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Thursday

Title: [The Purpose of Practicing Tasawwuf](#)

DVD title: Understanding the Purpose of Tasawwuf is to Understand the Value of the Practices  
A Review of the Teachings of the Lata'if

My dear friends, the serious purpose of practicing Tasawwuf is to fulfill the purpose of Rasulallah (sal) in the sense of uplifting the noble qualities and character of the individual. In so doing, one begins to have a clear understanding of what the essence behind not only the life of Rasulallah was and is to us today, but also one has a clear understanding of what the narrative and subtextual message of the Qur'an is, above and beyond what is apparently obvious to most people who study it, and which I must say, is probably not true or not completely true.

If another way of saying this is the purpose of the practices we are given to do (specifically talking about our practices) is some kind of refinement and purification of the self, purification of the heart, development of a kind of human essential *adab*, and then achieving a kind of state wherein one's actions and words reflect the beauty of Allah's creation, [reflect] the essential, noble responses (*ihsan*), nearness to Allah, [reflect] knowledge that surpasses any humanly generated form of academic knowledge (*marifat*); if the idea is one can establish oneself in such a way that for a period of time or times a person experiences the dissolution of their *nafs*/self, and then comes back into existence (*fana / baqa*) in an uplifted state; if this is the purpose of Tasawwuf, which is to transform a seeker into the most humane, ethical, moral, spiritually developed being, then we can begin to understand the value of the practices.

It's been pretty well established over the millenniums in the various traditions (not the least of which is ours) that one has to strive and have a yearning or make an effort to realize these goals. In today's world, where there are many challenges and demands on us in outer ways, it is very difficult to fulfill our inner most yearnings/*himma*. When we look around the world, there are many ways in which a person can try to do that. In our way, we go through a chain of authorized *shaykhs*. We offer a way to live our life in this world, but within a context of an encompassing spiritual philosophy. The most comprehensive and oldest of the teachings are found among the Khwaja Khwajagan, which later became the Naqshbandī and then Mujaddidī line of teachers. All of these teachers felt there was a need for a practical means that can be integrated into one's day to day life. It doesn't require someone to have a monkish existence, and these teachings are comprehensive enough that people of different inclinations and capacities, different interests, different sensibilities and sensitivities can benefit.

These teachings have created a line of many awakened individuals, some of whom were the *shuyukh*, others were the *murīds* of those *shuyukh*. It is generally accepted, and very well established historically, that it is by the *madad* (assistance) and the *bāraka* (blessings) of these *shuyukh* over the millennia that these teachings have not only been brought into existence, but they have lasted. I bring this to you tonight, because I don't know what you know. At least intellectually, it is based on the *latā'if*, the subtle centers of perception. What our predecessors experienced through their own practices was that there were many *latā'if*, many centers of perception. Through their intuitive insight (*kashf*) they identified ten *latā'if*. Not just one person identified them, but a number of the *shuyukh* did. The essence, or the apparent actions and forms of the *latā'if* reflect the actions, movements, and apparent realities of the universes that are viewable to us in the world.

In other words, we have this universe within us which turns and cycles and revolves around a center, just like the planets in our solar system in the universe that is perceivable to us. Even these days, there is a big discussion on creationism versus evolution. Interestingly enough, there are even parallels to that. Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) said that Allah Swt created the universe in two stages: one was the ‘*ālam al amr*, the world of command (“**Be and it became**”) in which instantaneously (the big bang or big breath) universes are created. Then Allah Swt created following that the ‘*ālam al khalq*, the world of creation. It came through a process of evolution, and it lasted many millions of earth-time years. We don’t have a problem with creationism or evolution, obviously. These two stages had been described by someone over 600 years ago.

