturally come from remembrance. And that goes back to the talk I gave you over the telephone (May 13, 2009) on formal and informal *adab*. I wonder how many of you really paid attention to the nuance, there. Certainly you know that the Shaykh (quoted writings by Hazrat (ra)) was not saying to not have *adab*. Certainly you know that he was not saying that we have progressed beyond the need to have any kind of formal *adab* towards our *shaykh* or people we respect. He was just being very pragmatic saying that times had changed. He used me as an example, because I live with you, and I work with some of you, and deal with your personal issues, not just your spiritual issues. He was just saying that under those circumstances, it is very hard to keep formal *adab*. But what was the nuance? The nuance was that you have love in your heart for your Shaykh. [That] is what he was saying.

We could say that if you have love in your hearts for your brothers and sisters (he was just talking about *adab* towards the *shaykh*), if you really have sincere love in your heart, then the *adab* is there. You don't have to try to do anything. It is there. You know when to speak and not to speak, what to say and not to say, what to do and not to do. It is a more mature point of view than learning a bunch of rules and regulations, or cultural expectations. So believe me, we can all persevere from a much higher state and a less painful state than the one of persevering out of habit, and persevering out of sheer will. If we can be patient with the things that we want and desire in life, and I don't necessarily mean for ourselves—we can want them and desire them for someone else; we can want and desire them for our work; we can want them and desire them for humanity—we

should be able to be patient during times of difficulties and misfortune. At the very least we should be patient, even if we don't have good graces, as he said.

We have to realize that we are walking on this earth and there are things in this world that are challenges. There are things to fight for. There are things to lose sleep over. There are things to protest. There are things to surrender over. In the case of our Tasawwuf, in the case of our Islam, surrender and submission are strengths, not weaknesses.

Sometimes we have to fight and struggle to submit (as a tool), instead of fighting with the ego. We have to fight with the ego as the enemy. We have to submit, and in that submission see how Allah uplifts us and lifts us up. [He] uplifts us from inside and lifts us to a higher state, [and we see] how much more love flows from us, just as if you rise above the trees or fly above the clouds, you see the sun. [We see] how that truth stands out, and the truth of our own capacity and our own love stands out. Allah said: **“Fighting is prescribed for you, though it be hateful for you. It may happen that you hate a thing that is good for you and it may happen that you love a thing that is bad for you. Allah knows and you know not.”** (2:216)

So sometimes knowledge is kept from us, just like at the right time the veil is lifted and the station between things disappears because we made the distinction out of our fears. We have to be careful with the things we like or dislike, want or don't want, desire or don't desire, love and hate, approve of or disapprove of—these apparent dichotomies. We should try to follow the law—but the inner, the sacred law, the inner law behind the Shari'ah and Sunnah. How do you follow that? We practice gratitude. When you practice gratitude with real sincerity and commitment, then you are elevated spiritually, and you achieve that station you cannot fall from. You know you are on this vehicle of *taqwa* moving toward Allah Swt. We see our lives as sacred and our desires as being a means to understand what is sacred and how to sanctify things. Then our desires

themselves will be elevated to things that are not selfish and self-serving, vengeful or critical. Our desires will rise to a level where everything we desire is good for our soul, good for our body, our mind, good for us, and good for those around us. Then we know that we are moving toward inner peace and perhaps even outer peace.

We shouldn't fight our destiny. That is to say, we should accept the fact, for example, that you and I are here, on this journey. We should cooperate, refine, and perfect ourselves on this journey. The girls told me that one day they realized how important it was to study, and how to study. That's a moment when you accept where you are and where you are going, at least in the short term. "This is how I get there. If I don't, this is going to be very difficult for me both mentally and emotionally and physically." You have to give up the lesser aspect of your desires and strive for the higher aspects. [We have to] keep our mouths from forming words we don't want to articulate, and keep our tongue from potentizing them. Often our tongue is the instrument of our emotions.

What Allah decides for us is good and will give us happiness and contentment and joy, if we accept what He has desired for us. We all have to struggle with that, but that struggle has to be purposeful—not just a struggle. The things that are difficult will run their course, at the end of which our knowledge will be increased. Maybe we will even have some wisdom. All our wrongdoings can be changed for good doings and right doings, like the night leads to the day and winter leads to the spring, and the spring back to winter again. (I heard it might frost tonight.) It's so easy to magnify faults, and so many things to complain about. We have to give up the willingness to complain. [We have to] give up the idea of vindication, that we are right. The whole context of fighting to be right is wrong. Let's become more worthy to be called Muslims and Sufis, and turn to the things Allah Swt has provided to us from our teachers and guides so we can really reap the benefits of the years, hours, and minutes we spent worshiping with good intention, but not

yet purified of our self.