After the ‘*ālam al khalq*, Allah Swt creates human beings. This new creation He gives a blessing to, because He gives us certain capabilities and faculties, which some of our predecessors called “points of light,” or *latā’if*. Five of those *latā’if* (*nafs*, *bād*, *nār*, *mā’* and *khāk*/self, air, fire, water, and earth) were part of this creation. *Qalb*, *ruh*, *sirr*, *khafee*, *akhfah* were the “points of light” that are part of the ‘*ālam al amr*. Which came first? The ‘*ālam al amr*. These *latā’if* were initially described by our predecessors (and anyone who realizes them, who sees and awakens them) as points of light. They are luminous. When Allah Swt connects these luminous points to the human body, when finally the human is created, the light starts to get filtered through the influence of things that human beings experience in the physical world.

One of the major things that filters this light is the human being’s tendency to identify with the material world. Why? Because human beings are created to live in the material world, and (in a sense) *needs* the material world to remain human. All the things of the material world are transitory for a human being, including our own bodies which are

made up of these elements. All the things of the ‘ālam al amr are eternal. But when one becomes a human being, one doesn’t see these things very clearly. So this inner luminosity begins to dim. Allah reveals that in Qur’ān: “**Surely We created the human being with the best of stature, then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good works, for they shall have reward unfailing.**”

(95:4-6) Those who have *ihsan*, whose attention is to the beauty and purity of things, and those who serve Allah and Allah’s Creatures: “**for them is an unfailing reward.**”

Meaning, there is an eternal awakening in that.

It is through the specific practices we have that require and guide us to concentrate on the *latā’if* that we become able to use them as a filter, if you will, on a lens—a means to see, to have an awareness of that Divine Presence. The more any seeker develops this ability, the less the light that is inherent in all created things is blocked or obscured. Seeing that light is equivalent to *marifat*: it is knowledge, whether it is Archimedes seeing the light and saying, “Eureka! I found it!” or any countless numbers of scientists or philosophers or spiritual beings having an insight into things. It means there is light that shines on it. That means the veil has been lifted, the knowledge that is inherent is not obscured, and we see it. We interact with it, and it has an effect on us. The effect on us will depend on to what degree we are free of our nafs ammāra.

[The effect on that interaction with knowledge will be] to the degree we are aware of the physical world and all the elements that comprise it, but are free of their pull. Just like the capacity we have to remember things (memory), the *latā’if* are also capacities or faculties through which we can experience or sense things. Yet, if I say to you, “Explain to me, what is smell,” we all know what it is, but can’t explain it. Or taste: you can describe how the olfactory system operates and all that, but you can’t explain it. Tell me, what is hearing? You say, “It’s hearing something.” What is tasting? You can tell the quality of

something by putting it in your mouth, and each thing has its own special quality, and that's what we call taste. In the same way, what is memory? How do you explain it without using the word memory? "Certain experiences took place, and I..." What? You remembered it. It's very difficult to explain. That's why you all find it difficult to understand *latā'if*. If you open the *latā'if* and see through them, you won't be explaining them but you'll know what it is.

We all know what taste and smell are; we all know what hearing is. We don't have to describe it. You can say a memory is something that lives in the brain, but you can't give all the dimensions of it. Now, if you lose your memory, not because you are demented (but even in that process, sometimes a person knows that) but maybe you had an accident. You remember that you lost your memory. You realize the importance of something when you lose it. Though you cannot define the *latā'if* adequately in words, as a person brings them to light, you begin to understand them. [A know a person who] has had no sense of smell since childhood. You can describe things to him, and he knows smells exist, but he doesn't know what they are. It's definitely a handicap that you learn to live with. Believe it or not, most of you live with a very, very, profound handicap. You have not activated the *latā'if* to the degree that you can understand them, and you don't recognize what they do, their function. It's just another word in Farsi/Arabic. We'll leave that for a minute, but come back to it.

Over the generations, many different Sufi orders have emerged, and they have associated the *latā'if* with different locations on the body, if at all. Most don't even discuss them. We talk about the five centers of Allah's world of command, the '*ālam al amr*' and the '*ālam al khalq*'. The '*ālam al amr*' are in the chest: *qalb*, *rūh*, *sirr*, *khaft*, and *akhfah*. The *shaykhs* of our major Tariqah, Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī, have been taught to guide the *sālik* [on the *suluk*]. Though the Shadhili may say, "We don't believe in *suluk* like you do,"

it's not the same: we believe in an inner journey, not an outer journey. We are guided to help you to open the doorway to the light of each *latīfa*, one by one. This is done primarily through *muraqabah*, through *niyyat* and paying attention to the center you are sitting in.

We begin with *qalb*, of course. Only after that do we pay attention to the ‘ālam al khalq. Of all these different *latā’if* connected with the ‘ālam al khalq, world of creation, only the *nafs* is placed on a certain part of the body. For Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya, it’s here near the third eye. For Chistiyya, Qadriyya it is [on top of the head]. The *nafs* is the first of the *latā’if* of the ‘ālam al khalq that a person tries to refine because it’s considered by us to contain the sum total of all the other *latā’if* of the world of creation. After concentrating on the *nafs* for a period of time, then one begins to concentrate on the four elements. When these are infused with light, then every aspect of our physical being, every pore of our body begins to become enlightened or illuminated and starts to remember Allah. It takes some very practical forms that you’ve heard stories about.

You’ve heard the story about the man who watched people walk to the mosque at Fajr all the time. But he never went to the mosque at Fajr. One day, he found his feet walking to the *masjid*, following the man to the *masjid*. This is an example of how the elements, once they are enlightened, begin to act on their own. Allah tells us [through Hadith Qudsi]: “**I will walk through your feet, speak through your tongue, and work through your hands.**” What it means is, as the organs of perception in terms of the ‘ālam al khalq, as the earth/air/fire/water become enlightened, they begin to act. The hands begin to assist people; the tongue begins to speak the truth or encouraging words. The eyes see the beauty. The physical senses sense the Divine Presence. The feet move you toward prayer. Your head wants to bow to the ground. This is based on the teaching of the Khwaja Khwajagan: “*indirajun nihayat fil bidayat; where others end, there marks*

*our beginning.”*

The point of this is [clear when] it talks about the very unique, distinctive sequence of spiritual practices, introduced and refined by Bahaudin Naqshband (ra) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is a method or technique designed to help us overcome obstacles that keep us at human beings from drawing near to that Divine Essence. We are human beings forget Allah Swt for two major reasons: one is, we are drawn to the external world. The other reason is that in that drawing to the external world, we become very involved with our own ego and what's found within the egoistic self. To attain to *maiyyat*, nearness to Allah, it is necessary to free ourselves from our attachments to both the external world and the whole idea of being a separate self. Most teachers, most *shaykhs*, most *tariqah*, focus first on freeing the seeker from the external world, and work on the ego. As Shaykh used to say, “They give their priority to the purification of the subtle centers of consciousness of the world of creation/’ālam al khalq.”

This journey is accomplished usually, if anyone accomplishes, through very arduous and rigorous spiritual practices and takes a long time. When we talk about a long time, some of you can say, “I’ve been at this 25, 30 years.” You have to always ask yourself, how have you been at it? We are not just talking about calendar time. We are talking about someone who is very serious, committed, one pointed and focused. Going through the method of focusing on the ‘ālam al khalq takes many years. I’m not talking about someone who practices like some of you practice. The problem is, if someone follows that way and something goes wrong in that long period of time it takes to either complete or make real progress on that journey, there is no way of reaching your goal because time runs out.

Khwaja Bahaudin Naqshband (ra) was very aware of the risk seekers take when they

undertake that kind of journey. He felt that as the time went away from the period of time of the life of Nebi Mohammed (sal), away from the time of the Sahabah and the Taba'ain and the taba-Taba'ain, then the seeker's ability and capacity to travel that spiritual path deteriorates. It becomes harder. You don't have that *nisbah*. You don't have the relatedness with the Prophet (sal). He saw that seekers, even though they were very sincere, after a period of 800 years since the Prophet, they didn't have the same dedication. They didn't have the same passion, determination, or courage. Having that in his mind with the *madad* of Allah, he realized in his *kashfa* a shorter, easier method, which was the inverse of the method that was practiced up until that time. That was, he focused first on the purification of *qalb*, of heart. Then he went through activating the four other subtle areas of consciousness in the world of command. Then only after doing that did he deal with the '*ālam al khalq*'. Think of it as someone who had a realization saying, "Wow, we've been doing it this way; but if you just turn it around, something else happens." Like when you are editing, and someone says, "Just turn the sentence around, and it will become clear." Look at it in another way. This is why the method was known as *indirajun nilhayat fil bidayat*.

There is something else. A person who begins this journey in some way—maybe in the first transmission they get, in the first meditation, in the first time they meet the *shaykh*, something about the way something was said, something about the *madad* of the *shaykh*, something about being in *suhbat*, something about the work of the *shaykh*—SOMETHING gives the person a taste of the final destination. I used to give the example of mountains. You are climbing the mountain, and the clouds are over the mountain top. But as you stand at the bottom of the mountain before you start to climb it, the clouds part and you see the peak. Then the clouds come back, but you saw the peak, and that was enough to make you want to climb all the way to the top. Something happens to everyone who seeks that knowledge. For at least every adult in this room who came to this path

(not forced by birth into it like some of the young people in the room), something happened. You might not even remember what it was, but your life is a testimony to it. On the other hand, something also happened to the young people. They were born into this family, or perhaps you married into it. . If you believe that your soul was placed by Allah somewhere, then something happened there, too.

So a person gets a taste of the destination on this journey with this method. Having a taste, one goes through the states of the journey. Only after doing that does one fully realize the reality that Hazrat Khwaja Bahaudin Naqshband (ra) [described as a] quick method, and doesn't involve great austerities or hardships, but allows a seeker a brief but sufficient survey of the whole path—like standing on top of the mountain and surveying the whole tract of land. In this way, we are told, the details of the path are left for later, and every effort is made to reach the final destination as quickly as possible. Hazrat used to talk about this all the time, and I didn't get it. You are going to fly from Delhi to Washington. You look out and you can see all the tracts of land and the ocean, but the details are left for later. You go there and get there, and then you can return to the details, because now you have other means of perceiving; whereas, if you went step by step along the way, you would be seeing things, but you wouldn't be seeing the reality of them. If you get to the destination where the *latā'if* are refined and you have gone through the process of opening the *latā'if* to the light, then you can look again at these things and see something you never would have seen if you went one by one in a very arduous journey where you could have an accident on the road, be distracted by this or that.

When Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) appeared on the scene, he made the path of reaching the highest station of the most benefit to people. In taking this path to its ultimate, he illuminated the person's life in a way none had done before. He described the details of the world of command and systemized the teachings. You hear me speak all the time of

the *Asmā' al Husna*. I use it as part of the systems theory; I talk about the qualities of the Names of Allah. I talk about how you can experience that Divine Presence through them. This is, *astaghfirulla*, one of the final conversations I had with Hazrat, where he admonished me not to confuse people with the Divine Names. He said it was a distraction. I was presenting to him an approach. I said, "Hazrat, in the West, people have questions: 'Who is Allah? How can I recognize Allah? What is Allah's role in my life? What is the purpose of existence?' People want answers to these questions.

*Astaghfirulaha*, you have worked your whole live with people brought up in the Indian culture and Islamic culture. Only in the past 30 years have you been working with people in the western culture. Of the westerners you work with, every single one of them is wrapped up in reading lots of books of philosophy and wanting enlightenment as if it is a thing. Allah Swt describes things in terms of the *Asmā' al Husna*, characteristics and qualities.

Having said that, and I will continue to talk about the *Asmā' al Husna* in many ways, how many of you – raise your hands – have been given technique by me, or been instructed by me in any way using the *Asmā' al Husna* other than what you find in the circles? None. Isn't that a little strange? You do know these techniques exist? Yes. I 've given them to two people. Two people who found very much difficulty in certain aspects of the teachings in the way we normally give them. We say Ya Shāfi and other things, and when you are in the circles you concentrate on this or that name when you come out of meditation. Only in that context do we do it. Yet, there are whole schools of Sufic thought where the *Asmā' al Husna* is recited again and again, over and over. Not that you shouldn't do it, but you haven't been given it as a method. Why?

Our predecessors said (listen for the nuance here) if a seeker is engaged in detail with the *Asmā' al Husna*, their path to Allah is obstructed because there is no end to the Names

and Attributes of Allah Swt. If a person does practice the method, and there is a method, and I know the method, and I've given it to two people, only those seekers completing this journey in detail can reach their final destination. There has to be so much concentration, because there are so many iterations and permutations of compassion, of healing, of peace, and justice. Just think about '*adl*/justice alone. How do you determine what is just and not just? It demands a tremendous amount of intellectual energy. Some people are prone to do that, but still you don't know. You have to arrive at the Names of Allah Swt through submission. All these things are happening, and you are attuned to the Names of Allah, and you have to keep submitting and submitting and submitting. The way we have takes you to the result of submission, but requires a lot less of that kind of effort. It's based on what? In the light of the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (sal), the human being should be treated with love, and things should be made easy and not difficult for them.

Hazrat Abdul Bari Shah (rah) made significant changes in the Mujaddidi practices. He was the *qutb* of the time, around 105 years ago. He was able to introduce the principle of, "*where others end, there marks our beginning*" in another way. He introduced it not just to the Naqshbandiyya Order, but to the Qadriyya and Chistiyya Orders. Indeed, he did this with the consent of the founders of those orders, *uways*. Some of those orders wanted to introduce these changes but weren't in a position to at that time, but Abul Hasan as Shadhili did try and his successors speak very briefly of it in their writings. The qualities, and the spiritual levels, and the status, and the miracles of the Mujaddid of the last hundred years Abdul Bari Shah (ra), through the *madad* of Allah facilitated opening these new paths for people. Some people are more prone to one order or the other, but once you establish the idea of what these *latā'if* are and how they operate, then you move to another order and there you might find a very nice home.

This whole idea of transmission begins when the Archangel Jibreel embraces the Prophet (sal) three times and said, “Iqra!” And he (sal) said, “I can’t.” And the angel embraced him twice more until he could. Then he could recite (read). Many believe this is the first example of transmission. The Prophet (sal) in the cave at Hira was asked this question. *According to hadith, one day the Prophet (sal) was holding the hand of Hazrat Umar (ra). Umar said to him, “O Apostle of Allah! You are dearer to me than everyone except my own self.” The Prophet (sal) said, “No, by Him in whose hand my soul is, you will not have complete faith until I am dearer to you than your own self.” Then Hazrat Umar paused and said, “However, now, by Allah, you are dearer to me than my own self.” The Prophet (sal) said, “Now Umar, you are a believer.”* That was also the result of transmission. One second he was one thing, and the next second he was something else.

*In another hadith, Hazrat Ali bin Qab said, “I was in the mosque and a man came in and started to say his prayers. He recited the Holy Qur'an in a manner that seemed incorrect to me. Then another man came in and recited the Holy Qur'an in yet another way. I went to the Prophet (sal) and told him how these people recited, and he asked both men to recite. They did and he (sal) said, “They are both correct.” “My heart was filled with evil doubt, even stronger than that of the Jahiliyya. When the Prophet (sal) saw my state, he struck my chest with his hand. I started perspiring profusely and my state of fear and awe was such that I felt I was seeing Allah.”*

These are transmissions. We get this whole reality of ours about transmissions from these. I hope this has helped you tonight, and I'll continue with it because I feel it is important that you review your understanding of the *latā'if*, and make the effort to complete your journey. Time is running out, for me at least. Maybe some of you think you will live forever, but wouldn't you like to complete one Order, and really sense that you start to see how your feet and hands and mind and tongue are taking you? Wouldn't

you like to look out every day, having gone through the ‘*ālam al khalq*, and see the flowers talking to you? Then wouldn’t you like to dive into another Order, so I can say, “You know, I’ve been waiting for you to complete that so I could give you this. But I can’t do it until you finish this.” Think about the effort you put into your work, your job, the last proposal you wrote, the children you teach, the plants you plan. Think of the kind of energy you put into that, ie. to get the seeds in the ground at the right time to have food. [This is] just me telling you again. *Allahu Akbar*.